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Los Angeles

Mi Existir Es Resistir:

Trans Latinx Lives and Strategies of Self-Preservation

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

Jack Caraves

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mi Existir Es Resistir:

Trans Latinx Lives and Strategies of Self-Preservation

by

Jack Caraves

Doctor of Philosophy in Chicana and Chicano Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Leisy Janet Abrego, Chair

This dissertation contributes to the dearth of empirical research on Trans Latinxs, primarily to understand how their social location shapes their relationship to themselves, families, communities, and the state while centering their resilience. I draw on two years of participant observation, 129 surveys collected in collaboration with the TransLatin@ Coalition, and 28 in-depth interviews with Trans Latinxs in the greater Los Angeles area. I argue that gender works as an axis of power to discipline and police Trans Latinxs and Gender Non-Conforming bodies.

In Chapter Two, I address how gender is shaped and policed for Trans Latinxs in terms of both their physical representation and gendered behavior. I focus particularly on the institutions of (a) home, (b) church, (c) immigration detention, and (d) employment as spaces that not only attempt to control transgressive behavior but also attempt to produce and reproduce gender

norms within the binary. In Chapter Three, I argue that despite the marginalization and gender policing that Trans Latinxs experience from an early age and in everyday life, they have affirming and validating experiences that allow them to emerge into themselves and their identity as Trans Latinx individuals. I examine how Trans Latinxs in this study have found or created spaces to discover who they are and emerge as themselves through finding affirming community and the importance of a mother's support in transitioning. In Chapter Four, I look at how spirituality is essential in the lives of Trans Latinxs. My overall argument is that Trans Latinxs do in fact embrace and practice spirituality either by (a) identifying as Christian or Catholic and/or engaging in Latino popular religion; (b) engaging in non-traditionally Latinx spaces such as other community groups, spaces, and religions to embrace their faith and spirituality; and (c) exploring and creating their own type of spirituality. In Chapter Five, I offer implications and significance of this work and future directions. This research shows how individuals have diverse and nuanced experiences within each of these sites and how they make meaning of the inclusion, exclusion, or shades of both as they transgress multiple boundaries on a daily basis.

The dissertation of Jacqueline Caraves is approved.

Gaye T Johnson

Robert C. Romero

Marcus Hunter

Leisy Janet Abrego, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

DEDICATION

For my mom Mercedes, and my brothers Rudy and Martin.

And to all the Queer and Trans familia, risking their lives every day to be seen, I see you.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I journeyed on the path to write the pages that lie before you, there were times I wanted to stop or turn back. Lucky for me, I was never alone. I wrote this dissertation with the spirit and guidance of those that walked the path before me and with the strength borrowed from those that walked with me. I want to thank the village that made this possible.

First and foremost, I want to thank those who participated in this study: the many Trans Latinas/Latinos/Latinxs who shared their stories of pain, struggle, agency, and resilience. Thank you for sharing your truths with me and entrusting me with your stories. To you all, I am forever indebted. You all live your truths with such beauty, joy, and hope. You are my guides, my mentors and femmetors and have given me permission to live my truth as well.

To Bamby Salcedo, when I met you, I was at a crossroads in my life. It was your passion for life and your endless dedication and radical love for community that allowed me to uncover my own truths. You are my collaborator, my accomplice, my friend, and a spiritual guide. I aspire to inspire the way you do. To the members of Trans Latin@ Coalition and specifically Maria Roman, Erika De la Cruz, Johanna Savedra, Alexa Castañon, and many others, thank you for embracing me, for giving loving feedback, and for leading by example in showing me what it means to truly be committed to uplifting our community. I would also like to thank Familia: Queer Trans Liberation Movement, specifically Jorge Gutierrez and Jennicet Gutierrez for all that you do to fight for the lives of Queer and Trans Latinxs and for collaborating with me.

This work would not be possible without the generous funding from the following sources: The Jean Stone Dissertation Research Award from the Center for Study of Women at UCLA, UCLA's Institute of American Cultures and the Chicano Studies Research Center, the

Latino Center for Leadership Development at Southern Methodist University, and the American Association of University of Women (AAUW).

I am also grateful to the César E. Chávez Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA for their financial support. I am also grateful for the opportunity to teach in the department and to have had the opportunity to meet and mentor some of the greatest students on UCLA's campus. Those students gave me energy and inspired me on a daily basis. A special thank you to the faculty and staff in the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department: Ellie Hernandez, Christopher Palomo, Sandy Garcia, Dr. Leisy Abrego, Dr. Gaye Johnson, Dr. Maria Cristina Pons, Dr. Maylei Blackwell, Dr. Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Dr. Judy Baca, Dr. Otto Santa Ana, Dr. Robert Chao Romero, Dr. Eric Avila, Dr. Abel Valenzuela, Dr. Genevieve Carpio. I am grateful for your vision and action in paving the path for a next generation of Chicana/o and Latina/o Scholars. I am grateful to have been part of the first cohort to embark on this journey. Thank you for your support.

To Dr. Leisy Abrego, one of the people who came before me on this path, words cannot express how much I love and appreciate you, but I will try. You have been more than an advisor to me. You are a gem. You have met me on this path step by step with honesty, compassion, and high expectations. I can honestly say that our relationship feels more like family than anything else. I cannot thank you enough for the times you have held space for my tears and my doubts. I cannot thank you enough for always making time for me in your busy schedule. Most of all, I cannot thank you enough for believing in me and my work even when I did not believe in myself. You have modeled to me what it is to truly be an authentic scholar and an activist that brings integrity, humanity, and visibility to those that are constantly being dehumanized and

erased. You make each and every person around you feel seen and understood. Thank you for taking in a little boi from East Hollywood and helping them become a doctor.

Leisy, thank you for creating and facilitating a writing group for all of your advisees to show up and support each other on our intellectual journeys with critical, compassionate, and constructive feedback. I am grateful to our writing group who was composed of Silvia Rodriguez Vega, LeighAnna Hidalgo, Rafael Solórzano, Lucy Leon, and Briceida Hernandez. I look forward to continuing to share our work and intellectual journeys.

Dr. Gaye Johnson, from the moment I met you I saw a light in you. Thank you for shining your brilliance with every interaction and conversation. Your friendship and mentorship have been invaluable to my development as a scholar. Thank you for seeing my light and being one of my greatest supporters.

Dr. Robert Chao Romero and Dr. Marcus Hunter, have also mentored me and supported me through writing this dissertation. Robert, it has been an honor learning from you, collaborating with you, and being mentored by you in the last seven years. Marcus, thank you for supporting my work and always providing rigorous and thoughtful questions and for pushing me philosophically. Thank you both for your support and mentorship.

To the CoyolxhauQueens, Angelica Becerra, LeighAnna Hidalgo, Silvia Rodriguez Vega, Christine Vega, and Rosanna Simons I am grateful for meeting you all at the beginning of the graduate school journey. From countless study sessions, sharing many tears and fears, to sharing our lives, welcoming babies, partners, chisme, sexcapades, endless laughter, and all our triumphs; you all are the best friends and colleagues anyone could ever ask for. Your friendship became home for me, and I will carry our queer commune with me always. Thank you for helping me re-member myself on our collective path toward conocimiento. Las amo tanto.

I would also like to thank the close friends and colleagues that have been there throughout this journey. I would like to thank Omar Gonzalez, Lauren Guerra Augilar, Lauren Ilano, Kimberly Miranda, Nadia Zepeda, Audrey Silvestre, Brenda Nicolas, Dafne Luna, Michael Moses, Eric Newman, Kabita Parajuli, Arleen Fernandez, Ashleigh Washington, Preeti Sharma, Kaelyn Rodriguez, Eliana Quintero, Mariela Dominguez, Tatiana Alvarez, Yasmin Ferrada, Sebastian Ferrada, Janett Miranda, Tanya Gaxiola, Stacy Maldonado, Mayra Rojas and Julio Garcia. To my research assistants, Eva Amarillas Diaz and Zacarias Reyes, you both give me hope for the future of academia, thank you for the love and labor you put into this project. Thank you to the community I have created together with Angelica Becerra through our podcast, Anzaldúing It, your love and affirmation has been a blessing on this journey.

To Jordan Beltran Gonzales thank you for being my editor and supporter. You have made this journey less lonely and more tangible. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Alma Itzé Flores and Jose "Pepe" Augilar-Hernández for showing me the academic ropes and mentoring me through the final stages of the doctoral journey. I am forever grateful to you two for sharing your consejos, experiences and wisdom in navigating academia and the academic job market. Thank you both for being stand-in cohort mates and lifting me up.

I would not be here without my greatest support and the foundation that holds me up, my mother and my two brothers, Rudy and Martin and their families. My family has taught me that resilience and tenderness are not mutually exclusive. We were dealt some really difficult cards, but you showed me that we can overcome anything if we show up for each other, care for each other, and love each other no matter what. You have taught me how to show up for my community and always leave space for softness, cariño, and affection. These invaluable lessons

are what taught me that to be resilient we must take care of each other emotionally and otherwise.

To my mom, you put everything into the three of your children. Even though you did not know the language, and you did not have money, you had time and you had love to give. You always show up in the ways that you can and the ways in which we need you. During my doctoral journey you did the same. You show me every day to give what I can in the ways I am able and to love fiercely. With the little that you had, I watched you care for us, and share those resources with the people around you. Thank you.

To Rudy, you see me even when I am not able to see myself. You are always there for me. I know all I have to do is pick up the phone and I know you will be there with your warm embrace and your love. On a very practical level, you are the reason I was able to get to and from grad school for the last seven years. Thank you for showing me how to be a sensitive thug.

To Martin, thank you for being my stand-in dad. You were the first person to show me that tenderness can exist in a masculine body. Thank you for providing for me financially, for being emotionally present and for being the academic trailblazer in our family. You were the first to go to college, the first to go to graduate school, and you made sure that the path was paved and illuminated so that I could follow in your footsteps. Thank you for always making sure that I am taking care of my mental health by planning and encouraging vacations. You have taught me to prioritize rest and fun as much as I prioritize work.

To Adriana and Rosie, my sisters-in-law, I am so grateful that I have two brilliant, fierce, and wise women as sisters. I could not have survived this program without your humor, your love, and your kindness. Rosie, you have shown me how to live my fullest life in a way that is grounded in prioritizing community. Adriana, you are a constant source of joy and laughter and

you show me daily what it means to show up for and have the backs of the people you love. To Lil Rudy, Ruby, and Ajani, you are the future and I look forward to seeing your wildest dreams come true.

To my Nichiren Buddhist Soka-Gakkai International community, I am here because I found this practice at a very difficult time in my life. This has not only been an intellectual journey, but a spiritual one. I know that I have made it this far because I have been surrounded by amazing comrades in faith. When my fire is diminished, when I am not sure I can be victorious, your fires burn brighter and you inspire me to keep fighting. You empower me and show me that the victory I am seeking is in my own hands. Amelia Stone, Nozomi Kanai, Julia Kataoka, Heidi Hsu, Olivia Saito, Lynn Frazier, Gitima Sharma, thank you! I am eternally grateful, to my spiritual mentor Daisaku Ikeda who provided me with continuous encouragement to keep going, and has been a model for fighting for the dignity of life and humanity in all people.

To my cats, Minnie and Miklo for your endless amounts of cuteness that kept me smiling and made me feel less isolated. Thank you for always sitting on or near my keyboard and reminding me of the importance of taking breaks for cuddles.

And finally, to Anisha Gandhi, I am so fortunate to have met you midway through the doctoral journey. You have put so much labor into this dissertation and I hope you feel victory in this accomplishment. But more than the labor, you have contributed your heart and your spirit, and you have become my sanctuary. Life with you in it has become softer, gentler, and more fun. In walking on this path together with you—you have helped tear down the walls of my fear, shame, and doubt. You have helped me find freedom in myself, freedom in my mind,

and freedom in loving. Thank you for pushing me always to be a better version of myself and for teaching me radical vulnerability in love and in life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO TRANS LATINX LIVES

> I'm a trans woman! There is a lot of risk of being persecuted . . . the judge didn't believe that I was a trans woman . . . I don't need boobies to know that I am a woman. (Leslie, 23 years old, she/her)

According to the Human Rights Campaign, in the five-year period from 2013-2018, there were 124 reported hate crimes that led to the murder of Trans[1] individuals in the U.S; the majority of the fatal victims were Trans Women of Color (HRC, 2019). Violence against Trans individuals is not a new phenomenon, however, with the rising visibility of the Trans community, new light is being shed on the problem. This visibility has grown with mainstream shows such as *I am Cait*, *Transparent,* and *Orange is the New Black*, and notable Trans advocates Laverne Cox and Janet Mock. As a result of growing visibility, *Time* magazine named 2014 the year of the "Transgender Tipping Point," suggesting that Transgender visibility was indicative of incoming social change and greater acceptance of Trans individuals as equals in our society (Steinmetz, 2014). However, while mainstream representations of Trans individuals have grown in the last decade, they have been met with anti-trans policies throughout the nation. Since 2016 the Trump administration has taken harmful administrative action toward many marginalized groups, including the Trans community which has been a target of such policies and hateful rhetoric. Furthermore, the Trump administration has passed a record number of anti-Trans policies including their first action, the removal of protections for Trans K-12 students in schools, and most recently, the ban of Trans people in the military (NCTE, 2019).

[1] I am using Trans as an umbrella term that includes various gender identities including transgender, transwomen, transman, transfeminine, transmasculine, genderqueer, and gender non-binary, and more. I use Trans to identify individuals who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

In the largest and first ever study of anti-transgender discrimination in the United States, conducted in 2009, the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, found that Trans and gender non-conforming individuals face discrimination in nearly every realm of their lives. Transgender People of Color, who also face structural racism, experience overwhelming discrimination, and "fare worse than white participants across the board" (Grant et al., 2011, p. 1). Specifically, Black and Latinx[2] Trans individuals experience higher levels of abuse, harassment, violence, and often live in extreme poverty, and have higher rates of HIV and attempted suicide (Harrison-Quintana, Perez, & Grant, 2011). This experience is exacerbated for undocumented immigrant Latinxs who are not legally permitted to reside in the country (Harrison-Quintana et al., 2011). There is growing interest in researching the Trans populations nationwide, as there are currently few empirical studies on the experiences of Trans Latinxs and Trans migrants. This dissertation centers the experiences of Trans Latinxs to bridge that gap and shed light on their experiences as they navigate a society that marginalizes them while also addressing the ways in which they cope and remain resilient despite such difficult realities.

Purpose of Centering Trans Latinxs

Today, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) issues and immigration issues are of significant concern throughout the country (Chávez, 2011). The LGBT and immigrant community, however, have often been treated as two separate entities (Chávez, 2011; Luibhéid,

[2] In this dissertation I use the word "Latinx," pronounced (La-teen-ex), as a gender-neutral term. The "X" is used to create a gender-neutral ethnic identity, as opposed to the masculine "Latino," feminine "Latina," or Latin@, which has been used to include both masculine and feminine (Reichard, 2015). Latinx in this way refers to people of Latin American descent whose gender identity exists on different points of the gender spectrum (Reichard, 2015). However, because many of the participants in this study do in fact identify within the binary, I do move between using Latina, Latino, and Latinx based on how participants want to be identified.

2002, 2004, 2008; Ocampo, 2016). This is due to the misconception that everyone in the LGBT community is assumed to hold U.S. citizenship while immigrants are assumed to be heterosexual (Luibhéid, 2008; Puar, 2013). Similarly, in immigration scholarship definitions of family are heteronormative and sexuality studies fail to include experiences of People of Color (Cantú, 2009; Moore, 2011; Ocampo, 2016). While there is a substantial LGBT immigrant population, their presence in scholarly literature remains invisible.[3] According to the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law's Williams Institute, which is dedicated to studying sexual orientation and gender identity law and policy, in 2013 it was estimated that the LGBT immigrant population included over 900,000 adults, with 30% (267,000) of this population identifying as undocumented (Gates, 2013). Of the undocumented LGBT immigrant population, 71% identify as Latinxs (Gates, 2013). Given their various forms of vulnerability, this population merits attention from scholars, activists, service providers, and community organizations to take an intersectional approach to better capture and meet the needs of LGBT immigrants (Chávez, 2011; Luibhéid, 2002, 2004, 2008).

When immigrant rights activists push for family reunification, for example, they exclude LGBT immigrants who may have additional barriers. Laws are also written and implemented in ways that exclude LGBT immigrant experiences. For example, family reunification is the most common path for legalization, yet many LGBT and particularly Trans migrants may have been rejected from their families and may have no means of becoming sponsored after being in the United States (Tomchin, 2013). Thus, the experiences of Trans Latinx immigrants demonstrate the challenges and additional strategies involved in navigating various institutions through the

[3] There is a growing body of queer immigration literature (Asencio, 2010; Cantú, 2009; Chávez, 2008; Luibhéid, 2002, 2004, 2008)

multiple borders they traverse as racial, gendered, and sexed individuals. Importantly, even when they are not immigrants themselves, participants in this study were raised by immigrant parents and have been shaped by those experiences.

Research Questions

As visibility of the Trans community continues to grow, there is limited literature that centers the quotidian lives and struggles of Trans Latinx immigrants and non-immigrants (Ochoa, 2010). To capture the overlapping marginalities, vulnerability and invisibility of Trans Latinx experiences, my dissertation is anchored by the following three research questions:

1. How is gender socialized and policed for Trans Latinxs?
2. How do Trans Latinxs make sense of and affirm their identities as Trans Latinxs?
3. What role does spirituality play in the lives of Trans Latinxs?

In order to answer these questions, I draw on Women of Color Feminists' intersectional lens that highlights the ways in which race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship come together and shape relations of power (Collins 1989, 1990, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981). Queer Migration scholarship also allows me to highlight how gender and sexual non-conformity shape and discipline the lives of migrants in their home country and in the receiving country (Cantú, 2009; Luibhéid, 2002, 2008). Lastly, I take from Jotería Studies, particularly the scholarship of Galarte (2011) and Cuevas (2018) who push us to move beyond the rigid Chicana/Chicano/Latina/Latino gender binary that is tied to man/woman, masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual dichotomies and toward a Trans and gender variant critique that acknowledges the potential of gendered identities and sexualities within Latinidad.

While hyper-visibility of Trans individuals becomes apparent after a transphobic murder or in the midst of the passage of anti-Trans policy, my dissertation aims to make visible the lived experiences and struggles of Trans Latinxs that are otherwise too often overlooked, dismissed, silenced, and made invisible. Part of my larger title, "Mi Existir es Resistir[4]," is a phrase used by leaders of the Trans and queer Latinx liberation movement, is one that encapsulates the very struggle and beauty of Trans humanity: To exist is to resist, to exist is to be seen, to exist is to not be erased. Looking to the daily lives of Trans Latinxs is important in underscoring their humanity, something which is often denied to them and discarded in the narratives about them that focus only on their gender transgression and their other marginal identities.

A Roadmap of the Introduction Chapter

In the following section, I will define key terms and concepts that are central to my dissertation study. In what follows, the conceptual framework points to how I arrived at this work, followed by a literature review that informs how we understand the lives of Trans Latinxs people. I will then expand on the theoretical lens for which I approach my analysis, continued by the research design and methods, and the significance and implications of my study. I will end this chapter with an outline of each of the following chapters.

Key Terms and Concepts

The following are key terms and concepts as defined within a U.S. context in the present historical moment. These key terms and concepts are not static, and as more theory develops to inform Trans/gender identities, there may be terms that substitute these concepts in the future.

[4] In my time in the field since 2015, this phrase has consistently been used by Queer and Trans Latinx organizers in the U.S. including Jennicet Gutierrez and Jorge Gutierrez from Familia: Queer Trans Liberation Movement, Bamby Salcedo as well as many others. The phrase also appeared on a t-shirt created by Ramiro Alexis Gonzalez from Jotx Wear that made the concept wearable and brought greater visibility for organizers and activists.

Cis-gender or cis-sexual: Refers to one's non-transgender status, wherein one's gender identity or gender performance matches one's assigned sex (Stryker, 2008).

Gender: Refers to the socially and culturally constructed categories of "man" and "woman" in which one is socialized to take on certain roles and behaviors based on this distinction (Bornstein, 1994; Stryker, 2008; Westerfield, 2012).

Gender Binary: The traditional understanding that sex and gender are divided into two opposite categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, and man/woman (Bettcher, 2014).

Gender Identity: A person's internal understanding of their own gender, wherein there is usually a "congruence between the category one has been assigned and trained in, and what one considers themselves to be" (Stryker, 2008, p. 13). For transgender people, there is often incongruence with an individual's assigned gender and the gender they consider themselves to be.

Gender Queer: Refers to an individual who does not identify within the gender binary but who self-identifies and claims "both sexes or genders, neither, or a complex blend of them" (Bettcher, 2014, p. 1).

Gender Non-conforming: Refers to "someone who adopts gendered traits that are stereotypically associated with members of the opposite sex" (Lester, 2002, p. 4) where masculine or feminine traits can be performed by either sex. Gender non-conforming individuals do not subscribe to or perform heterosexuality as either female or male, meaning anyone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered is also considered to be gender non-conforming.

Passing/Passability: Refers to a transgender person's ability to be perceived as a gender they identify with, usually that fits within the gender binary of man/woman, so to not be perceived as being Trans (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2010).

Religion: An institutional system of spiritual beliefs (Hill & Pargament 2003; Stander, Piercy, MacKinnon, & Helmeke, 1994; Westerfield, 2012).

Sex: Refers to one's biological anatomy that one is born with, "male" and "female" refers to sex and entails one's reproductive potential (Stryker, 2008).

Spirituality: One's thoughts, core beliefs, values, and convictions (Carr, 1996; Rodriguez, 2002).

Transgender: Refers to individuals "who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (Trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender" (Stryker, 2008, p. 1). This movement away from birth-assigned sex to the gender of their choice may be because an individual feels that the sex assigned to them at birth does not match the gender they identify with. Just as migration entails the movement of an individual across a socially constructed border, Transgender refers to the "movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place" (Stryker, 2008, p. 1).

Trans: Often used as a shorter version of Transgender within the Transgender community (Padrón & Salcedo, 2011) and may be used as a placeholder for those who transgress gender, for example, Transgender, Transman, Transwomen, Transsexual (Bettcher, 2014).

Transman/Transmasculine: Someone who is assigned female at birth and identifies as a male/man/masculine.

Transwoman/Transfeminine: Someone who is assigned male at birth and identifies as a female/woman/feminine/femme.

Transphobia: Fear, disgust, or prejudice toward people or groups of people who transgress traditional gender roles (Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Padrón & Salcedo, 2011).

Two-spirit: A contemporary term used by some Native American and First Nations peoples to describe individuals who fulfill a third gender or are gender-variant individuals, emphasizing the spiritual aspect of one's life (Jacobs, Thomas, & Lang, 1997).

Context of Transgender People in the United States

In the United States it is estimated that there are 1.4 million Trans people, making up about 0.6 percent of the population (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). It should be noted that capturing the full breadth of the Trans community is a challenging task, because the U.S. Census Bureau does not directly ask about gender identity (Gates, 2011). As a result, current percentages for Trans individuals have been estimated from state-level data sources taken from the CDC's Behavioral Risk factor Surveillance System (CRFSS) to estimate current percentages of adults who identify as Trans in all 50 states (Flores et al., 2016). While BRFSS captures data for adult Trans individuals statewide, no national survey exists. Thus, Flores et al. provide a rough estimate of the national Transgender population. The youngest age group in the study was 18 to 24 and it was found that this group is more likely than any older age groups to identify as Transgender. Accordingly, this number may be overlooking a large number of Trans people, especially because in the face of discrimination, many Transgender people would understandably prefer not to discuss their identity (Flores et al., 2016; Grant et al., 2011).

Transgender individuals who transgress their assigned sex and expected gender norms often face a great deal of stigma, discrimination, and prejudice (Gardón, 2008; Spade, 2008;

2015; Stryker, 2008; Tomchin, 2013). Transgender Studies scholar Susan Stryker (2008) suggests that this is because society has trouble "recognizing the humanity of another person if they cannot recognize that person's gender, the gender-changing person can evoke in others a primordial fear of monstrosity, or loss of humanness" (p. 6). This fear often translates to violence—whether verbal, physical or emotional—to those perceived as not fitting within the gender binary or non-human. Because most government administrative agencies are fixed within the binary gendered system, the denial of basic needs such as housing, employment, health care services, education, and basic forms of identification is common for Trans individuals (Bender-Baird, 2011; Padrón, 2015; Spade, 2015; Stryker, 2008). Thus, Trans individuals often lack basic necessities including housing and employment, which ultimately leads to increased health problems, disproportionate incarceration, and higher rates of poverty (Galarte, 2011; Gardón, 2008; Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlock, 2011; Spade, 2008; Stryker, 2008; Tomchin, 2013).

Due to transphobic bias, Trans people face both physical violence as well as structural violence that prevents them from thriving economically. As legal scholar Dean Spade (2010) asserts, "Trans people face severe economic insecurity, exclusion from social services, high rates of imprisonment, and high rates of violence" (p. 446). Moreover, as "not all trans people are equally vulnerable" (p. 447), the situation is further exacerbated for Trans People of Color whose structural barriers are compounded by race, class, gender, national origin, and legal status (Grant et al., 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Stryker, 2008). Transphobia, in turn, intersects with other sites of power to construct lived realities.

Trans Women of Color face particular challenges because they "are endemically profiled as sex workers by police" (Mogul et al., 2011, p. 61). When they are not able to pass as stealth cis-gender women within the gender binary, they are incarcerated just for visibly being Trans

women and walking on the street (p. 61). For undocumented Trans individuals who are pushed into sex work, having even one prostitution charge on their record could ruin their chances of attaining legal permanent residency and citizenship (Spade, 2015). A report released in March of 2016 by Human Rights Watch, "Do You See How Much I'm Suffering Here?: Abuse Against Transgender Women in U.S. Immigration Detention," documents the experiences of Trans Latinas in immigration detention. While noting that for anyone, cis-gender or not, immigration detention is a difficult and dehumanizing experience, this situation is extremely harmful for Trans women due to the physical and emotional abuse they have experienced before arriving at detention and the further abuse they experience while in detention. In detention their bodies are not only deportable, but also disposable (Cacho, 2012; De Genova, 2005; Padrón, 2015). Trans Latinas in detention centers are further dehumanized when they are placed in facilities where they experience repeated sexual assault, harassment, unwarranted strip searches by male officers, and excessive use of solitary confinement (HRC, 2016). Thus, their intersectional identity as Trans women and also as racialized foreign and "illegal" immigrants makes Trans Latinxs particularly vulnerable to multiple layers of dehumanization and violence.

Moreover, Trans issues touch on foundational notions of human needs and bodily existence. Their experiences with persistent hate, physical, and structural violence call us to consider those unexamined assumptions about gender that shape our reality, such as, "What makes a man a man, or a woman a woman? Or "How do I know what my gender is?" (Stryker, 2008, p. 6). To begin to interrogate the assumptions of gender that are too often unexamined, this dissertation centers the lived experiences of Trans Latinxs. With a desire to provide a counter-narrative to the multiple forms of dehumanization that they face, this dissertation centers the voices of Trans Latinxs across the gender spectrum and across legal status as they make

meaning of who they are, affirm who they are, and remain resilient and hopeful despite the hostility they are met with in society. Additionally, for Trans Latinxs, we must go beyond just questions of gender, and understand the ways in which other power structures of race, class, sexuality, legal status, and national origin shape identity and experiences as they navigate sites wherein most people are treated as humans.

Conceptual Framework

In this section I address the personal accounts, academic scholarship, and theories that inform and guide this dissertation project. In the first section titled "Visiting ICE[5] Detention," I highlight my participation in a Detainee Visitation Program with DeColores Queer Santa Ana. Specifically, I narrate the story of my first interaction with Leslie, a Transwoman from Honduras who has been in the United States since she was 11. At the time of my visit with her, she was 23 and facing deportation. To note, I address the way in which this key experience has informed the direction of this project. Next, I provide a literature review of scholarship that addresses how we understand social location of Trans Latinxs. Because there is no literature on Trans Latinxs specifically, I do so by reviewing literature that informs their broader identities as both Latinx and Trans individuals and bridge these experiences by drawing on Labor Studies, Immigration Studies, Sexuality Studies, and Chicana/o/Latina/o studies.[6] In doing so I focus this chapter on the literature within the institutions of family, employment, and spirituality as important factors affecting Trans Latinxs' livelihood. Finally, the theoretical framework describes the way I employ Women of Color feminism to understand the intersectional identities and boundary crossing lives of Transgender Latinxs.

[5] ICE stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

[6] Similarly, within Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I provide a more in-depth literature review that pertains specifically to each area.

Visiting ICE Detention

On October 31, 2015 I visited an immigrant detention center for the first time through a visitation program set up by DeColores Queer Orange County and Familia: Queer Trans Liberation Movement. The detainee visitation program was created to provide emotional support to Transgender immigrants who were detained at Immigration and Custom's Enforcement's (ICE) Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender (GBT) pod located inside of Santa Ana City Jail, in Santa Ana, California. As part of the program, volunteers like myself would visit Trans immigrants in detention by talking during the 30-minute visitation sessions they were allowed. Because the Santa Ana GBT pod was one of the only existing pods of its kind, many in the country, many detainees came from states outside of California and did not have family or friends nearby. Below I describe my first visit to the Santa Ana City Jail GBT pod where I went together with Juan, another volunteer from DeColores, to visit Leslie, a 23-year-old Transwomen from Honduras that was apprehended in Las Vegas, Nevada where she has lived since the age of 11.

Once Juan and I got through the ID screening with the Sherriff at the main kiosk and the metal detector, we entered the sterile visiting room inside the GBT Pod at Santa Ana City Jail. It was very much like what I had seen in movies—four small stations resembled phone booths and a thick glass window that separated detainees from outsiders. We nervously waited about 15 minutes before Leslie, a Trans woman detainee, walked up to the glass and greeted us. This was our first time visiting anyone in detention, and our first time meeting Leslie. Juan picked up the phone and so did Leslie. Leslie had to dial in a code that would give her access to talk. She must have said "Hi" to Juan first, and he responded in English, which is not what I was expecting, as we were told that most of the detainees speak only Spanish. Juan went on to introduce himself

very briefly and then passed me the phone so I could do the same, I only said "Hi, I'm Jackie," and smiled as I passed the phone back. Juan let Leslie know that we are both queer to express to her that we were "familia."

Leslie had just turned 23 while in detention and had been there for six months. She was picked up in her hometown of Las Vegas, Nevada, where she had lived since she migrated from Honduras, with her family at the age of 11. I did not ask what she got picked up for, for fear that anything she said was being recorded and could be used against her in her case. Yet, she openly shared how tired she was of being there and how desperately she just wanted to go home and get back to her family, friends, and work. She mentioned that it had taken the jail four months to provide her with the hormone treatment she had started prior to being detained. She had been threatened with deportation twice. In one of those instances, the judge told her he was sending her back to Honduras because she had no risk of being persecuted there. Because Leslie is undocumented, she was ineligible to legally change her name, sex, and gender, thus based on her physical body parts, the judge saw her only as a gay man who would be in no real harm if deported to Honduras. She recounted to me how she replied to the judge: "I'm a Trans woman! There is a lot of risk of being persecuted . . . the judge didn't believe that I was a Trans woman . . . I don't need boobies to know that I am a woman."

Leslie's narrative reveals that her gender identity did not match the gender she was assigned at birth—the same one that society and the legal system continue to apply to her. Her inability to access legal documents based on her citizenship status, in addition to her birth assignment, underscore the difficulty of being seen as who she truly is. These legal markers work together to invalidate her existence as a human being, deeming her as undeserving of justice (Cacho, 2012; Padrón, 2015). My interactions with Leslie became imprinted in my mind

as they revealed some of the complexities of being Transgender. In our conversations since then, she often spoke of family, fear of being unable to find work when she gets out, and hope that her spirituality will give her the strength she needs to get through this process. It is this experience that has shaped the direction of this study, particularly because Leslie's experience is not isolated. While not all participants in this study have been held in ICE detention, many of them face similar structural biases. Leslie's experience reveals larger patterns in the lived experiences of Trans people, none of which are captured in the literatures of either Latinidad or Trans Studies.

Literature Review

The categories of transgender and Latinx are often seen as separate entities. Scholarship that addresses Trans experiences often center white, middle class individuals, while scholarship on Latinxs tend to assume sexual and gender conformity. Thus, this review is an attempt to bridge these two areas of research together to begin to understand how Trans Latinxs navigate daily life.

Navigating Family

Canonical literature about gay life centers the experiences of middle-class White men and how they socially navigate their sexual identities; however, other identity categories are often overlooked (Brekus, 2003; Ocampo, 2013; Seidman, 2009). While homonormative Whites can gain access and acceptance in gay spaces and organizations and maintain economic stability, People of Color and immigrants are likely to have different experiences with the coming out process. This is due to stronger ties to ethnic and racial communities, socioeconomic disadvantages, and contentious beliefs toward sexuality from parents (Cantú, 2009; Hom, 2007;

Manalansan, 2003; Ocampo, 2013). In this way, for LGB People of Color and immigrants there is a fear of LGB being cut off from their families and communities (Ocampo, 2013).

Accordingly, in the minimal work that exists on LGBT Families of Color, navigating being "out" within families of origin and in society is an overarching theme. In Asian American and Native American families, talking about sexuality is a sign of disrespect that goes against cultural norms (Yep, Lovaas, & Ho, 2013). Homosexuality, therefore, is often portrayed as a cultural taboo that should not be discussed in families. Thus, individuals must refrain from coming out in order to maintain family ties (Walker & McAllen-Walker, 2003; Yep et al., 2013). In the case of Black lesbian families, Moore (2011) found that maintaining respectability that upholds a high standard of Black womanhood intersected with the ways in which Black lesbians expressed their sexuality and gender performance. While standards of Black womanhood do not include lesbianism, Black lesbians felt the pressures to uphold such standards as a way to be accepted within the Black community, especially since they have historically been excluded in White lesbian communities due to racial and class differences.

The study of LGB Latinx families is consistent with other Families of Color. In the study of Mexican immigrant men who have sex with men, Cantú (2009) notes that most participants migrated because of their feelings of rejection from their home. These men "expressed a certain sense of isolation or 'not belonging' and not wanting to disappoint their families. Even learning to emulate normative gender and sexual performances was not, in itself, sufficient to resolve these [familial and cultural] conflicts. For some men, these tensions were a catalyst for migration itself" (Cantú, 2009, p. 120). In this way, migration sometimes becomes a solution for gay Latinos who experience rejection from their biological families when they could not align their sexuality and gender to the expected norms. However, as Decena (2011) notes, even when

migration does occur, immigrants are often forced to maintain their sexual identity tacit and gender performance needs to match hegemonic norms of masculinity in order to maintain family ties.

Similarly, in the case of LGB women, Acosta (2013) finds that Latinas must perform hegemonic femininity that conforms to cultural norms in order to gain acceptance from their mothers and the rest of their family. Mothers are more accepting of their daughters' sexual non-conformity when daughters perform femininity that associates them with heterosexuality and allows them to "pass" as heterosexual, because in doing so, their daughters maintain social and economic status not tarnished by gender non-conformity (Acosta, 2013). Overall, these studies of People of Color and immigrant LGB individuals show us that they perform gender and sexuality in ways that allow them to "pass" within their hegemonic gender identities. They do so to maintain close relationships with families and their racial and ethnic communities (Acosta, 2013; Decena, 2011; Hom, 2007; Ocampo, 2013).

In Decena's study (2011), gay men also seem to be practicing a form of "straightening up" to achieve familial and societal acceptance through gender conformity. "Straightening up," therefore, appears to be a common strategy for LGB Latinxs and other People of Color, for whom transgressive gender performance, or gender non-conformity is highly stigmatized not just within greater society but also within families of origin (Acosta, 2013; Cantú, 2009; Decena, 2011; Moore, 2001). In my own fieldwork, I have met Transgender individuals who still have tight bonds with their families of origins, but they express having stronger ties to chosen family who most often include other transgender individuals. Knowing that passability is highly valued within society and Families of Color in general, I look at how individuals navigate daily life transgressing gender boundaries.

While there is scant research on Trans Latinxs, the little that does exist is revealing. In a small in-depth study with six transgender People of Color—three Latinx and two multiracial—Singh and McKleroy (2011) found that participants often struggled with finding acceptance in their families and were rejected and pushed out of their home and into homelessness. However, families did go through a "coming out" process of their own (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Lev, 2004; Singh, Boyd, & Whitman, 2010) similar to LGB experiences, and once they did, most often families came to accept their transgender family member over time. This support would later become critical to transgender individuals' resilience (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). This shows us that while Trans People of Color may initially experience rejection from their families—a process that often leads to instability and structural vulnerabilities—acceptance is possible over time.

Immigrant Latinx Families and Illegality

Immigration is an area that pertains to Trans Latinx people, but scholarship has historically been grounded in a binary gender system that does not take into account gender outside of male and female categories. In this section, I briefly review the current research on immigration on Latinxs to then discuss how it applies to the experiences of Transgender Latinxs. While the United States purports to be a nation of immigrants, since its inception as a modern nation-state it has marked countless people in the United States as "illegal" or undocumented (Luibhéid, 2008; Menjivar & Kanstroom, 2014; Ngai, 2004). With no mass legalization programs since the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)[7] of 1986 and heightened

[7] The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, also known as the "Simpson-Rodino," bill was a response to growing tensions and fears about what to do to with the growing undocumented, and "assumed lawless population" in the United States (Coutin, 2007, p. 179). IRCA offered a two-part approach to try to eradicate "illegal aliens," which on one hand, imposed sanctions on employers who hired immigrants not properly documented to work in the United States, presuming that undocumented migration to the United States would cease.

penalties for unauthorized immigration, 10.7 million immigrants do not have a clear path towards citizenship (Pew Research Center, 2019). As a result of escalating punishment for undocumented immigration, scholars have developed the concept of "illegality" to understand the role that immigration policy plays in the lives of immigrants (De Genova, 2002). Scholars have defined "illegality" as a legal, political, and social status for immigrants in the United States grounded in historically specific laws, policies, and discourses that serve to construct migrants' legal status and deportability (Abrego, 2014; De Genova, 2002; Dreby, 2015).

This legally produced status creates social inequality for all immigrants, which then further legitimizes the surveillance, criminalization, detention, and deportation of undocumented immigrants, those with liminal legality[8] (Golash-Boza, 2014; Menjívar, 2006). Whereas all immigrants are deeply impacted by "illegality," after the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the law has criminalized undocumented immigrants more severely, particularly Mexican and Central American migrants. As a result, Latinxs have been highly associated with illegality and criminality due to these legal changes (Abrego, 2014; Chomsky, 2014; De Genova, 2002). In this way, "illegality" marks Latinx people as criminals due to juridical and legal changes that ultimately leave migrants more vulnerable and simultaneously produce feelings of insecurity and helplessness in relation to the law (Abrego, 2014; Cacho, 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Ruiz, 2014).

Whereas migration scholarship has historically centered single adult males, recent

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On the other hand, IRCA created an amnesty program for some seasonal agricultural workers and for "immigrants who had been continuously and illegally present in the United States since January 1, 1982, to legalize" (p. 179).

[8] Menjívar (2006) coins the term "liminal legality," which is "characterized by its ambiguity, as it is neither an undocumented status nor a documented one, but may have the characteristic of both" (p. 1008). For example, many Central Americans have temporary protected status, which provides individuals with a protected status for two years, and that status can easily return to an undocumented status once the temporary status ends, if it is not renewed, or if it is denied.

scholarship centers Latinx immigrant families in the United States and primarily focuses on how illegality shapes the lives of migrants within the context of families, particularly emphasizing mothers and children (Abrego & Gleeson, 2014). Due to increased migration and heightened punitive enforcement of immigration policies, illegality has created a climate of fear for individuals and families as it pertains to their legal status and possible deportation (Dreby, 2015). In a greater sense, illegality, whether documented, undocumented, or quasi-documented, shapes all realms of life—including the economic, political, and social—for individuals and their families (Abrego & Menjivar, 2011; Dreby, 2015). This is illustrated in current scholarship that focuses on how migration molds gendered expectations and inequalities of mothers and fathers, and further impacts the relationships between parents and children—noting that the most vulnerable in these circumstances are undocumented mothers (Abrego & Menjívar, 2011; Dreby, 2015; Schmalzbauer, 2014). In highlighting the gendered experiences of mothers and fathers in migration, and the overall experience of Latinx immigrant families in the United States, the literature does so within a dichotomous gendered binary. In this way, the experiences of Latinxs who deviate from the gender binary are often overlooked and untold (Padrón, 2015).

Navigating Labor and Being Transgender in the U.S. Labor Market

This section will discuss the growing scholarship on Trans work experiences and the status of Latinxs in the labor market and the ways Trans Latinxs are overlooked.

In the United States, it is common for Trans individuals to face employment discrimination, resulting in not being hired for a job, being fired, or being overlooked for a promotion due to Transphobic bias (Bender-Baird, 2011; Flores et al., 2016; Grant et al., 2011; Hartzell et al., 2009; Lombardi et al., 2002). In the largest survey taken of transgender individuals in the United States—more than 6,000 Transgender participants completed surveys—

the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) finds that employment discrimination for Transgender individuals is a common occurrence, with 90 percent of participants sharing one or more of these instances (Grant et al., 2011). Accordingly, participants experienced double the rate of unemployment when compared to the general population. For Transgender People of Color in the survey, the rate of unemployment reached four times the national unemployment rate (Grant et al., 2011). For Latinx participants, unemployment was 20 percent higher than the overall Transgender population. Because job losses and unemployment creates unstable livelihoods for all Transgender individuals and their families, this can lead to adverse effects, such as homelessness, lack of healthcare, and inability to meet other basic needs (Bender-Baird, 2011; Flores, Herman & Mallory, 2015).

While passing is not necessarily an imminent concern for Trans individuals, passing provides Transgender individuals with greater labor market opportunities (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Passing allows them to attain higher-paying jobs, face less discrimination, and greater acceptance (Bender-Baird, 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Schilt, 2010). Passing entails that individuals be perceived as a gender within the gender binary of man and woman (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2010). Specifically, individuals must conform to strictly dictated norms of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity that powerfully reinscribe the gender binary system (Schilt, 2010).

Schilt's (2010) study of Transmen provides insight into how gender inequality between men and women persist within workplaces. Because Transmen are "outsiders within" in the sense that they were previously employed as women and are now employed as men; they have insight into both work experiences. Participants in Schilt's study reveal that as men, they are more accepted within their workplaces and among co-workers. Their new gender identity and

male privilege gives them access to different kinds of benefits because they are now perceived to have more authority and to be more competent. This, in turn, increases their economic opportunities. Those who openly transition, and who did not fit within the confines of hegemonic masculinity (meaning they did not fit the White, tall, masculine physical appearance), however, faced greater negativity and discrimination in their transition. Transmen who were stealth about their transgender identity were either marginalized at work, or protected. In either situation, being open or stealth, Schilt finds that responses to Transmen are one in the same: they reinforce the gender binary and further the power dynamics within that binary. Specifically, they continue to assert notions that men are powerful and women are subordinate.

While Schilt (2010) centers the experiences of Transmen in the workplace, she does compare experiences between Transmen and Transwomen, and finds that the direction of the transition definitely matters. While Transmen faced greater acceptance and benefits upon transitioning, Transwomen experienced resistance. For Transwomen, Schilt argues that lack of passability especially hinders them. This is due to the notion that it is more challenging for Transwomen to attain "social femaleness" because they have masculine features in their post-transition appearance. While Transmen end up looking like cis-gender men (and are usually assumed to be heterosexual), Transwomen possess a sort of devalued feminism, because they are not easily able to attain passable feminine characteristic/traits through transition (Schilt, 2010). Finally, while the idea of gender and in particular the category of "man" through the transition process expands to incorporate Transmen within the gender equation, gender inequality still exists. Schilt argues that there are "serious questions of whether a binary as a form can ever be equal, even if the content of the binary undergoes radical change" (p. 175). While Schilt addresses Trans experiences in the workplace, her findings inform how Trans people experience

life outside of work as well, where gender is only legitimated as a cis-gender, binary reality. Thus, not being able to pass at work also has significant consequences outside of work if one cannot full pass or assimilate to a cis-gender binary identity.

Schilt's (2010) study is the first empirical study of Transgender participants in the workplace, and she notes that most of her participants are White. While transgender literature usually acknowledges that Trans People of Color fare worse at every turn, there is minimal empirical work that centers those experiences (Bender-Baird, 2011; Grant et al., 2011; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Schilt, 2010). Thus, it is important to understand what happens to Trans individuals who do not fit within the heteronormative mold that constructs gender identities within terms of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

Like much of the scholarship of Trans people, Bender-Baird's (2011) study centers mostly white participants across the spectrum from Trans masculine to Trans feminine. Bender-Baird made sure to not place participants' identities within the gender binary of Transwomen and Transmen MTF/FTM, since those binaries do not fully capture the complexities of gender identity. In pulling together the available data on Transgender work experiences, Bender-Baird (2011) argues that Transgender people experience discrimination in various ways within the workplace yet there is limited policy means for protesting such conditions at the workplace. This is due to the fact that the United States lacks a federal discrimination policy protecting Transgender employees. Thus, Bender-Baird (2011) finds that in terms of the law, Transgender individuals are limited to three options for filing workplace grievances: using (a) disability law,[9]

[9] Specifically they draw of the Rehabilitation Act and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Bender-Baird, 2011).

(b) civil rights law,[10] and (c) local and state nondiscrimination policies.[11] Bender-Baird finds that for Transgender individuals, places of greatest concern and discrimination were workplace policies on dress codes, bathrooms, and identity documents. This is because many employers require surgery and legal sex/gender changes before allowing Transgender employees to use bathrooms and dress codes for their gender. Bender-Baird notes that this is particularly an issue for Transgender employees who cannot afford to change their bodies, or who do not want to change their bodies in a way that would appease their workplace.

As a result of such workplace policies, Transgender individuals experience discrimination and harassment that can often include job loss or unemployment. Thus, those with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to be able to afford to attain passability, thereby further mitigating negative experiences in the workplace and labor market. Clearly, passability translates to better treatment and acceptance in the labor market and within society more broadly. It is important to note, however, that given their various intersectional identities, Trans Latinxs may not always be able to attain these benefits. Passability is not always attainable, or the goal, especially when other intersectional factors such as class, race, sexuality, national origin, immigration status, and language overlap to create conditions in which passability is out of reach. While the importance of passability has been underscored within Trans workplace studies, it serves as a microcosm in understanding Trans experiences overall and moving through various intuitions on a daily basis.

[10] Transgender individuals argue for protection under the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which protects workers from discrimination based on sex (Bender-Baird, 2011).

[11] Specifically these policies at the local and state levels protect individuals on the basis of gender identity, gender expression, and /or transgender status (Bender-Baird, 2011).

Given what previous research finds about discrimination in the workplace, it is not surprising that in her 2015 dissertation, Karla Padrón finds that immigrant Trans Latinas often live in the margins of the labor market because they are unable to attain identity documents that legally validate their identities. In this way, she argues that many Trans Latinas are forced into undocumented status, not only because of current immigration policies, but because of traditional legal gender policies that do not allow Transgender individuals to change their gender identity and names on government-issued documents even when they are able to have documents. My dissertation project builds off Padrón's (2015) study to include the experiences across the gender spectrum and across immigration status.

Latinx Labor Market Realities

While Latinxs make up the largest labor force population in the United States, they face many "labor market disadvantages including high unemployment rates, low wages, overrepresentation in low-level occupations, and limited mobility" (Catanzarite & Trimble, 2008, p. 148). It should be noted that the Latinx labor force is particularly diverse, and it varies in terms of skill set, educational attainment, class background, national origin, immigration status, and geographic location (Catanzarite & Trimble, 2008). For example, while native-born Latinxs have greater labor market opportunities than immigrants, so do those with higher educational attainment (Catanzarite & Trimble, 2008).

Abrego and Gleeson (2014) assert that legal status shapes the way in which immigrant workers integrate into the United States, which is impacted by low wages that are exploitative, leaving immigrant workers susceptible to deportation and their families at risk of separation. In that regard, undocumented workers do not have access to upward mobility and earn far less than their U.S. counterparts (median household income $36,000 vs. $50,000; p. 215). As it pertains to

children, the authors note that in addition to the 500,000 undocumented children in the United States (in 2010), there are 4.5 million U.S. citizen children growing up in families where at least one parent has no legal status (p. 219). Thus, economic marginality and illegality intersect for immigrant families to create precarious conditions for parents and children that can ultimately lead to separation. Transgender Latinxs may or may not have the proper documentation based on either their legal status in the United States and/or their gender identity means that they may be pushed further into illegality based on not just their immigrant status, but also their gender identity not being reflected on any documentation they may have (Padrón, 2015). Further, for Trans Latinxs who financially contribute to their families' livelihood, the structural disadvantages of being Trans Latinx place further vulnerability and instability in their lived realities.

At the intersection of economic marginality and illegality, many scholars highlight the ways in which gender plays a role in the deeper vulnerability of migrants (Abrego, 2014; Abrego & Gleeson, 2014; Abrego & Menjívar, 2011; Dreby, 2015; Schmalzbauer, 2014; Zavella, 2011). Hegemonic notions of gender, both in the country of origin and host country, shape men's and women's labor market opporunities and familial expectations (Abrego, 2014). While motherhood is the "idealized image of a woman" and for Latinxs in general, mothers are expected to be primary caregivers to their children, work, and be politically active whereas fathers are not (Abrego & Menjívar, 2011, p. 10). However, Latina immigrants are concentrated in poorly paid service sector jobs and systematically earn less than their male counterparts, who more easily translate their labor skills in the United States as mechanics, painters, and construction workers (Abrego, 2014, p. 11). Although research examining labor market opportunities for Latinxs looks at the various intersections within the heterogeneous group, it

does so within a heteronormative gender binary. The absence of analysis of gender and sexual non-conforming individuals leave many questions unanswered. My project aims to extend the analysis to Trans individuals that are greatly understudied and overlooked altogether.

Navigating Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality are often overlooked in the research on LGBT peoples. Indeed, we often think of the institution of religion as being in contradiction, in contestation of LGBT individuals. However, there is growing literature that centers the LGBT community and spirituality (Halkitis et al., 2009; Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007; Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, & Quick, 2010; Tan, 2005; Vidal-Ortiz, 2009; Westerfield, 2012). Within this literature, however, Transgender experiences are rarely centered. Spirituality and religion are important parts of identity, just as family or one's livelihood. Religion often plays a major role in individuals' lives by providing a support system, reducing stress and anxieties, and cultivating harmony within oneself and between others (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; French & Joseph, 1999; Koenig, 1997; Westerfield, 2010). Like other social institutions, however, many religious institutions incorrectly understand Transgender individuals as also automatically sexually non-conforming (i.e., LGB). To be clear, Transgender individuals can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or heterosexual (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2011; Stryker, 2008; Westerfield, 2010). In any case, many religious and spiritual institutions view gender and sexuality as "tied to faith via the mechanism of sexual morality" (Sullivan-Blum, 2004) which can dictate the acceptance or rejection of Transgender individuals within that space. Thus, similar to gays and lesbians, Transgender individuals are often rejected because of what are perceived to be "sinful" identities (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Singh & McKleroy, 2011; Westerfield, 2010).

Sign and McKleroy (2011) found the gender identity of Trans individuals of Color who

was shaped by the religious household they grew up in. In this sense, many participants experienced religion being used either by institutions or families as a means of "punishing" their trans identity. Notably, this was not the case for all participants. For example, a participant who grew up Buddhist had more positive experiences (Singh & McKleroy, 2011, p. 39). While religion has been used to justify family and community rejection of LGBT people (Acosta, 2013; Ocampo, 2013), this does not always lead LGBT people to separate or reject their spirituality and/or religious affiliation (Westerfield, 2012).

For People of Color and immigrants, religious community is closely tied to their racial and ethnic identity (Ocampo, 2013). While many LGBT individuals do disassociate with religious institutions based on their gender and sexuality (Acosta, 2013; Ocampo, 2013; Singh & McKleroy 2011), many LGBT individuals may end up embracing spirituality whether affiliated to a religion or not. For example, Moore (2011) found this to be true of Black lesbians who remained immersed in the Black community and in organizations such as the church. Similarly, according to Acosta (2013), Latina LGB families sometimes used religion as a means of justifying rejection of their sexually non-conforming daughters. While some participants severed ties with their family's religious institution, some participants continued to be religious and attend church, developing their own relationship to the religious community.

Religion is often closely tied to family and can be used as tool of policing gender. Singh and McKleroy (2011) found that while their study participants struggled with the ways in which religion was used to justify the judgment of their sexual morality, participants reconciled their relationship with religion and in some cases still chose to follow the religion they grew up with, even if it was not accepting of them. My study considers these previous findings and searches for greater nuance about how family and religion come together and shape identity for

transgender Latinxs. It is possible that religion may serve as a site of hope and empowerment for Trans Latinx, some of whom choose to remain involved in these institutions even after they have been rejected.

Latinxs and Spirituality

For Latinxs, spirituality is an important part of what they consider to be within the realm of cultural values (Hunter-Hernández, Costas-Muñíz, & Gany, 2015). Since Spanish colonization, the Latinx community has been forcefully associated to the Catholic Church, and this has as a result has shaped Latinx identity and societal norms (Baez, 1996). This continues to be true today, even as one third of Latinxs no longer identify as Catholic (Ellison, Wolfinger, & Ramos-Wada, 2013). Accordingly, for Latinxs spiritual and religious communities are part of their support systems, and hold similar value as those of their extended family (Baez, 1996; Delgado & Humm-Delgado, 1982). Thus, acceptance of individuals within this support system is indicative of people's well-being (Baez, 1996; De la Rosa, 1992).

While Latinxs are often associated with being Catholic, they are also assumed to be very socially conservative (Dávila, 2008), to the point that they are perceived as not accepting of LGBT individuals or even of including LGBT individuals in their midst. When addressing Latinx spirituality and religiosity, therefore, the scholarship is grounded in heteronormative understandings of gender and sexuality. Without looking at gender and sexuality within Latinx spirituality, there is much that is overlooked in understanding these intersections. Thus, this dissertation study offers an understanding of how Trans Latinxs employ spirituality as part of their resilience in the face of the multiple marginalizations they experience.

Theoretical Framework

I take on Emma Perez's (2003) call to action in "Queering the Borderlands: The

Challenges in Excavating the Invisible and Unheard" as she asks queer scholars to use the strategy of disidentification[12] from the White heteronormative gaze in scholarship, and rather use a "queer-of-color gaze" that "sees, acts, reinterprets and mocks" the normative gaze to rewrite the world we live in which would otherwise leave out the non-normative (p. 124). Perez (2003) encourages scholars to find the queer in everything, including historical documents, immigration documents, and policy. It is then, that we can begin to capture the queers that have been denied, silenced, dismissed and negated in our history, and make sure they are part of the future (p. 129). Therefore, because transgender Latinxs experiences are often overlooked in literature on family, labor, religion and immigration, they provide a strategic case for "queering" these dominant narratives.

I draw on an intersectional lens to understand experiences of Transgender Latinxs who often transgress multiple boundaries. Intersectionality has its roots in Women of Color feminism of the 1960s and 1970s wherein women of color began "raising claims about the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, and sexuality in their everyday lived experiences" (Collins, 2015, p. 7). Black Feminism and Chicana Feminism, in particular, felt confined by the patriarchal nationalism they experienced within the racial justice movements they were a part of and created intellectual and political spaces in which to share their experiences at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981; Collins, 2015).

In "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) proposes the concept of intersectionality to address the ways in which Black women experience violence and discrimination in the legal

[12] Muñoz (1999) refers to disidentification as a survival strategy or a way with dealing with dominant ideologies, without assimilating to or opposing that dominant ideology. Rather, disidentification is a strategy "that works on and against ideology…always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance" (pp. 11–12).

system, wherein the White and male experience is considered to be the norm when addressing racism while the White Woman's experience is considered the norm when addressing sexism. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2015) builds on this notion of intersectionality to address the "critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, ability and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities." In this way, intersectionality addresses the cumulative effects of racism and sexism that create violence against women by encapsulating the simultaneous experience of multiple oppressions that Women of Color experience. Thus, in looking at multiple vectors of power that shape identity and lived experiences, intersectionality allows us to understand how Trans Latinxs experience various parts of their identity as they navigate various institutions.

Legal scholar Dean Spade (2008) addresses the notion that not all transgender individuals are created equally, or made to be equally vulnerable, and thus we cannot address the injustices and inequality they face through the "single vector of transphobia" because in doing so, "the reality of conditions facing the most vulnerable" are erased (p. 477). Thus, intersectionality, Spade notes is key in interrogating the "multiple vectors of power that work to construct the realities of the conditions faced by those who are most vulnerable." For Transgender Latinxs whose race, class, gender, sexuality, and national origin shape their lived realities in the United States, a multiple-axis approach is necessary in understanding the multiple vectors of power that construct their lived realities wherein they do not only face racism, sexism, and classism, but also xenophobia and transgression of the gender binary. This transgression of gender creates greater nuances in their experiences, especially since the gender binary operates within a hierarchy wherein males are above females.

To understand how transgender Latinxs make meaning of their experiences within each site they experience, I turn to Jacqui Alexander's (2005) *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred.* Alexander critiques capitalism, global power relations, and hegemonic knowledges that produce social inequality for marginalized others. In her view, such social inequalities create oppositional knowledge. Thus, in unpacking these broader themes Alexander uses two metaphors throughout her work. The first is "crossing" which literally refers to the Middle Passage and the forced migration of millions of Africans to European empires. For Alexander, these crossings function as "an archive of empire's twenty-first-century counterpart, of oppositions to it, of the knowledges and ideology it summons and of the ghosts that haunt it" (p. 2). Further, she notes that boundaries of a nation, episteme, and identity alter and shift understandings of contemporary social realities while the hegemonic nature of such boundaries requires oppressed groups to know their worlds and experiences and further perform differently within them.

The second metaphor Alexander uses is "pedagogy" which she refers to as different methods or practices that oppressed groups use to empower themselves within contemporary and hegemonic power relations. Through such practices, oppressed groups acquire new sensibilities that allow them to challenge their status within an oppressive space. In my own work with transgender Latinxs, Alexander's work is useful in thinking of the ways in which "crossing" into this country entails a sort of inscription on the sexualized body through the different sorts of discourses, be it immigration policy, discourse centered on heterosexual immigrants, or citizen queers. The concept of pedagogies (Alexander, 2005) can further speak to the ways in which LGBT immigrants cope with the hegemonic state power that tries to control their bodies and sexuality. My project interrogates the way in which Transgender Latinxs experience family,

labor and religion. My exploration presumes that this population understands each of the boundaries they encounter as racialized, sexualized, and gendered when society perceives and treats them as less than human, "illegal" or "undocumented" regardless of their actual status in this country.

Research Design and Methods

Positionality

I grew up in a single-parent household as the youngest of three and the only girl. Because my mom migrated prior to the passage of IRCA in 1986, she received amnesty and eventually became a naturalized citizen. For the majority of my childhood, my mom could not work due to her disability, but we made due with the little resources we received from her disability check and welfare.

As the youngest, I saw my brothers take two very different trajectories. The oldest, Martin, went off to UC Berkeley after high school, and Rudy sought refuge in gangs. Following in Martin's footsteps, I excelled in school and went to UC Santa Cruz for my undergraduate education. It was there that I learned about intersectionality and institutional racism and began to understand systematically my experiences growing up and how they impacted our trajectories.

In graduate school, my exposure to Chicana Feminism, Critical Race Theory, Latina/o Sexuality, and Queer Migration literature gave me the language to articulate my own experiences as a Latina Lesbian. In 2015, through mutual friends, I met and developed a friendship with Bamby Salcedo, the President of TransLatin@ Coalition (TLC). Later in 2015, Bamby reached out to me to collaborate with her and the TransLatin@ Coalition on the first ever needs assessment survey to capture access to services for Trans Latinxs in Southern California. While

I will also address this as part of the research design, I highlight it here as part of my trajectory to my research and my own internal reflexivity process.

Until coming to this work in 2015, I can see now that I was someone who identified openly as a lesbian and tried to perform femininity, always afraid of getting too close to masculinity or butch identity for fear of being seen as different or deviant. Until that point I had never questioned my gender identity. I had always embodied hyper-femininity as the youngest and only girl, and I learned that as a woman I was different from my brothers; I could not act, dress, or have the freedom that they did as men. When I did come out as a teenager, my sexuality as a lesbian was acceptable because I did not "look" like one. I maintained a palatable femininity to me and only dated feminine cis-gender women. Through this reflexive process while collaborating with the Coalition, I have acknowledged my own internalized homophobia and Transphobia that resulted from my own socialization as a Latina. It was through my collaboration with TLC that I was given the language to articulate the feelings I had always suppressed about my own body and my gender dysphoria—which up to that point, I assumed all women experienced. This work, and really this community, has allowed me to see myself and further has allowed me to emerge into my own identity while taking steps to affirm my gender identity as a genderqueer Trans Latinx person. I share these details of my positionality and trajectory to emphasize how my life experiences and what Delgado Bernal (1998) refers to as "cultural intuition" have shaped the way I approach this research.

Since March of 2015 I have been attending meetings and events in the Greater Los Angeles area that address issues pertaining to the LGBTQ Latinx community. In that time I became familiar with many individuals who do advocacy work and provide services to the LGBT Latinx community. The three organizations I developed relationships with closely are:

Familia: Queer Trans Liberation Movement (Familia),[13] The TransLatin@ Coalition (TLC),[14] and DeColores: Queer Orange County.[15] DeColores was dissolved in 2016, but TransLatin@ Coalition and Familia have continued to grow in their advocacy work. These three organizations do their respective work at the local, regional, and/or national level, and they have often collaborated because their larger mission and goals overlap. One of the key issues central to each organization's work centers the experiences and needs of the LGBTQ Latinxs in the United States. In 2015, mutual friends introduced me to the Executive Directors of both Familia and TLC. Since then, I have developed strong connections with them. These two individuals serve as respected leaders in the queer and Trans community locally, statewide, and nationally. Before DeColores dissolved in 2016, I was an active member of DeColores' Detainee Visitation Program which worked in collaboration with Familia and as I was beginning the collaborative survey collection with the Coalition. Thus, the rapport I developed with them is invaluable to the development and validity of this dissertation project.

Research Design

In order to understand the experiences of Trans Latinxs, my study utilizes surveys, semi-structured interviews, and community-based participatory research methods. As I mentioned in my positionality section, in the Fall of 2015 I was asked by Bamby Salcedo, Trans advocate and the Executive Director of TransLatin@ Coalition to conduct a needs assessment for Trans

[13] Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement (Familia: TQLM) was formed in 2014 and is based in Angeles, but as noted on their website, "is the only national organization that addresses, organizes, education, and advocates for the issues most important to our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) and Latino Communities."

[14] TransLatin@ Coalition is also based in Los Angeles and is a national organization that advocates for the Trans Latina/o/x population.

[15] DeColores Queer Orange County (DCQOC), based in Santa Ana, California, is a local organization that "emerged from our community's need to create an empowering, social, supportive, and political space for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans, and Queer Latina/o Community."

Latinxs in Southern California. The TransLatin@ Coalition, or the Coalition as I will refer to it throughout this dissertation, is a national non-profit organization that advocates for the needs of Trans Latin@s in the United States and is headquartered in Los Angeles. The Coalition was started by Trans Latina migrants throughout the country in 2009 to advocate for Trans immigrant rights in the United States. Since 2016, the organization has expanded its capacity and advocates for Trans Latina/o/xs regardless of migration status. Since 2016, the Coalition has also begun providing direct services to improve the lives of Trans people at the Los Angeles headquarters office. They do this mainly through their new Center for Violence Prevention and Transgender Wellness where they provide a drop-in center, daily food distribution, leadership development, economic and workforce development, ESL classes, a computer lab, and economic support for those recently released from immigration detention and incarceration.[16]

Prior to our collaboration in 2016, the Coalition had previously collaborated with Dr. Karla Padrón in 2011 to produce a survey report on the experiences of Trans Latina immigrants in the United States[17] and the social and legal barriers that impact their lives. Thus, it was important for the Coalition and for me to begin our collaboration using Community Based Participatory Research Methods (CBPR).

Wallerstein and Duran (2006) define CBPR as "an orientation to research that focuses on relationships between academic and community partners in all aspects of the research process. Its principles are grounded in co-learning, mutual benefit, and long-term commitment and incorporates community theories, participation, and practices into the research efforts" (p. 312). When CBPR principles are implemented in this way, knowledge is produced with and for the

[16] For more information about advocacy and direct services the TranLatin@ Coalition provides in Los Angeles and around the country please find them at: translatinacoalition.org.

[17] The Survey Report is titled, "TransVisible: Trans Latina Immigrants in the U.S."

community and relationships with members of the community are prioritized before, during, and after the research is conducted (Padrón & Salcedo, 2011).

Survey Data: The State of Trans Health Report

Bamby and I worked together as Co-Principal Investigators to develop the survey for the needs assessment, focusing on the communities across the greater Los Angeles area, including the areas of Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley, Pomona, Santa Ana, Long Beach, and San Diego. The Coalition had pre-established relationships to local groups and organizations in the area due to existing Trans support groups that the Coalition has been instrumental in backing. My collaboration with Salcedo and TLC have provided me with access to the members in these various communities throughout Southern California. While I developed the survey questionnaire based on previous surveys conducted to learn about LGBT health, LGBT family acceptance, LGBT Labor, and spirituality (Kenagy, 2005; Kenagy & Bostwick, 2005; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005), Bamby, core members of the Coalition, and I worked together to narrow down questions and we developed original questions.

While this needs assessment was produced with and for the TransLatin@ Coalition, the survey data serves as a contextual grounding for what is the core of this dissertation project to understand how Trans Latinxs fare in Southern California. Additionally, this collaborative project has provided me with a way to enact reciprocity to the Transgender community, as it is based on information that they requested.

The survey data documents Trans Latinxs' access to services around (a) sexual health, (b) medical health, (c) mental health, (d) housing, (e) employment, and (f) spiritual/religious services. While the Coalition and I clearly agreed upon the first five areas of focus, it was the Coalition who was also adamant about incorporating questions regarding access to religious

and/or spiritual services. In her previous collaboration with the Coalition, Padrón (2015) shares that Spirituality often came up in surveys to suggest what allowed them to be resilient. Thus, it was important to capture a holistic understanding of what contributes to the health, well-being, and resilience of Trans Latinxs outside of the medical industrial complex. This is especially true, as part of a community that is now over-surveyed and often pathologized by non-Trans, non-Latinx researchers. Ultimately, for the Coalition, the goal of the survey was to capture what services and resources are readily available and accessible to the Trans Latinx community in Southern California while also assessing the existing gaps in an effort to shape their services and advocacy efforts to holistically meet and nurture the needs of the Trans Latinx community.

In early January 2016, as co-Principal Investigators, Salcedo and I received IRB approval from UCLA to conduct this needs assessment. From January 2016 to August 2016 we collected a total of 129 surveys. Thereafter, I used SPSS data software to input and analyze the survey data. Working closely with Bamby, we used a majority of the data we collected to put together the survey report. We titled the survey "The State of Trans Health: Trans Latin@s and Their Healthcare Needs"[18] and we presented the survey findings at the California Endowment in November 2016 to community members, health care service providers, locally elected officials, and organizations who support and advocate for the Trans Community. While the survey was open to anyone who identified as Trans and Latinx and was over the age of 18, it was not until 2016 that the Coalition went from focusing solely on Trans Latina immigrants, to opening their services to all Trans identified people of Latin American descent. Due to the Coalition's existing

[18] "The State of Trans Health: Trans Latin@s and Their Healthcare Needs" PDF can be found online here: http://tinyurl.com/y3e3dwd3

membership and network up to that point a majority of survey participants were Trans Latinas and migrants as can be seen below.

Table 1

Survey Participants

Gender Identity		Status in the United States	
Transwoman	66%	Citizen	37%
Transman	19%	Undocumented	26%
Transgender	7%	Other	37%
Trans	4%		
Woman	4%		

Interviews

To further capture the holistic experiences of Trans Latinxs I collected a total of 28 in-depth interviews. The first 19 interviews are nested interviews—they were conducted with people who had taken the survey and agreed to be interviewed by me. The nine additional interviews were recruited via a snowball sampling method which allowed for a greater variety of experiences (Seidman, 2013), in terms of gender identity and relationship to the Coalition. Considering that Trans Latinxs face a great deal of discrimination in their daily lives, the interviews were centered around experiences with their support systems, employment, and spirituality, since this became evident in the surveys as part of people's resilience and affirming of their basic necessities. I created a flyer for the interviews, which was circulated via TransLatin@ Coalition survey collection as well as on social media. Participants were offered a $20 Target gift card as an incentive for their time.

All interviews were semi-structured and conducted in a private setting chosen by the participant which usually took place in their homes or cafés close to home. Interviews lasted approximately between 90 and 180 minutes and were audio-recorded with the consent of the

participant. Because there is limited empirical work on the lives of Trans Latinxs (Padrón, 2015), I sought to include anyone who identified as Latinx and Trans/Transgender and was over the age of 18. The interviews centered on questions about three main topics including participants relationship to their family, religion/spirituality and employment. While the initial interview guide (See Appendix) I created covered broader topics including experiences with medical care and mental health care, it became apparent in the pilot interviews that family, religion, and employment were the most important factors to one's resilience and livelihood. I did not ask questions about medical transition because Trans people are often asked detailed and invasive questions about medical transition including surgery and hormonal treatments without regard for their privacy and with the assumption that all Trans people opt for hormonal or surgical options (Singh et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2011). However, in each interview participants spoke without prompting about some facet of medical transition because it was either a part of their journey or something they may aspire to. Because interviews provide participants with the ability to "make meaning through language" in understanding their own experiences (Seidman, 2013), interviewing as a research method was a necessary part of the research design to center the voices and understand the overall experiences of Trans Latinxs.

The criteria for participants in the study including the following (a) being over the age of 18, (b) identifying as Trans, and (c) identifying as Latinx/o/a. Of the 28 interview participants, the age range was from 20 to 61 years old; the mean age was 35 years old. In terms of gender identity 16 participants identified as either Transwoman, Transfemme or woman, 10 participants identified either as Transmen or Transmasucline, 1 participant identified as gender non-conforming, and 1 participant identified as gender-neutral two-spirit. In terms of ethnic identity sixteen participants were of Mexican descent, five were of multi-ethnic descent, three were of

Salvadoran descent, two were of Guatemalan descent, one was from Peru, one was from Colombia. Sixteen participants were immigrants: five participants were naturalized citizens, five participants were legal permanent residents, seven participants were undocumented. Of the seven undocumented participants, five were in asylum proceedings and held work permits, one participant had Differed Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Twelve participants were born and raised in the United States, of which nine were second-generation living in the United States and two participants were of third and fourth generation. In terms of employment, seven participants were working in the non-profit sector, seven participants were self-employed, four participants were students, two participants worked full-time for a corporation, two participants worked full-time in education, two participants worked in the service sector, two collected Supplemental Social Income (SSI), and two participants were unemployed.

All participants' names in this study are pseudonyms in order to obtain anonymity. At the beginning of each interview I asked each person to choose a pseudonym of their liking, for those who did not choose one, I chose one for them. Anonymity was important to this population due to the precarity of many individuals' legal status, as well some individuals' engagement in informal and illicit economies.

After conducting the interviews, and before transcribing, I wrote 3- to 5-page interview memos capturing my thoughts about the overarching themes and sentiments that came up during each interview, taking notice of gender presentation and performance, body language, tone, and overall demeanor during the interview. Once the interviews were collected, they were transcribed verbatim via a transcription service. Then the transcripts were then put into Dedoose software in order to code the interview data. I initially coded interviews by myself and eventually after securing research funds I was able to hire two undergraduate research assistants

to support in the coding process. I used descriptive codes to identify data into categories and grounded my coding on what Rowan (1981) refers to as a "dialectical" process where "the participants have spoken, and now the interviewer is responding to their words, concentrating his or her intuition and intellect on the process" (in Seidman, 2013, p. 129).

In the initial round of coding I created descriptor codes for gender, family, employment and religion and spirituality to capture anytime individuals talked about any of the five topics. I began to create pattern codes for each of the descriptor codes that would capture similarities happening within each of the descriptor codes. For example, under the family code I created, codes labeled "rejection" or "acceptance" based on the recurring frequency participants experienced in relation to moments of rejection or acceptance of family tied to their gendered identity. In the third level of coding, I created three process codes to capture the larger action and phenomena taking place in relation to participants and what became important factors in their gendered experience. The three process codes—which make up each chapter in this dissertation—were gender policing, identity formation, and spirituality. I created a code book and defined each of these process codes, and shared the definitions with the two undergraduate assistants whom I hired at this stage of the coding. After coding interviews, I met with research assistants to verify and confirm process codes.

Participant Observation

Lastly**,** I conducted participant observation and attended gatherings, events and actions led by TransLatin@ Coalition, Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, and DeColores Queer Orange County among other organizations in the greater Los Angeles area. Participant observation lasted between 2016 and 2018. Many of the events I attended were actions many of which were civil disobedience actions that were led by the aforementioned organizations in Los

Angeles and advocated for the elimination of detention and deportation especially as it pertained to the Trans Latinx population. I also attended events in and around Transgender Day of Visibility and Transgender Day of Remembrance, which TransLatin@ Caolition was always in collaboration with other organizations for. Similarly, because my field work took place in the midst of an election year, many actions were also in response to the Trump administration's attack on the immigrant and Trans population in the United States. As part of each of these events, I participated and would take notes on my phone when quoting speakers. And after each event I would take more elaborate field notes.

After each event I wrote detailed field notes about my observations and statements that were shared. Field work served to supplement and triangulate the survey and interviews. Additionally, participant observation also served to inform the experiences of Trans Latinxs especially in relation to how Trans Latinx immigrants face structural and economic barriers in this country.

Significance and Implications

As shared by Dean Spade (2011), "trans people are told by law, state agencies, private discriminators, and our families that we are impossible people who cannot exist, cannot be seen, cannot be classified, and cannot fit anywhere" (p. 41). In this way, the Trans Latinx experience is valuable in understanding larger structural issues in the United States. context as they pertain to everyday life. Because Trans Latinxs experience greater discrimination when it comes to their livelihood, understanding their quotidian struggles and realities is crucial as we mobilize across different communities to draw attention to their humanity and dignity within our society.

Chapter Outlines

In Chapter Two, "Gender Policing Trans Latinxs in Everyday Life," I address how gender is shaped and policed for Trans Latinxs in terms of both their physical representation and gendered behavior. I offer the term "fear of ambiguity" to understand what motivates the consequential gender policing that Trans Latinxs experience on a daily basis. In doing so, I examine how the various institutions they navigate on a daily basis enact this gender policing on Trans Latinxs as a way correct and normalize any transgressive behavior. I focus particularly on the institutions of (a) home, (b) church, (c) immigration detention, and (d) employment as spaces that not only attempt to control transgressive behavior but also attempt to produce and reproduce gender norms within the binary.

In Chapter Three, "Emerging into a Trans Identity," I argue that despite the marginalization and gender policing that Trans Latinxs experience from an early age and in everyday life, they have affirming and validating experiences that allow them to emerge into themselves and their identity as Trans Latinx individuals. I examine how Trans Latinxs in this study have found or created spaces to discover who they are and emerge as themselves through finding community and others like themselves either through social media, media, or meeting others in the Trans community. These moments of finding others like them make other gender identities possible.

In Chapter Four, "Trans*Formative Spirituality and Self-Preservation," I argue that Trans Latinxs embrace spirituality in various ways. Spirituality, I found, was an important factor for many of my participants. They name spirituality as the source that fuels their resilience and hope as they move forward in the world. I offer the concept of what I have termed Trans*-Formative spirituality, which I define as a spirituality that Trans Latinxs perform as an embodied

knowledge that they are children of God, that they are living in their truth in their bodies as God wants them to, and also that in their journey to their own truth they are able to transform and convert others around them. My overall argument in this chapter is that Trans Latinxs do in fact embrace and practice spirituality either by (a) identifying as Christian or Catholic and/or engaging in Latino popular religion; (b) engaging in non-traditionally Latinx spaces such as other community groups, spaces, and religions to embrace their faith and spirituality; and even (3) exploring and creating their own type of spirituality. I close this chapter by looking at the concept of love as a form of spirituality that is necessary for individuals.

The conclusion chapter summarizes the overall findings, and suggests future directions.

CHAPTER TWO: GENDER POLICING TRANS LATINXS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

> After nearly two months, Ms. [Ishalaa] Ortega was released [from ICE Detention]. She moved to New York the next year, armed with a green card, ambition and multiple technical degrees. But even here, she encountered a problem that she said is common among transgender women.
>
> I applied to many places as a woman and they wouldn't hire me," she said, "I realized that regardless if you're a citizen, or an immigrant or whatever, you're still very far behind just for being a trans woman. Especially if you don't pass. (Wolfe, 2018)

Trans Latinxs are often perceived as transgressing the gender binary. In this chapter, I highlight how this perception leads to policing of Trans Latinx bodies through the very institutions that Trans Latinxs interact with on a daily basis. I address how gender is shaped and policed for Trans Latinxs in terms of both physical presentation and gendered behavior. I push forward two terms that explain how this occurs. In the following section I describe what I coin a "fear of ambiguity," which motivates and leads to consequential "gender policing" that Trans Latinxs experience on a daily basis.

Gender policing has been commonly defined as the responses of enforcement "to the violation of gender roles aimed at promoting conformity" (Wade & Ferree, 2015, p. 355). Within Trans Studies attention has been drawn to the informal policing of gender binary norms through interactional settings that enforce sex-segregated space, verbal and physical harassment based on perceived transgressions of the gender binary system (Collier & Daniel, 2019; Lucal, 1999; Nordmarken, 2014; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). I am extending that definition to include the attempt to control, shape physical gender presentation and gendered behavior. Gender policing is most visible in legal sanctions and other forms of discipline and punishment (i.e., the policing of gender outlaws in bars, the ban of Trans people in the military). Additionally, gender policing exists to enforce and regulate gender and sexuality, and while there not real laws, but

exist as moral laws and social codes that are socially constructed to dictate how men and women are supposed to act. It takes place at an interpersonal level—whether direct or indirect—that makes visible one's gender identity, gender performance, or gender expression to be punished, sanctioned, reprimanded, or, in its worst form, targeted for violence and harassment. In each case, punishment is performed as a means of enforcing and regulating moral and social codes of gender, including hegemonic masculinities, hegemonic femininities, heteronormativity and most importantly, serves to produce and reproduce the gender binary.

This chapter is divided into four sections. I explore how Trans Latinxs experience gender policing in their everyday lives, and to understand what has shaped their experiences, I focus on four sites where gender policing takes places: (a) home, (b) church, (c) immigration detention, and (d) employment. In each of these sections, the narratives feature profound experiences that exemplify how gender policing takes place at the hands of others in these four institutions. The narratives describe how these defining experiences shaped each of the participants' understanding of themselves and their own gender. After describing how gender policing functions in those spaces to target their gender behavior, gender identity, or gender presentation, I also highlight how Trans Latinxs have coped with and internalized these attempts to tame, correct, and erase their transgressive gender behavior.

Gender: Who Decides?

Sociologists agree that though it is incorrectly presumed to be naturally derived from biology, gender is socially constructed (Kessler & McKenna, 1987). Gender, or the process of "doing gender," moreover, is a socially achieved process that happens through interaction with others (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Westbrook and Schilt (2013) argue that authenticating one's gender, or what they refer to as "determining gender," is a social process of being

"recognized as members of the gender category with which they identify if their identity claim is accepted as legitimate by other people determining their gender" (p. 33). Gender is placed within a binary system that is also presumed to be natural, and categorizes gender as two fixed gender identities that are derived from biology—male/masculinity and female/femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Further, the gender binary system reproduces a gender order that "shapes norms for femininity and masculinity by defining what is gender appropriate in areas such as romantic partner selection, occupational choice and parental roles" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 442). The gender binary system consistently reproduces inequality based on a hierarchal nature which places a higher value on masculinity than on femininity (Connell, 1987; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Schippers, 2007)—while also placing a greater value on heterosexuality.

Though masculinity and femininity are not biological characteristics tied to male or female bodies, the expectations for "doing" either of the two genders depends on the historical time and context as well across interactional settings (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). While all people—cis-gender and Trans people alike—"do gender," it is only Trans people who "pass." Passing entails that individuals be perceived as a gender within the gender binary of man and woman (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2010). While not all Trans people aim to pass, passing does allow individuals to experience greater acceptance and less discrimination (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2010; Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Because Trans Latinx bodies exist at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, we must take into consideration how racial and ethnic minorities and women "experience subordinated femininities and masculinities" (Acosta & Salcedo, 2018). As a result, Trans Latinxs who do not pass as cis-gender individuals within the binary become subordinated within the gender, racial and ethnic hierarchy that invalidates their existence.

Surveilling and Disciplining Gender: Structural Practices, Interpersonal Effects

For Trans people, having an audience, or being on display and surveilled is common because they visibly transgress the gender binary (Stanley, 2015). It is this visibility of difference as a gender transgressor that, according to Stryker (2008), evokes violence and harassment because society has trouble "recognizing the humanity of another person if they cannot recognize that person's gender, the gender-changing person can evoke in others a primordial fear of monstrosity, or loss of humanness" (p. 6). What Stryker (2008) is addressing is one's gender ambiguity when Trans people do not pass. The notion of gender ambiguity is often discussed in Transgender Studies and is associated with two ideas: (a) that the perception of one's gender ambiguity is a source of evoking fear in cis-gender individuals who are entrenched in the gender binary system (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Mollenkot & Sheridan, 2010; Stryker, 2008); and (b) a Trans's person fear of their own gender ambiguity and inability and visibility as not passing (Wilson, 2002). I call the fear that cis-gendered people feel when faced with gender ambiguity of a Trans person "fear of ambiguity." That fear is based in the cis-gendered individual's discomfort when faced with gender ambiguity. The ambiguity of their gender within the binary causes such discomfort, and that discomfort manifests as gender policing. This fear often translates to violence—whether verbal, physical, or emotional—to those perceived as not human for not fitting within the gender binary, and structurally can manifest as the denial of basic needs such as housing, employment, healthcare services, education, and basic forms of identification (Bender-Baird, 2011; Padrón, 2015; Stryker, 2008).

Trans scholars have historically traced how sex and gender minorities have experienced heavy police surveillance in public places where they congregate, including public places and private establishments such as bars, street corners, and alleys (Namaste, 1996; Stanley, 2015;

Stryker, 2008). This type of surveillance and raiding of public spaces was common in the 1950s and police often went into public spaces looking for "gender outlaws," including transgender and gender variant individuals, who transgressed rules of gender. In 1950s New York, "gender outlaws" had to wear at least three articles of clothing that were "appropriate" for the sex/gender that they were assigned at birth; otherwise, they would automatically be arrested under anti-cross -dressing ordinances (Namaste, 1996, p. 231). These type of policies existed throughout the United States and stem back to the first of the ordinances that was created in 1848 in Columbus, Ohio which forbade people from appearing in public "in a dress not belonging to his or her sex" (PBS, 2015). In the 1850s, a wave of similar anti-cross-dressing laws created across at least 40 states allowed police to enforce normative gender behavior specifically targeting Transgender and gender-non-conforming individuals, and masculine woman, and feminine men (PBS, 2015; Stryker, 2008). While many of these laws have been overturned, some have persisted and were overturned as recently as 2010 in Oakland, 2011 in New York, and 2014 in New Jersey (PBS 2015). While laws and police enforcement have historically been the central methods of policing and surveilling Trans bodies, policing has taken other forms, as well.

In addressing how surveillance shapes experiences of minoritized groups and particularly Trans people, Spade (2015) identifies a form of power that shapes life outcomes for Trans people which he refers to as the "disciplinary mode of power." Spade explains how the disciplinary mode of power operates: "racism, transphobia, sexism, ableism, and homophobia operate through norms that produce ideas about what types of people and proper ways to be. So while there are no laws that say Trans people cannot exist, norms are enforced through "internal and external policing and discipline" and are created and disseminated by various institutions including medicine, social science research, and education (p. 52). Through these normalizing

functions, or what we know as social norms, individuals come to learn what constitutes "good behavior and ways of being" (p. 52). Thus, being cis-gender and heteronormative are norms that shape our everyday lives so powerfully that we do not question them. Instead, we consider anything outside of the norm, even when it is not illegal under the law, to be deviant and therefore morally incorrect.

In this way, the disciplinary mode of power operates in Trans Latinx lives through external policing of their bodies, actions and behaviors, as they are at the intersection of two hyper-surveilled and hyper-policed communities: race and gender. Beyond that, they are hyper-policed due to their racial make-up, gender, immigration status, class status, and assumed criminal and sexual deviance. In centering Trans Latinxs, we cannot talk about their gendered marginalization without discussing what it means to be a Latinx person in the current moment. Due to xenophobic sentiment post-September 11, 2001, U.S. migration enforcement has become taking a punitive turn through the rise of immigrant detention and the hyper-criminalization of migrant populations (Collier & Daniel, 2019; Menjivar & Abrego, 2012). Thus, leading to a legally and discursively produced status of migrant "illegality" that creates social inequality for all immigrants, further legitimizing the surveillance, criminalization, detention, and deportation of immigrants (Cacho, 2012; Golash-Boza, 2014; Menijivar & Abrego, 2012). As a result, all Latinxs or those assumed to be Latinx, regardless of legal status, have been highly associated with illegality, criminality, and affected by these legal changes in countless ways (Abrego, 2014; Chomsky, 2014). "Illegality" marks all those presumed to be migrants, including Latinxs as criminals due to judicial and legal changes that ultimately leave migrants more vulnerable and simultaneously produce feelings of insecurity and helplessness in relation to the law (Abrego, 2014; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Ruiz, 2014).

Gender Policing Trans Latinxs: The How and Where it Happens

To best understand how gender policing takes place in the lives of Trans Latinxs, it is necessary to explore the unique experiences of the members of this group. As Schilt (2008) has found in her study of white Transmen in the workplace, I have found that for Trans Latinxs, their gender is policed in ways that bind them to the gender binary. In this section, I demonstrate that this expectation of gender is based on a racialized gendered experience because culturally there are particular expectations of gender within Latino identity upheld by its own set of rules, expectations, and meaning for disciplining gender. This is apparent in the opening quote of Ishalaa's experience as a Trans Latina migrant in the United States—despite having the "correct" legal documentation (Spade, 2015) and educational credentials that should allow her to access a job, transphobia, racism, and xenophobia intersect in this example and translate into structural barriers that prevent her access to employment. In this case, having the right documentation does not matter, because as a Trans Woman of Color who does not "pass" as a cis-gender person, she is not deemed to have full rights as a citizen or as a full human being and thus she is shunned from the formal labor market.

Within Latinx identity there are gendered and racialized hierarchies of what is expected of Latinx bodies, gestures, vernacular, and general characteristics. This is something that is both imposed on us from within Latinx families and culture, as well as assumed and stereotyped by the broader U.S. society. What does it mean to be masculine and Latinx? What does it mean to be feminine and Latinx? And more specifically, what type of Latinx manhood and Latinx womanhood is acceptable and palatable for consumption via family, community, and society?

Queering Latinidad in Family

In Katie Acosta's (2013) *Amigas y Amantes*, women loving women are expected to perform hyper-femininity if they are to maintain close ties with their family of origin. In these cases, mothers often become gatekeepers to the rest of the family and church communities. Even Latina women who might perform a more masculine femininity, they still perform hyper-femininity through the rejection of wanting to be men, and keeping long hair. Indeed, length of hair becomes critical to maintaining positive relationships with mothers, since hair and grooming are often key aspects of building familial bonds between women within the family and also signal an allegiance to femininity. In "The Gay Second Generation," Ocampo (2013) discusses the "moral management" that Gay Latinos embody in order to perform a type of masculinity that is palatable for their families and cultural communities. In this way Gay men, like Lesbian women, self-police in order to fit into cis-gender heteronormative ideals and expectations of Latino masculinity. They dress in baseball caps, groom in stereotypically masculine ways, and downplay anything that might be perceived as feminine within their home.

We see that both cis-gender Gay men and Lesbian women have to perform their assigned birth gender in order to assimilate into their families and be "respectable" and homonormative in their queerness. In contrast, Trans Latinxs find themselves in the process of rejecting the gender that they were assigned at birth. Therefore, they cannot, through a stereotypical performance of the gender that they were assigned at birth, make themselves legible or legitimize their queerness in the way that their cis-gender gay and lesbian counterparts can. It might be that after completing hormonal and surgical gender-affirming processes that Trans Latinxs can pass, but as children and as part of the family unit prior to that ability to pass, they cannot legitimize their

existence as good (normal) sons and daughters to their families through performing the gender binary.

Trans Latinx lives are illegible and therefore unassimilable to normative standards of being and existing. This rigid gender and sexuality policing that occurs as a normalizing function of cis-normative society takes place in inter-personal interactions and through institutional discrimination, leading to various forms of violence, harassment, incarceration or immigration detention, unemployment, and, in its worst form, death.

Gender Policing at Home

Sage (28 years old, they/them) is about 5'9". They wear glasses, dark and faded clothes, and what look to be worn-in black Chuck Taylors. They have a small amount of facial hair growing on their chin and mustache area. The sides of their head are buzzed with longer jet black hair on top that was put into a small bun. Sub, their black pit bull-mix service dog, sits faithfully by their side. Sage presents masculine; they have short hair, are wearing knee-length shorts and a T-shirt. They struggle with anxiety and depression, and have a volatile relationship with their family. Much of their distress is particularly related to the strained relationship they have with their parents. The lack of emotional support Sage feel is related to their gender identity, gender performance, and sexuality.

Sage is one of six children, and is still seen as a woman/their daughter by their parents. In Latino culture, being a daughter has its own set of expectations and placement in relation to sons. Sage mentions this daughter-son dynamic when talking about their mom and the close relationship their mom has with Sage's oldest brother. Seeing the closeness between their mother and brother has also been difficult, because of what Sage's surrounding the sexual violence and harassment they experienced from this older brother when they were young.

Sage describes their parents as low-income. They share: "We come from a big family. My dad is the only one that has ever worked . . . But financially they can't help me out like I would like or how parents—other parents do with their children, which is fine because it's helped me grow up. I'm not dependent on them." Sage sees their family dynamic and lack of both financial and emotional support as the source of the financial, emotional, and mental struggles they deal with on a daily basis. Sage identifies as gender non-binary and two-spirit, and did not have the freedom or space to explore that identity until they left for college.

As Sage recalls, growing up, they always felt different, but feared their parents' disapproval if they were to act on or express those feelings. Sage recalls they always felt fear to act out or be something that their parents were not fond of. Much of this fear Sage attributes to the fact that their parents are "very old school" and religious. They share:

> When I was little they were always like, "Be tolerant. Be friendly. But stay away from *them*." Like from gay people, from trans people. From anybody that's an "other." Because we were like very religious; a very well-known family in the community . . . . My family's Catholic but they're like Christian Catholic old-school . . . very old-school way of thinking . . . traditional.
>
> I remember one time when I was really young – I think I was ten or eleven, we went to this party and there was a Trans girl there and they were like, "Oh es un hombre; that's a guy. That's not a woman." So I always had this bad . . . this thing that it was bad to be "other" so I suppressed my own feelings for such a long time and I ended up cocooning myself and being this person that I was not. So it's hard to wanna be myself around them when I know that growing up who I am is not right to them.

Sage's fear of living honestly in their gender identity came from spoken and unspoken messages that they received from their parents and elders as a young person. Similarly, it is this way of thinking that is grounded in traditional Catholicism that created a boundary between Sage's family, Sage's community, and "them" who were not in line with what was right and moral within the Catholic dominion. The "them" Sage's family referred to are the "others" who are gay, Trans, or anything that moves outside the normative understanding of both gender and sexuality which is not acceptable in the traditional worldview of the Catholic Church that Sage grew up in.

Furthermore, the fact that Sage's family is well known in their religious community created pressure to perform a certain kind of morality, one that was aligned strictly with God and the Church. This was loud and clear to Sage early on. The message was: We can be tolerant, but not to certain people (i.e. queer people). Their parents noticing a Trans woman—and automatically policing her gender and misgendering altogether and invalidating her identity and her existence—only reinforced the insidious idea that Trans people are illegitimate and wrong to Sage. Notably, while Sage's parents were calling out this Trans woman and defining her gender as male, they were not explicitly telling Sage that this was something they should not be; rather, they were implicitly communicating what would be tolerated and what was acceptable and what was not acceptable in their household and community.

From a young age, these messages that Sage received from their family and their community taught them that it was "bad" to be different. Specifically, it was unacceptable to be gay or Trans. Sage went on to internalize this message. These messages delineate the boundaries of normative gender presentation and behavior and those boundaries created a prison in Sage's body that ultimately made them self-police their own gender and sexuality. This is

why they acknowledge suppressing who they were for a long time—for fear of being rejected, marginalized, and abandoned by their family and their community. As an adult now Sage recognizes how they internalized these messages, and in doing so they subconsciously knew they could never cross the gender boundaries as their parents' daughter. They would have to abide by gender norms for good young Catholic Latinas, which meant they would have to be feminine, but not too feminine, and heterosexual with the understanding that sexuality was only appropriate for procreation.

Sage learned early on that going against this would have consequences and so for their own safety, they did not act on their feelings or attempt to explore outside of the normative gender roles and behaviors designated for them. Sage talks about the isolation they experienced as a result of their difference:

> It's like I didn't feel safe. I didn't have anybody to turn to. I didn't have anybody to talk to and I knew that if I talked to a teacher and said, "Hey, this is what's happening to me," I knew what that would lead to and I felt like I was gonna destroy my family. And I didn't want that to be what would happen because I shed light into what was happening to me, so like for many years I just swallowed everything because nobody would hear me out.
>
> Like if I said anything that was other, if I questioned anything my parents were very easy to like cut it. Like, "Oh no; you can't think that way." Or . . . I know my parents are not for it now, but before they would have been for like conversion therapy so I was not gonna talk about my questioning identity or my feelings or what I was—if I saw someone that I found attractive not being necessarily a guy or if it was like a queer boy that I

thought was cute, so it's like I couldn't talk about these things. I couldn't question these things because that's not who I was supposed to be.

Sage shared the difficulty they encountered growing up without having a sounding board for what they were going through. They learned early on what was acceptable and what was not acceptable. Sage learned from their parents from an early age that it was not okay be associated with gay or Trans people, and to a deeper extent that it was not okay for them to be gay or Trans. The gender policing Sage indirectly experienced caused an internalization of gender policing to the point that Sage felt unsafe exploring their identity or even talking to anyone about their identity. At home and at school this drove them into further isolation and further from themself.

For Sage, as a second-generation Salvadoran American who was also one of the youngest of their six siblings, college became one of the only acceptable ways to leave home. For Sage going to college became a space where they were permitted to explore who they were and emerge into their gender-neutral/genderqueer identity. As an undergrad who lived seven hours away from home in Northern California, college became a place where they were able to explore who they were without the moral boundaries placed on them by their family and religious community. It was there that they became exposed to literature in gender studies and Indigenous studies that provided a new language and framework for understanding gender and sexual identities that went beyond normative heteronormative, cis-gender limitations. College is where Sage began learning about their own Indigenous identity and embracing a two-spirit identity. It was that experience at college and having the space to learn about who they were through their exposure to Indigenous and LGBTQ literature that allowed Sage to identify who they were.

So I think it took like a couple weeks before I—like two weeks after I moved back [from college] that I was like, "Hey, so I hate to break it to you . . ." but the only word that I

knew how to use at that time for them was – that they would understand or kinda grasp is, I just said, "I'm gay." And they were like, "What?" and it was horrible. They just went berserk. I thought my dad would take it a little easier than my mom because I felt that me and my dad had a little bit better of a relationship growing up than me and my mom did. However, he took it the worst. He took it the worst. Still doesn't really know what to do. There was a time after I came out that he wouldn't even like look me in the eye. He wouldn't talk to me even if I would say, "Hey, Dad. How are you?" would just walk away; wouldn't say anything.

So he like gave me the silent treatment for a good year and a half; maybe two years. That was horrible: Your dad not even talking to you. Or you hearing like little bickering on the side and them talking shit about you and like . . . it was a lot. That's why me trying to be myself but being in a home that didn't accept who I was and even if they're like, "Oh, let's go to church," and I would wear what I would normally wear, they're like, "Don't wear that. You can't wear that. Hide your tattoos. Take out your piercings. Put your hair a certain way. Dye your hair back," because I used to do a lot of different crazy colors . . .

Sage's trajectory is similar to many of the people in this study who are second- or 1.5-generation immigrants in the U.S. For those who were not raised in the U.S. but raised in their country of origin, this journey to the U.S. became a place for freedom and explorations. Migration then becomes a way to explore identity, sexuality, and other aspects of a person's social location.

For Trans women, gender is often policed by their fathers. In Latinx culture, a son's gender and sexuality is seen as an extension of their father's gender and sexuality (Acosta & Salcedo, 2018). For heterosexual fathers in particular, scholars have found that their sons'

masculinity is a direct representation and reflection of their own masculinity and thus it becomes a father's responsibility to lead their sons to hegemonic masculinity (Kane, 2006, 2012). As Cantú (2009) finds in the experiences of men who sleep with men in Mexico and migrate to the U.S., for Trans Latinxs, both who migrate and grow up in the U.S., the household becomes a site to normalize rules of gender and sexuality. In particular, this is where study participants experienced gender policing directly and indirectly through the socialization of gendered behavior. The home is also a site where gender and sexual norms are taught, corrected, and children are rewarded when they act in behavior that is appropriate for their assigned gender. For example, for boys acting tough, aggressive and not crying become normative rules of their gender; acting in this way is validated from a young age. In the context of such strict socialization, transgressing rules of gender and sexuality opens the gateway to scrutiny and correction by family members. Indeed, many participants in my study experience this correction of behavior. This familial scrutiny and correction was all too normal and shaped how they experienced the beginning stages of gender policing in their households. Two participants, Sarita and Mariah, share their own experiences of this familial scrutiny and correction.

Sarita (43 years old, she/her), is a Transwoman who grew up in Mexico with her mother and stepfather and younger siblings. Sarita did not identify as a woman until later in her life, when she and her immediate family migrated to the U.S. when she was 17. However, from a very young age Sarita acknowledges feeling different. She had been made to feel different through the constant bullying she experienced at church and school as a young feminine boy. At home, she also experienced this alienation, particularly through the gender policing via corporeal punishment she received from her stepfather. Only later in life as an adult did she realize that the

physical punishment she had received had been an attempt to normalize her behavior within a gender binary, and more specifically as a way to teach her how to be a boy.

Reflecting on her childhood, Sarita recalls the contentious relationship she had with her stepfather, who she had thought to be her biological father until a close relative revealed he was actually her stepfather. Sarita remembers how much her stepfather hit her constantly, but she did not have full clarity as to why she was often a target of punishment. She describes the corporeal punishment she received for her femininity: ". . . él me golpeaba mucho por mi condición de que me cruzaba los pies, o a veces como más femenina, entonces él me decía que no era de niño, que tenía que comportarme como un niño y me pegaba a veces" [he would hit me a lot for my condition, I would cross my legs, or I was just more feminine, so he would tell me those things weren't what boys were supposed to be doing so he'd hit me and tell me I had to act like a boy].

Sarita acknowledges that she was not perfect as a kid and maybe sometimes was deserving of punishment. She went on to share, ". . . pero yo siento que sí me pegaba más porque él quería que me comportara como—[niño] (. . . but I feel like he hit me because he wanted me to act like a—boy)." For Sarita, looking back on her childhood, it is clear to her that the physical punishment she received as a young boy was due to her display of feminine behavior and characteristics such as crossing her legs. This feminine behavior, which lies outside the scope of hegemonic masculinity and normative standards of boyhood, are what made Sarita deserving of punishment from her stepfather. Moreover, her femininity was not only punishable because of her non normativity, but because of her womanhood, which she refers to as a "condition." This "condition" suggests her understanding of a type of sickness that not only makes her different, as she has come to feel since a child, but makes her sick or ill and therefore

in need of punishment as an attempt to cure her of her perversion.[19] Similarly, from a young age her body, her behavior, and her movement fell under constant scrutiny, as is common for gender transgressors (Stanley, 2015). Sarita's inability to embody hegemonic masculinity was not only her transgression as an individual, but likely also reflects a failure of her stepfather's masculinity.

As I mentioned previously, Sarita represents one of many Trans Latinxs in this study who have experienced the scrutiny and surveillance of their families' gender policing. Moreover, while Trans masculine Latinxs in this study experience similar scrutiny and surveillance, my interviews suggest that Trans women's bodies are scrutinized, surveilled, and targets of corporeal punishment more often and more consistently. This can be tied to the fact that Latino culture is steeped in a patriarchal family structure, often referred to as machismo, which devalues femininity and feminist characteristics altogether (Cantú, 2009).

The punishment that Sarita experienced at the hands of her stepfather has been embedded in her memory and has stayed with her during adulthood. When coming out to her parents as a Transwoman when she was 17—after having migrated to the United States together with her immediate family—her stepfather kicked Sarita out of their home. As her father figure, in essence he had failed to engender masculinity in Sarita. Thus, she was no longer welcome because of her decision to be a woman. While I discuss in more detail how Sarita coped with her identity and her family relationship in Chapter Four, here I highlight the way in which her stepfather's gender policing impacted her as a child and what that meant for her relationship to her mother. Her mother's reaction of her coming out as a transwoman was opposite of her stepfather. Sarita's mother never had an issue with Sarita's identity, however, she never

[19] The LGBT population has historically been pathologized as diseased and mentally ill (Singh et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2014).

challenged her husband when Sarita was exiled. As a result, Sarita was estranged from her family for many years. More recently, as her relationship with her family has healed, Sarita describes how after coming back into her mother's life after many years of being estranged she asked why her mother never stood up to her father for her:

> Después de que pasan muchos años –. . . le pregunto por qué no me apoyó . . . pero ella dice que ella ya sabía que yo iba a ser así, pero como en el pueblo ella decía que ella tenía mucho temor de que me fueran a hacer algo y que por eso también ella no me apoyaba también en ese aspecto de decir, "ah, ¿pues qué importa?"
>
> After many years have passed, I asked my mom why she didn't support me/stand up for me, but she says that she knew I was going to be like this [a Transwoman], but she said she was too scared that something would happen to me in our neighborhood/community and that's why she never stood up for me.

Sarita's mother's lack of advocacy in her household is something that has marked Sarita deeply. She has associated it with being part of her rejection from family. Yet in retrospect, she is able to understand why her mother remained silent despite the gender policing and punishment Sarita endured at home. Her mother's silence and complacency in the face of her husband's actions condoned the gender policing Sarita experienced and showed a desire for Sarita's behavior to be corrected within the home. While Sarita's stepfather attempted to erase Sarita's gender transgression, her mother condoned the gender policing and erasure of her transgressive gendered behavior in order to ensure that Sarita would be safe in hyper-homophobic and hyper-Transphobic external environment. In this way, the correction and erasure of transgressive, gender variant, non-normative behavior of Sarita at home, would teach her what was normal and safe, so as to not be met with even harsher punishment and violence outside in society. In this

way, home would become a learning ground for what is to be expected in society almost as a microcosm of a world that is hostile to queer and Trans bodies—even from a loving mother.

Furthermore, Sarita's mother's reaction is a common reaction among parents and particularly among mothers of Trans Latinxs. Many participants that I interviewed who have been out for over a decade have shared their experiences of transforming rejection into acceptance over time with family members. It is mothers who often have shared with their Trans children that it was the fear of violence and possibly death that informed a major part of the initial rejection of their child's transgressive behavior. Thus, for mothers, gender policing became a way to ensure their child's safety.

Mariah (27 years old), a Transwoman who was born in Mexico and was brought to the United States by her mother at the age of one, shares a somewhat similar experience to Sarita in relation to her father. Mariah has spent most of her life in Los Angeles where she grew up with her mother and sister. Growing up in an undocumented family with no extended family in the United States, Mariah has always been extremely close with her mother and sibling especially after her father was out of the picture. When Mariah came out to her mother as a trans-woman, her mother was not surprised because of how feminine Mariah had been as a young child. Mariah shares how her mother reacted when Mariah came out to her as a Trans Woman:

> Well your dad kind of after a little bit, after you were a little older, he didn't really allow it, like it wasn't cute anymore.
>
> Because when a little boy is two or three and you put lipstick, it's cute but when [he's] six or seven, people are like okay you can't do that now, you're too old, now you've got to be a man or whatever.

For Mariah she experienced this gender policing directly from her father, as he continued to embody feminine behavior as a child.

> My dad was like, when he was younger and I was younger, he was pretty homophobic. He would always tell me don't sit like that, don't put your hand like that, you're a man and men act like this. And you know, you're never going to find a wife, you've got to be a man, and stuff like that . . . . I feel like it was just trauma honestly. I just feel like I was just, not that I was physically beaten into boyhood, but more verbally and socially.

Mariah acknowledges that overall, she was accepted for her femininity after her father left, thanks to her mother and sister always affirming her identity. But Mariah experienced significant verbal and social trauma as a young boy, mainly in learning that as a boy, it was not okay to embody any presumably feminine characteristics.

As seen in these experiences, gender policing played an important role in teaching Sage, Sarita, and Mariah who they were. Ultimately, they learned early on what was appropriate and what was not appropriate via the direct and indirect messages they received from their parents and family members. They learned early on that they were transgressing gender norms, and that was met with negative consequences. In this way, scrutiny and surveillance of gender presentation and behavior is exacerbated, and individuals learn early on that enacting appropriate gender norms is necessary in order to be tolerated within their families and communities. A feeling of difference often permeates individuals' notions of themselves and often gender policing is self-inflicted especially as children work hard to accommodate parents and families.

While I address gender policing in the household and talk about the ways in which families contribute to gender policing, my findings suggest that gender policing—and on a larger scale, rejection by family members—is never static. These relationships change over time for

most participants in my study. The reality is that while gender policing occurs in the institution of family, the family is also a malleable institution where gender policing can decrease over time. In the following section I focus on gender policing at church, which is a common place for gender policing to occur for Latinxs.

Gender Policing at Church

Chloe (41 years old, she/her) grew up in the South Bay area of Los Angeles. Her mother had three daughters from a previous marriage when she immigrated from El Salvador to the United States. Chloe's mother and father met in Los Angeles, got married, and had Chloe shortly thereafter. When she was three, Chloe's parents divorced and Chloe and her three sisters were raised by their mother. Growing up, Chloe always stood out at home because while she was assigned male at birth, she was the most "femme" of all the women in her house from a very young age. Growing up in a mixed-status family, Chloe's feminine behavior was not the only characteristic that made her different. She also was the only one of her siblings that had a different father. While Chloe's father was a Chicano from Texas, her sisters' father lived in El Salvador and was unknown to them. These various factors made Chloe feel especially visible at home. Chloe's various differences made her a target at home, where her sisters often made jokes about her. Chloe's hyper-femininity as a young boy and her classmates' fear of ambiguity made her the target of harassment and physical violence almost on a daily basis at school. Chloe recalls "there was always an audience looking at me and making fun of me."

In addition to home and school, Chloe endured gender policing at church that left a lasting and painful emotional scar. Shortly after her parents' divorce, Chloe's mother began attending a Pentecostal Church when Chloe was four. Chloe describes her experience of Pentecostal Church as being "all about Satan and hell and stuff. So, that scared the fuck out of

me. And then they used to love pointing me out." In Latinx communities, Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity that differs from mainstream Catholicism due to its belief of emotional stirring of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and healing and miracles (Aponte, 2011). In Chloe's experience she expresses the constant emphasis on Satan and Hell used as a fear tactic to one's proximity to God and good moral character and distinguishing between bad behavior. As a result of growing up in a Pentecostal Church, there was a sense of fear instilled in Chloe from a young age. In the following passage, Chloe describes how despite her wanting to remain hidden, she was always pointed out. In this particular instance it was with a minister at her church when she was eight years old:

> I remember it would happen here and there where they would ask each child at the end of the service to come up and they would pray for the children. And because I was always looking to not be seen, I wanted to always hide. I would just be under the benches and then I would always be the last, and I remember this one particular time, this one preacher said every child, and my mom forced me. She always forced me.

As she remembered this event, which she recalled later she had not thought of in a long time, she became emotional as she struggled to hold back the tears. Chloe went on to describe what happened next:

> . . . I went up, so of course, because I was the last [kid], everybody was looking at me. And then he says, "Who's the parent of this child?" And then everybody was looking around and my mom's like, "Oh, that's my child." He says, "Your child is in a fight with the devil. Your child is in the grips of the devil and you need to pray for him and you need to be right with the lord. You need to make sure this child is safe."

For Chloe, this was an early indicator of not only her difference but of her proximity to the devil. This experience is an example of the hate and gender policing Chloe faced within her church as a young child. As a child she was dressed as a boy and had a male name. The only indicator of her gender-deviant status was her effeminate behavior. Her behavior marked her as feminine and designated her as "queer," whether it was as a *joto or maricon*.

As a result of colonization and forced Christianization, much of Latinx cultures continues to be grounded in patriarchy and the superiority of men and masculinity, to be male means one must behave in very specific ways where anger, aggression, and acting tough and unemotional are normalized (Ocampo, 2013). Boys who transgress normalized Latino masculinity to engage with femininity and womanhood are reprimanded and criticized at home, and are categorized as an "abomination" (Cantú, 2009, p. 129). While the minister never explicitly classified Chloe's queerness, he clearly classified Chloe as an abomination by proclaiming that Chloe is in the grips of the devil. The minister makes it clear, in front of the entire congregation, that there is no room for deviance within gender. The minister reveals that deviance, even at the age of eight years old, signifies eternal damnation. The minister threatens Chloe's deviance with the specter of burning in hell thereby attempting, through fearmongering, to stamp out any speck of non-binary deviance.

Chloe goes on to say, "And of course . . . I knew what it meant. I didn't know that I liked [men] . . . I knew I was just different only because everybody always made fun of me and everybody picked on me." In this way, her transgression deemed this type of policing that she had already experienced from others including at home, with peers at school, and even from adults and people in power including this minister at church who made an example of her and her ungodly and unacceptable devilish behavior. To be homosexual is an abomination, and I

extend that to people who are not cis-gender women or cis-gender men. That is, to be a trans person is also to be an abomination. The only way to get right with the lord in this sense, as the minister stated, would mean that Chloe and her mother who was "responsible" for her child's behavior would need to enforce gendered and sexual social codes in order to correct, and ultimately erase Chloe's gendered transgressive behavior and presentation that did not fit within the realm of hegemonic masculinity for an eight-year-old boy.

Furthermore, because of the role religion plays in the lives of people and the role it played in Chloe's mom's life, Chloe shared, "I was just mortified . . . and then my mom believed him, so whenever she got mad, she would bring it up." Her mom went on to use the minister's words as truth in believing that there was something wrong with Chloe, especially when Chloe was acting up or acting out. It became a reminder of her presumably devilish nature that the minister imposed on Chloe. In this way, Chloe's very existence was deemed to be evil by the pastor, and her transgression of gender behavior at such a young age was something to be eliminated both at the church and at home. While Chloe still feels the pain of this experience that marked her at such a young age, it has not defined her existence. A few years after this incident, Chloe stopped attending church altogether with her mother's approval, and while the fear instilled in her from church was internalized in psyche as she describes it, it was in high school that she began to meet gay and queer peers that affirmed her existence.

Gender Policing and Immigration Detention

Rita (43 years old, she/her) identifies as a Trans Latina who is originally from Puebla, Mexico. When I sat down with Rita in February of 2017 it had been almost one year since she was released from ICE detention. She had spent three years in immigration detention and throughout it she was constantly sexually and verbally abused by inmates and on-duty guards. I

first met Rita when I was conducting surveys with Bamby Salcedo and the TransLatin@ Coalition. We were collecting surveys at a LGBT Church in Long Beach, and she showed up to the survey collection with Bamby that day. She was a survey participant and we chatted a little—about nothing in particular—and once other participants finished, Bamby and I collected the surveys and went our separate ways. A week later, we had a second set of survey collection at the LGBT Center in Long Beach, and there was Rita once again. For the next few months, wherever Bamby went, I saw Rita there with her. As time went on, I came to find out Rita's story and her turbulent journey to get to this place where she was working for TransLatin@ Coalition and was beginning to experience some stability in her life after many years of violence, harassment, and immigration detention.

Rita invited me to her home for the interview, where she had been living for a short time. She was renting a room in large house, with other queer and trans people whom she met through one of her non-profit networks. Her room was small and cozy, with just enough space for her twin bed, a small dresser, her clothes which hung on one side of the room across from her bed, and a shoe rack filled with high heels, which she later told me were her most prized possessions. Her walls were filled with certificates from various workshops and trainings she had completed since being released from detention in March of 2016.

Every time I saw Rita during survey collection or at a Trans Latin@ Coalition event and even now in her home, she always looked so put together from head to toe. Her makeup was flawless. Her signature thick cat eyeliner had become part of who she was and her vibrant eyeshadow was always perfectly brushed across her eyelids. Her makeup was not flashy, but luminous and warm across the canvas of her face. Her dark black hair was wrapped in a tight bun

sitting on the top of her head without a single hair out of place. She wore red-burgundy lipstick, her long nails were manicured, and she wore black pants and a black top.

Rita explained to me that she fled from Mexico because she deeply feared for her life after being a victim to various physical attacks from men in her neighborhood, including threats of violence from police. In Mexico, Rita recalls doing her best to live her life without calling attention to who she was by living as a man as best as she could: "Como varón pasaba . . . pretendía ser hombre y, y chanceaba con otros chavos, con otros hombres, y me decían palabras fuertes, tú las conoces: maricón, puto . . . joto . . . ellos ya medio notaban algo, aunque yo trataba de comportarme lo más varón posible, ellos ya sabían" [As a boy I passed . . . I pretended to be a man, and I took a chance doing so with guys I knew, with men I knew, and they would call me names, you know the words: fagot, fucker . . . queer . . . they kinda noticed something even though I tried to act as manly as possible, they already knew]. For Rita, she took on her own self-policing of her gender performance to avoid the consequences of any type of fear of ambiguity. She tried everything to fly under the radar by dating women, working out, and being fit. She hoped this would allow her to embody a form of Mexican masculinity that was palatable and acceptable within her society.

As the oldest son and brother of a single mother, her masculinity was not only for her own protection, but it served as a shield of protection to her family, particularly her siblings who she protected from any and all harm, including sexual violence from close family friends. She explained, "Alguien tenía que asumir el rol de hombre, y ese lo tomé yo. Lo tomé por muchos años, hasta que llegué aquí a los Estados Unidos, donde ya pude ser libre. Pero, no fue así, en realidad" [someone had to the take the role of the man (in the house), and I took that role. I took it on for many years until I got to the United States, where I could be free]. She decided to leave

Mexico fearing for her life after one of her cousins found her wearing women's clothes—she did not feel safe knowing this particular cousin would share this information with men in the neighborhood who had already threatened her with violence for their assumption of her being gay.

Fleeing violence and persecution, Rita came to the United States in 2003 by hiding in the back of a truck. She began a new life in Phoenix, Arizona. It was in Phoenix that Rita began to live part time as a woman and began her medical transition with hormone replacement therapy in 2006. By day she passed as Juan, and worked under the table as a busboy at a local restaurant and in the evenings, she would come home, where she lived with other migrants, and dressed as herself, a woman. Living this double life took a toll on Rita. She felt isolated, and lonely, eventually finding solace in alcohol. In 2011, while driving under the influence and without a license under Joe Arpaio's draconian tenure, she was taken into custody. After 20 days in a local jail, she was transferred to Eloy Detention Center outside of the city. It was at Eloy detention center where she spent about three months that she got help from a non-profit organization to begin her asylum request. She was eventually released from detention.

Two years later, in 2013, she was arrested and convicted again for driving under the influence without a license. This time she was sent directly to Eloy Detention Center. Both times Rita was stopped she was dressed as a woman, in a dress, heels, make-up, and by this point her hair was long. Yet, Rita was placed in male facility and was there for 2 years and 4 months, where every day she experienced consistent verbal, physical, and sexual abuse from male detainees and ICE Detention guards. Despite Rita's physical appearance, immigration detention focused solely on Rita's genitalia and relegated her to the male facility. There was no room for Rita's gender variance in the eyes of the detention center and law enforcement. Furthermore,

Rita was undocumented and had no legal documentation that would have identified her as a woman at that time. So, her gender was policed, that is, Rita was forcibly considered male by law enforcement at great cost to her. Rita shares how one CCA[20] guard in particular harassed her while in Eloy:

> Ya no aguantaba, ya no aguantaba más, porque fui víctima de asalto sexual por un oficial, un oficial de CCA, y pues, nadie me hacía caso. Decían que yo estaba mintiendo, algo así. Y pues, me acusaba con los mismos compañeros de él. Entonces, un compañero tiene que cubrir a otro.
>
> Entonces, el tipo me estaba tocando inapropiadamente, me apretaba las nalgas, las piernas, los pechos y, y pues, él hacía lo que tenía que hacer, porque saciaba su ego, o su sadismo. Entonces, de ahí en una ocasión que me fui a acusar, no le hicieron nada. Le dio tanto coraje, porque el tipo me decía que yo era un hombre y que, y que tenía que aguantar lo que él estaba haciendo, ¿no? Entonces, pues, yo al tener mi parte masculina en medio de las piernas, dije:
>
> "Esto no me gusta, porque gracias a esto me están maltratando, me están haciendo acoso . . . – estoy siendo burlada y todo esto." Entonces, me acuerdo que llegué a mi celda, y dije: "Okay." Traté de hablar con un consejero . . . y nada. Entonces, agarré y me acuerdo que yo tenía un blade, que estaba prohibido adentro, y me corté un testículo. Entonces, y con mi sangre estuve escribiendo "respeto a las mujeres transgénero en detención!"

[20] CCA stands for Correction Corporation of America, which is the private company who owns and manages private prisons and detention centers. CCA was the former name, and now that company is called CoreCivic.

[I couldn't take it, I couldn't take it anymore . . . I was a victim of sexual assault by a CCA officer and no one paid attention or believed what I was saying. They [all the guards] would say I was lying. And so, (the CCA guard) would instead go accuse me of misconduct with the other guards who were his friends, because the guards work together and protect each other.

So, the officer was touching me inappropriately, he would squeeze my butt, my legs, my breasts, and well, he would do what he needed to do to satiate his ego or his sadism. So, from there, there was one time I went to report him, but they didn't do anything to him. He got so angry, because he would say that I was a man, and that I had to put up with what he was doing, right? So then, since I had my masculine part in between my legs, I said to myself:

"I don't like this, because thanks to this I'm being treated badly and I'm being harassed . . . I'm being bullied and made fun of." So, I remember being in my cell, and I said to myself, "Okay." I tried talking to a counselor . . . and nothing. So, I remember I had a blade in my cell, and I grabbed it . . . we're not allowed to have blades, and I cut my testicle. So, with my blood I was writing "respect Trans women in detention!"]

For Rita, cutting her testicle was not just a cry for help but a protest for her own protection and that of other Trans women immigrants in detention. This act of protest eventually caught the attention of her aggressor's superior and she was eventually transferred to one of ICE's only segregated units that housed Gay and Transwomen in Detention, inside Santa Ana city jail in California. Rita was living at the intersection of transphobia, xenophobia, and racism at this time. The fact that Rita transgressed the gender binary and the fact that Rita was a

prisoner due to the harsh punitive regime of immigration enforcement, Rita had lost her humanity in the eyes of the enforcement officials at the detention center.

Rita was forced to take drastic measures in order to escape the confines of the gender policing that she was experiencing. We see in Rita's experience how she was forced to physically and violently remove parts of her body in order to catch the attention of the authorities that were inflicting this severe punishment on her. Rita's extreme act of self-mutilation is not just a shocking story. It is also emblematic of how extreme one's actions have to be in order to be seen as who she truly is. Rita's body was being policed in a way that was meant to erase her existence completely while at the same time, cause her to suffer. In order for Rita to be visible she had to literally smear her own blood on the walls of her cell, to spell out her existence and her demands. The fact that it took such extreme measures to receive help represents the fact that institutions grounded in cis-normativity aggressively eviscerate the existence of Trans people. This is particularly true of the immigration system that marks undocumented as disposable due to their ascribed illegality, similarly Trans individual's hyper-visibility outside of the binary sex-categorization (Collier & Daniel, 2019) further marks them illegible and thus physical and sexual violence is used as a means to kill one's spirit.

Yet, as Rita recalls, the aggressive strip searches and humiliation did not stop in Santa Ana. Moreover, throughout Rita's detention, guards and medical providers made the decision without her consent to lower her hormones and to provide her with these only inconsistently. She was also often denied access to necessary medical services. Again, tactics that do not allow for her Transness do not allow for her needs as a Transwoman.

While in Santa Ana, Rita stayed with other Transwomen in detention, but this did not put an end to her problems with guards who were aggressive and who used any opportunity to

humiliate her and other trans women. Through the help of a non-profit organization, Rita was released from detention in March of 2016 with an ankle bracelet that tracks her every move. With no family in the Los Angeles area, local organizations such as TransLatin@ Coalition, Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement and Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC) helped get her on her feet after her release. While Rita's legal status is still liminal as her case is pending in immigration court, she has since been adjusting to life after detention as a Trans Latina in Los Angeles. She was granted a work permit and she has since been going to school and has aspirations to get her GED.

Gender Policing and Employment

According to survey data from my study of 129 participants only 20% of participants reported having a fulltime job, and 20% reported having a part time. Furthermore, 56% of participants reported making $10,000 a year or less. Additionally, for Trans individuals, particularly Transwomen in this study, it has been challenging to acquire formidable employment. As my participants have named it, many times this comes in the shape of being able to receive interviews, but not being able to be hired for a position and not knowing why. As Ishalaa's experience details at the opening of this chapter, while she was able to gain citizenship status as a Transwoman, attaining legal status has not helped her obtain a position. Because she does not pass as a cis-gender woman, Ishaala and many of the Trans women in my study "play the part" and enact feminine behavior, feminine characteristics, and outwardly embody feminine style through the use of women's clothes, makeup, long hair, and even have gone through medical transition, they still become identifiable and thus it is their lack of passability which prevents them from finding employment in a structurally transphobic labor market (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2010). And further, Transwomen possess a sort of devalued feminism,

because they are not easily able to attain passable feminine characteristic/traits through transition (Schilt, 2010).

After being given a work permit, Rita also shares that she had applied to countless service sector jobs. She applied both in person and online and with an extensive service work managing a restaurant prior to being in immigration detention, she felt like she was a great candidate for work. Below she describes her experience of turning in job applications in person, and what happened when she submitted applications online and was called into an interview:

> . . . pero, no se me dio trabajo. La verdad, lo único que me dijeron en muchos restaurantes: "Nosotros te hablamos." Hasta ahorita, a esta fecha, no hay uno que me haya hablado de regreso, más que al . . . algunas aplicaciones que hice por Internet, para que fuera yo a hacer la entrevista, pero, después de entrevistas, lo único que dicen es: "Nosotros te hablamos." No han vuelto a hablar de regreso [. . . but no one gave me a job. The truth is that the only thing that most restaurants would tell me [when I'd submit a job applicaiton in person] was: "We'll give you a call." Up until now none have called me back . . . some of the one I applied for online called me in to do an in-person interview, but after the interview the only thing they said was "we'll give you a call." And they still haven't called me back.]

It was clear to Rita that she was qualified for the positions she was applying to, especially now that she had a work-permit. Yet, she knew that being an openly out as a Transwoman was not going to be easy, and she knew why she never received a call back from any of the jobs she applied to. In short, she was not the *type* of woman they were looking for. In this way, Rita experiences gender policing through being unemployed. When she was performing as man part

time in Phoenix, Arizona before being placed into ICE detention she was able to find work easily, being undocumented and working under the table. However, now with a valid work permit, her Trans identity marks her ineligible for employment. Although she was able to secure part-time work, part time employment often does not guarantee benefits and insurance and permanency. Thus, for Rita and many Transwomen who are hyper-visibility, they are pushed into positions of financial and social insecurity because of the instability of the labor market that indiscreetly enforces cis-normative gender policing.

Trina, (45 years old, she/her) was also born in Mexico but was raised in the United States and had citizenship status from an early age. During our interview she recalled what it was like for her as a Transwoman being out in Los Angeles in the 1980s with a High School Diploma when searching for work. Trina remembers that, at that time having a high school diploma enough of a qualification to procure sustainable employment. While Trina is reflecting on her work experience as a 20-something-year-old naturalized citizen Transwoman in the 1980s, her experience was extremely similar to Rita's who is talking about present day employment conditions in the service sector in particular. Trina shared her frustrations:

> . . . being discriminated upon employment and stuff—based on my education, the skills, and I had a high school diploma—but I was still being discriminated just for who I was. I would go on the interviews. And the next thing you know, I would hear them say, "Well, we'll call you," and this and that. I kept on hearing the same old thing, same old thing.

Ultimately, Trina also learned very early on in her life that regardless of her credentials which at that time, in the 1980s should have afforded her a stable job and income, she realized she was going to be discriminated against because of her lack of passability as a cis-gender women (Bender-Baird, 2011; Schilt, 2010). For Trina and Rita and many other Transwomen this

pushing out of the formal labor market for their transgression of the gender binary system places them into a precarious situation where their options for a livable wage become limited. The precarity of employment has many consequences that lead to financial instability which can have major impacts on other sectors of life including access to housing, healthcare, and lead to informal and/or illicit means of employment.

Due to the development of non-profit organization that exists in the Los Angeles area that aid LGBTQ and undocumented populations, Rita was fortunate enough to get two part time jobs with organizations that advocate for LGBTQ and immigrant rights, one of those organization being the Trans Latin@ Coalition. Many of the Transwomen in this study in particular, have had similar experiences wherein the only places they are able to find work are within non-profit organizations that advocate for Queer, Trans, or immigrant communities.

On the other hand, women like Trina, who currently works part-time at a health non-profit that provides medical services to the Trans community, has spent most of the last 20 years opting to do sex work, because of the fact that she was discriminated against when on the job market. She describes the importance of sex work in sustaining herself:

> . . . so, I started doing just sex work. Period. Doing escorting, being out…hustling. And been there, done it. And because I am a human being, I did have to pay rent. I did have to feed myself. I did have to dress, etc., and pay bills. So, I did what I had to do to make my ends meet. And not only was I a victim of hate crime—well, hate crime not once, not twice, but three times— . . .

Often the only places that Trans women who do not pass or have the appropriate government documentation, can acquire employment are in the health and non-profit industries that cater to the Trans population. Often, sex work is the only viable option to make ends meet. However, as

Trina shares, it also places individuals in vulnerable situations where physical and sexual violence are common.

In the site of employment, gender policing operates by limiting access to formal employment sector or being misgendered by employers. Trans women especially have to face the stigma that society places on sex workers, yet because of a lack of access to formal employment, many Trans women are forced into sex work as a means to survive. While not all of the women in this study participated in sex work, many of them have had to find work that pays them under the table whether cleaning houses, working at salons, or at factories. The impermanency of this type of self-employment leads to financial instability and drives Transwomen in particular into poverty. While this has implications for housing, healthcare and basic human needs, it also further makes medical transitions inaccessible if one chooses or aspires embark on a medical transition. In this way, that lack of employment accessibility for Trans individuals, and particularly Trans women further legitimizes their erasure and disposability in our society.

Ultimately, for Trans women in particular and Trans undocumented individuals in general, the lack of access to formal employment also has larger consequences that keep them from attaining stable income, insurance and access to gender-affirming medical treatment. While low-income Trans individuals can access Trans medical services through Medicaid, this is not accessible to all. Lack of access impacts mental health and how individuals feels about themselves, and their bodies.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered my understanding of how the existence of Trans Latinxs evoke the fear of ambiguity in others. This fear results in gender policing enacted in the everyday lives of Trans Latinxs as a way to correct and ultimately erase their non-normative

behavior. Gender policing as I have defined it here, happens at the interpersonal level—whether direct or indirect—that causes one's gender identity, gender performance, or gender expression to be punished, sanctioned, reprimanded, or, in its worst form, targeted for violence and harassment. Punishment is performed as a means of enforcing and regulating moral and social codes of gender, including hegemonic masculinities, hegemonic femininities and, most importantly, the gender binary.

The xenophobia and racism and uniquely Latino cultural norms that many Trans Latinxs face is inextricably tied to the gender policing discussed above. In Sage's story, we see how their Latinx family had specific cultural norms for daughters and their families that Sage was not allowed to deviate from. In Mariah and Sarita's experiences with family, we see how their families expected them to behave in stereotypically masculine ways that conformed to Latino culture. We see in Rita's experience that she was policed by the state due to her immigration status and then further mistreated while in detention due to a combination of her ethnic background and her Trans-identity. Then in Chloe's experience we see again the Latino community leader in the form of the pastor specifically demonized and policed Chloe in front of the entire church and her family because of her transgression of the gender binary. In the experiences of Trina and Rita exclusion from sustainable employment leaves them in precarious situations.

I began by addressing how family and the home shape understandings of gender, by making home a space to learn what is normal, what is not normal and more specifically what behavior is acceptable for boys and what behavior is acceptable for girls. Once these boundaries of normative behaviors are transgressed, there is an attempt on behalf of parents and siblings and schoolmates and peers to correct behavior. However, the attempt to correct behavior often

comes in the shape of verbal and/or corporeal violence and leads to punishment of the Trans Latinx person who often is made to know early on in their life that they are different, and that being different entails that something is wrong with them that needs to be fixed or corrected.

Second, I turn to Chloe's experience as a young child attending church and the hate she endured at young age in relation to her transgressive gender behavior. Through her narrative we can see how church which engenders the fear of God is used to distinguish between good and evil and further mark gender and queerness as devilish and as an abomination in the house of God. Next, I turn to Rita who was in immigration detention for three years, whereas a ward of the state she experienced first-hand gender and sexual violence from other detainees and police guards. Unfortunately, Rita's experience is not uncommon for Transwomen in detention who are constantly verbally and physically assaulted within the detention, where detainees are often forced to enact behavior of their sex/gender they were assigned at birth. Last, I look at employment, and how Transwomen in particular experience gender policing through discrimination in the labor market, have only limit options to employment, and are often pushed into the informal labor economy. In addressing gender policing, I am shedding light on the very real consequences that Trans Latinxs have for existing out of the scope of the gender binary system. In this chapter we can see that at any age Trans people are told that they are not legitimate, and they are punished in various ways across institutional structures.

In Chapter Three I will discuss how Trans Latinxs emerge into their gender identity despite their everyday struggles in being who they are, and in their journey to getting closer to themselves in how they physically present and their gendered behavior.

CHAPTER THREE: EMERGING INTO TRANS LATINX IDENTITY

> I like to always say I *emerged* as a Trans woman, as a woman, because I feel like transition implies that there was something I was not –[it was something] that I became. And I'm like, this was always me, I just finally left myself permission to be it. (Chloe, 41 years old, she/her)

At the intersection of race, class, gender, gender performance, gender identity, sexuality, and legal status, participants experience surveillance of their bodies, their behaviors, and their transgressive gendered identities. Trans Latinxs endure discrimination in every realm of their lives, including their families, in church, in employment, and in immigration detention as detailed in Chapter Two. Discrimination and marginalization of Trans Latinxs exists as an attempt to correct and normalize their behavior to fit more neatly within the gender binary. While the participants in this study violate heteronormative cis-gender moral codes of doing gender (Stryker, 2008) in U.S. society—and face gender policing through direct or indirect action, such as verbal harassment and physical violence—this chapter answers the question: In the face of these various forms of exclusion and violence, how do Trans Latinxs make sense of and affirm who they are?

In the face of a socially determined "impossibility" to exist (Spade, 2008), Trans individuals often experience self-blame and internalize the idea that they are abnormal or deviant (Gagné, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997). However, when Trans individuals are able to find others who are similar themselves, or see themselves in others then they are able to experience a "sense of self-recognition, and most quickly align themselves with new potential identities" (Gagné et al., 1997, p. 490). Participants in this study have found various mean of validating and affirming who they are as Trans Latinxs individuals as Chloe's epigraph above alludes to. Chloe altogether moves away from the idea of her transitioning into something she was not (i.e., the

assumption she was *not* a woman because she was assigned male at birth) and instead she describes her "transition" as emerging into herself as a Trans woman, or a woman. She describes the permission she gave herself to be herself—the woman she's always been, both externally and internally. While the epigraph does not capture the moments, people, and spaces that led her to this affirming process and acknowledgement of herself, in this chapter I look to the moments of affirmation that participants in this study name as important to them and their process of becoming their authentic selves. These are the moments that validated them and peeled back the layers of their identity so that they could emerge as their true selves.

While some participants in my study identified their gender identity before they began any sort of transition or emergence, others felt that their gender identity was more fluid or not clear until later on in life when meeting others who represented new gender possibilities for them. I focus particularly on (a) acknowledgement of their gender identity and developing acceptance within themselves, and (b) how external factors become necessary for embracing one's Trans identity. I discuss how participants question their own performance of gender and their process of understanding what "fit best" for them and what has allowed them to affirm who they are as they are affirmed internally and externally. While being Trans does not entail or necessitate bodily changes through hormone replacement therapy or gender-affirming surgery, and although I did not determine my sample on this, all participants but one in this study have undergone some form of hormone replacement therapy and/or gender-affirming surgery. I focus on the experiences of two participants in this study. I center this chapter on Adrian (25, he/him) and Didi (34, she/her), because their experiences are representative of the larger processes that take place for Trans Latinxs when transitioning or emerging into one's gender identity. Thus, I

highlight not only how Adrian and Didi have emerged into their identity, but also how they have managed their own understanding of who they are and what their gender is and means to them.

Importance of the Latinx Family

Family is a key social institution for the socialization of gender and sexual norms (Cantú 2009; Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Schmalzbauer, 2014). This is true in culturally-unique ways for Latinxs. Scholars have often given major attention to the family unit, when understanding Latino culture (Cantú, 2009). In doing so, scholars often point to the concept of Latino "familism" which is defined as the value and preservation of the family over all individual concerns and which strongly emphasizes family relationships and childbearing as a core part of family life (Cantú, 2009; Moore & Pachon, 1985; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Williams, 1990). In this way, Latino familism is often seen as the "contentious source of both material and emotional support and patriarchal oppression" within the family structure (Cantú, 2009, p. 128). While this view of Latino family is problematic and leads to the pathologizing of Latino culture (Cantú, 2009), I draw on it to understand and examine the institution of family as a site for understanding the production of gender and sexual norms. Within Latino familism, there are distinct gender roles and divisions, and boys/men and girls/women are socialized differently. Girls are expected to be submissive, pure, and dependent, while boys are expected to be dominant, aggressive, tough, and independent (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Similarly, in terms of the household, daughters are expected to do chores around the house, whereas boys are not.

Similarly, boys have a lot more freedom. While, tomboy behavior may be acceptable is some circumstances for girl, being "unfeminine" is considered unacceptable (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Additionally, for boys, any kind of effeminate behavior is also unacceptable (Cantú, 2009). While this is important in understanding experiences of Trans individuals and what has

shaped their childhood I reiterate this in terms of how this impacts individual in their own transition. Similarly, because of the importance of family to Trans Latinxs and the underpinning of Latino familism, it is important to note the gendered socialization and distinctions that exist within Latino families. Also, important to highlight how these distinctions impact the socialization of Trans Latinxs around their own understanding of gender, and their own relationship and ties to their family in the process of coming out.

Additionally, because acceptance is important to Trans Latinxs, as is stated throughout the dissertation, I do want to note the importance of Latina mothers in particular, especially because this becomes important in Didi's experience, and has a broader impact on many of the Trans individuals in this study. Building on how Latinas are socialized as girls, Latina Mothers are are often venerated as the idealized image of a women both inside and outside of the home (Abrego & Menjívar, 2011; Alcalde, 2010; Chant & Craske, 2003). Similarly, Latina mothers are often expected to be primary caregivers to their families, and thus are expected to support their children within the home and in the public spaces through their income, political involvement or migration (Abrego, 2009; Abrego & Menjívar, 2011; Schirmer, 1993). In this way, within Latino culture, Latina mothers are often seen as morally superior to other members in the family, and therefore they must practice self-denial and self-sacrifice to maintain their status within the family and within the culture (Abrego & Menjívar, 2011; Alcalde, 2010; Chant & Craske, 2003).

Of the interviewees, 27 out of 28 participants acknowledged the importance of their families in their lives. Even in cases when families had rejected participants when they initially came out as Trans, or when they began to show visible signs of being Trans in their gender performance. Participants continued to work on their relationships with family because rejection

was not static. While many participants did experience gender policing at home, the process of coming out took on various forms in relation to their family. Of the 28 interviewees, only one Transwoman, Paloma—who at the time of our interview in 2017 was not out to her family—still lived a "double life" wherein she dressed masculine at work and at home, and only dressed as a "femme" when out with friends in places where she knew she would not see her family or close relatives.

For Trans individuals, emerging into who they were was often a process that took time and many forms of validation before they arrived to a place on the gender spectrum where they felt affirmed. The gender policing they experienced throughout their lives left them feeling different and sometimes immoral, so it took multiple experiences of affirmation to feel more like themselves. Many of the participants in my study came to their Trans identity by first identifying as gay, since Trans people had seldom been part of their immediate community. It is for this reason that gender-affirming spaces and media plays such an important role in my study participants' processes of claiming their gender identities.

Coming Out as Trans and Transitioning

Emerging into Trans identity, is reflective of the coming out process that is often associated with the broader LGBT community. However, "coming out" has historically been associated with gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals and their process of choosing to inform others of their sexual identity (Gagné et al., 1997). While sexual identity is often assumed to be based on one's gender identity, and gender performance, one's sexual identity is neither tied to nor indicative of one's gender identity (Bender Baird, 2011; Styker, 2008). On the other hand, Trans and gender non-conforming individuals must manage both internal coming-out processes as well as external processes of their identity due to their gender performance, and changes to

physical appearance. In this way, Trans and gender non-conforming individuals are often forced out of the closet as a result (Gagné et al., 1997; Goffman, 1963).

As Trans individuals emerge into their gender identity, they must "learn to accept an alternative gender identity; develop repertoire of coping strategies to manage public presentations of gender; and in some cases, manage the actual transformation of permanent identity and anatomy (Gagné et al., 1997, p. 482). While some Trans individuals do not feel the need to take on medical transition through hormonal treatement or surgery, many who identify as Transgender do embrace a medical or social transition (Norwood, 2012). Medical transition entails physical changes prompted by hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgery, while social transition entails changing of name, pronouns, clothing choice (Norwood 2012). Overall such changes constitute a shift in the performed identity of a Transgender person (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1963; Norwood, 2012; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In this way, transitions may invovle a change from one gender category to another (e.g., man to woman) or from one gender category to a more nuanced and ambigious identity (e.g., woman to genderqueer; Norwood, 2012).

While there is a growing body of literature that pertains to gender identity and gender expression of Trans individuals, much of it centers the experiences of Trans youth. Much of that literature has focused on the barriers to obtaining one's desired gender presentation and gender identity given the dependence on parents for factors pertaining to gender and name change and /or gender-affirming surgery (Gonzalez & McNulty, 2010; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Russell et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2014). Similarly, other challenges that emerge for persons transitioning regardless of age include: feelings of isolation, shame, fear, worries about safety, suicidal ideation (Budge et al., 2013; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Norwood,

2012); and loss of supportive relationships they had previous to transition, which can directly impact family relationships, friendships, and romantic partnerships (Norwood, 2012). This places individuals at risk of poor mental health, substance abuse, violence, harrasment, discrimination, homelessness, and economic instability (Budge et al., 2013; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Norwood, 2012; Singh et al., 2014).

With the growth of literature that captures the oppression of Trans people and the process of transitioning there is also developing body of literature that captures the resilience of Trans individuals. Scholars in counseling and psychology have found that for Trans individuals, there are various factors that contribute to their resilience in managing social and institutional discrimination in their lives (Singh et al., 2014). For Trans individuals being able to self-define and theorize one's own gender identity has been found to contribute to ones resilience (Russell et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2014). Similarly, choosing one's name has been correlated to lower levels of depression (Russell et al., 2018) and is essential to one's happiness by being able to align with being authentic and true to one's self (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014).

Other factors that contribute to one's resilience in the midst of transitioning or after transitioning include: affirming communities (Budge et al., 2013; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Singh et al., 2014), particularly connection to a Trans-affirming community (Singh et al., 2014) and social supports stemming from family and friends. In particular, affirming communities can be lifesaving for Trans individuals, because it provides a safe space in supporting and exploring gender and self-acceptance by countering Transphobia (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014). In terms of social support, while parents have diverse range of responses to their children's Trans identity, from very negative to positive, messages of support even if inconsistent, are crucial to validation

and resilience for Trans individuals (Singh et al., 2014). Siblings are often found to be sources of support, even when parents are not (Norwood, 2012).

The current literature is necessary to understand the experiences of Trans individuals. However, because this field is still developing, there has not been much literature that addresses the complexities of transition for Trans people of color, Trans immigrants, and in terms of my study, the experiences of Trans Latinxs. Furthermore, this literature does not fully acknowledge the experiences of Trans Latinxs whose proximity to migration shape their understanding and emergence into their own identity. For first-generation Latinx migrants, transition may include a need to move to another country, experience can include migrating to a new country to find Trans-affirming spaces. For 1.5- and second-generation Latinxs, growing up in a Latinx household may create unique experiences for individuals transitioning as related to the Latino family structure. Similarly, for those growing up in the United States who spend most of their life in the United States, media, social media, and queer spaces can provide a space to find themselves and embrace their gendered identity.

Representation of Trans Identity

There has been a growth of portrayals of Trans people in offline media (TV, movies), as well as in social media. The growth of and access to the internet opens up possibilities for new media and social media content that has had a significant impact on the telling of Transgender stories (Ekins & King, 2006). Some of the content on social media is generated by Trans people who are, in turn, becoming more visible online where they can tell their own stories. Currently, one common trend among Trans youth is to document and share their gender transition through YouTube and many other social media platforms (McInroy & Craig, 2015).

With the wider visibility of Trans people, there is often an expectation of Trans individuals to conform to common assumptions that they were "born into the wrong body" and therefore must desire a medical intervention and transition even when it does not apply to their experience (Fink & Miller, 2014). To capture this phenomenon, Johnson (2017) coined the term "transnormativity":

> In addition to accountability to hegemonic standards of sex category and gender, Trans people are also held accountable to transnormative standards that are specific to Trans people . . . an ideology that structures trans identification, experience, and narratives into a *realness* or *trans enough* hierarchy that is heavily reliant on accountability to a medically-based, heteronormative model. (pp. 467–468)

For Trans people, this places assumptions that they if they are Trans they are trying to attain a gender binary presentation and behavior further erasing the fluidity of gender. Furthermore, it reiterates the fear of ambiguity which I described in Chapter two that assumes that Trans people must want to attain heteronormative, cis-gender standards that make them pass otherwise they evoke fear in non-trans individuals.

Trans advocate Janet Mock (2014), who speaks to this type of normalizing of being "trans enough" and is known for her autobiography *Redefining Realness*, shares:

> I have been held up consistently as a token, as the "right" kind of trans woman (educated, able-bodied, attractive, articulate, heteronormative). It promotes the delusion that because I "made it," that level of success is easily accessible to all young trans women [and men]. Let's be clear: It is not. (xvii)

For gender queer-nonbinary Trans individuals, this becomes significant since they may downplay the fluidity of their gender to fit overarching narratives of Trans identity (Darwin,

2017; Garrison, 2018). Similarly, embodying a binary gender Trans identity is often associated with being "Trans enough" and met with greater acceptance and less discrimination (Bender-Baird, 2011).

Finding Community, Finding Myself

Adrian, (25, he/him) experienced a childhood that was very tumultuous. Both of his parents, who had migrated from El Salvador and Guatemala respectively, were in and out of jail for domestic violence and drug addiction. Ultimately both of his parents were deported and he was primarily raised by his maternal grandmother and aunt. He struggled with his parent's absence, because he was too young to go visit them, and only kept in contact through brief phone calls. While both his parents ended up in Mexico, they continued to struggle with substance abuse. For Adrian, having both his parents stripped from him across the border impacted him deeply. Adrian shared that he often acted up in school and acted out at home with his grandmother and aunt. He described himself as being extremely rebellious, which took a toll on his grandmother and aunt who were struggling to raise him. While he felt extremely loved by his grandmother, he often felt a contentious relationship with his aunt who was doing her best to support her mother, Adrian, and her own kids and husband.

Adrian did not always know that he was Trans. From early on in his life he always saw himself as a tomboy. When Adrian got to middle school and high school, he was exposed to lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers. In middle school, Adrian became aware of his attraction to women. In high school Adrian joined the girls' basketball team, where many of the team members openly identified as lesbians or bisexual, and many of the women on the basketball team dressed masculine. Thus, exploring his sexuality toward women and his gender performance was normalized because of his peers at school. While on the basketball team in

high school, being around so many queer kids, as he recalls, Adrian knew he wanted to be more masculine and so decided to cut his hair short, and began dressing more masculine. Yet, at this time he still no conception of a Trans identity.

Adrian then began to date both men and women and identified as bisexual but describes the shift in his sexuality : ". . . at some point, I gave up on men. I was like, 'Well, I'm no longer bisexual. I'm actually just a lesbian.' It made sense. I was like, 'I won't date men. I don't like men. They don't do it for me.'" Having explored his sexuality with various partners, both men and women, he came to realize that for him, being with women was most comforting, and what he was most attracted to—not just physically and aesthetically but also romantically and emotionally.

While in high school Adrian entered a long-term relationship with a girl he went to school with. They stayed together for about three years, and broke up about a year and a half after high school, when Adrian was 19 years old. He describes that relationship as being extremely toxic and abusive, both physically and emotionally. While still in high school together, Adrian's girlfriend forced him to come out to his grandmother and aunt. Adrian's coming out, coupled with getting into a fight with his aunt's husband, was the last straw for his aunt, who then decided to kick Adrian out of the house.

Displaced, Adrian then moved in with his girlfriend, whose Latinx parents were open and accepting of their daughter's queerness. But after a few months, Adrian also got kicked out of his girlfriend's house because of a physical altercation he had with his girlfriend. Adrian remembers feeling helpless during this time because he had nowhere to go, and felt that his girlfriend was controlling and highly aggressive with him. While they continued their relationship, Adrian was able to live with a close friend of his girlfriend. It was not until he went

to live at this friend's house, that he got a glimpse of what he was truly feeling inside in terms of his gender identity. Below he describes how he came to figure out that he might be Trans:

> . . . I was watching Degrassi—it was like old reruns—and there was a Trans character in one of these seasons. I was like, "That's interesting. It's really interesting." I was like, "Whatever."
>
> So, I started looking stuff up, all this Trans stuff . . . I was 18 when I realized I was like, "Ah, this is interesting. I don't feel like a girl. I know I'm gay, but I don't like looking like a girl anymore. It was fun for a while [being a girl], but I don't like it anymore. It doesn't make me feel that great. Being like a boy feels really great. It feels really comfortable. I feel good in men's clothing."

At this point in Adrian's life he did not know about Trans people or the possibility that he might even be Trans, but one influential television show changed that.

Seeing the representation of a Trans person in Adam Torres's character in "Degrassi" then spurred Adrian's curiosity to further research for himself what he felt he resonated with on TV. While Adam Torres's character is a White, middle-class Canadian high school student, what resonated with Adrian was that Adam Torres's character is female-to-male Trans student at Degrassi Community High School. When a tampon falls out of his backpack, though, Torres is discovered as being Trans by a few of his peers. Up to this point his peers see him as one of the guys, but following this turn of events, Adam's narratives shifts to sharing openly what it means to be a female-to-male Trans binary person who binds their chest and who is beginning hormone replacement therapy, and goes through the questioning of what it means to be a Trans person in an isolated space like high school where no one else identifies in this way. While this character did not solidify Adrian's identity as a Trans person, it did allow him to see a possibility of what

he might be experiencing (Gangné et al., 1997). This small moment that Adrian sees as "interesting" and then refers to as "whatever" symbolizes the importance for him in becoming aware there was someone in the world—even if in the fictional world of Degrassi—that was somewhat similar to Adrian (Gagné et al., 1997).

Seeing Adam Torres's fictional character then is what led Adrian to the internet, which is common for Trans youth to turn to in order to create community and share their own experiences of documenting their transitions (Heinz, 2012; McInroy & Craig, 2015; Shelley, 2008). For Adrian, having the accessibility and resources on Trans identity and Trans masculine transition stories—readily available to him on the internet, no less—allowed him to begin to distinguish his own feelings around his gender identity that he was not able to articulate up to this point. Prior to that moment, because he saw possibilities of different sexualities around him at his school, Adrian was able to initially identify as bisexual and as a lesbian. Later, television representations and social media allowed him, even without having any contacts in real life, to begin to understand Trans identity and develop new possibilities of gender identities. Like the experiences of many other participants in my study, Adrian's narrative also speaks to the importance and significance that media/social media play in impacting Trans people's lives and contributing to the development of their gender identity (Heinz, 2012; McInroy & Craig, 2015; Shelley, 2008).

For Adrian, seeing potential gender identities of himself in media and social media shifted his reality of what was possible. While he shared his thoughts with his same girlfriend at the time, she had a negative reaction to the idea and became dismissive of him sharing that he may be a Trans guy. This invalidation of Adrian's possible gender identity sunk him into depression which is common for Trans youth who come out people who are close to them

(Budge et al., 2013; Norwood, 2012). When this happened, Adrian had already graduated high school and was now a student at a vocational school where he was studying to become an ultrasound technician. Steph, one of his professors who openly identified as a lesbian, had become Adrian's mentor. Adrian explained that their gay identities drew them to one other. After Adrian repeatedly struggled to come to classes consistently due to his depression, Steph asked Adrian if everything was okay. Adrian confided in Steph and told her that he was struggling with thinking that he might be Trans, and his abusive relationship was making it difficult to come to class consistently. Steph immediately responded positively and supportively to Adrian's situation. Through her own involvement in the LGBT community in Los Angeles, she had ties to the Los Angeles LGBT Center and brought Adrian along with her to the center.

Additionally, Steph suggested that Adrian meet her friend Aiden, a well-known and self-identified Asian American Transman. Adrian describes this significant experience of meeting Aiden for the first time:

> . . . he was the first trans person I ever met and he was like, "Yeah, my name's Aiden." I was like, "You're trans?" He was like, "Yeah." I was like, "What? You don't look trans." First of all, I don't know what Trans looked like but, in that moment, I'm like this 18-year-old kid like, "You don't look Trans. I want to be like you." He showed me his chest and explained to me his name story and did all of this. He is the only Trans person that I ever met that I was like—before my transition—that I was like, "Oh my God. I am trans. You solidified it. You did that. I don't know why you did that." I don't know if it's just because I met a human and it wasn't somebody on TV who's pretending to be trans . . . So, I'm like, "Oh, this is real. I can do this. I could do this. This is gonna happen."

For Adrian, meeting a Transman in real life was imperative in his journey of figuring that he identified as Trans. Up to that point, while he had media and social media to initiate the process of exploring the possibility of a Trans gender identity, meeting a Trans person in the flesh is what allowed him to recognize himself as being Trans. Even though Adrian mentions not knowing what a Trans person is supposed to look like, he still recognized the qualities in Aiden that he was finally able to see as possible for himself, too. In short, Aiden passed as a cis-man. In this sense, Aiden did not look Trans because of his medical transition and gender performance—through the use of hormone replacement therapy and having a mastectomy, or "top surgery"—made Aiden passable as a cis-gender man, since he had no visible markers of being assigned female at birth. For Adrian, the thought of being Trans, and more specifically moving away from womanhood and becoming masculine as a Trans person felt attainable and tangible in this meeting with Aiden. This moment allowed Adrian to envision himself in a way he never could before, and ultimately gave him a vision to be able to emerge as himself. Similarly, for Adrian, it was the first time since questioning his gender identity that he experienced an affirming space. Meeting Aiden created a Trans-affirming space for him that was necessary for his resilience and movement toward his authentic self (Budge et al., 2013; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014; Singh et al., 2014).

In solidifying his identity as Trans after this visit with Aiden, Adrian discussed what this would mean in practical terms with his mentor. The first thing that Adrian decided to do as part of beginning his social transition was choose a new name. Because first names are often gender specific, having agency in choosing a name to reflect one's social transition and to align one's gender presentation with one's gender identity helps to support one's mental health and

resilience (Russell, Pollitt, Li, & Grossman, 2018). Below, Adrian explains his process of choosing a name that fit him:

> . . . me and my mentor talked about it . . . I was like, "Okay. So, let's change my name." Peter, I was like that works, but that's still a little rough. That doesn't fit me. [I'm] a stereotypical brown kid . . . But then I'm not even masculine enough. It's so interesting because if the world will view you as how masculine and how much you pass and how much you don't pass. So, I'm [at the time I'm] like this non-physically transitioned kid, 18-year-old kid, who's trying to be called Peter. So, at this point, I'm trying to figure out how I can live in the world as a Trans person in a really safe way.
>
> [Steph's] like, "Listen, I don't want to be an ass, but you're 18. You're gonna graduate this program and no one's gonna hire you and you're gonna be called Peter. So, I was like, "You have a really good point," . . . she's like, "What about [Adrian]?"
>
> I was like, " . . . [Adrian] isn't that bad." I mean it is. It's like super gender neutral. I can say I'm [Adriana] if I choose to you know and sometimes I do. Sometimes I'm like, "Yeah, my name's [Adriana]" because people are so . . . because gender means so much that, at some point, they either assume my name's Adrian or Adriana which again is the obvious choice because it's so gender neutral, right? So, I'm like, "Fuck it. I'll just take it."
>
> So, I took it and as she called me [Adrian] and as in my mind I started to feel into my own masculine, right? Fuck everybody. So, I started to . . . I wasn't transitioning hormonally. I was just feeling really good about just being [Adrian] and dressing like a boy and having people not caring so much.

For Adrian who had what he referred to as an extremely feminine name, having the agency to choose a new name was important for him in his transition toward his authentic self.

First, it was important to have a name that could match the masculine identity he was trying to move toward. But in this passage, we can see how important it was for Adrian to have a gender-neutral name so that he could move between a feminine and masculine identity of the name for his own safety. Since he was not medically transitioning at this point, and beginning his social transition it was important for him to find a name that people would believe was his, since oftentimes families and peers reject Trans individuals' chosen name (Russell et al., 2018). For Adrian, choosing a name that was affirming of his gender identity as well as his racial and ethnic identity would ensure safety as well as visibility in capturing all of who he is. This is why he did not go with a name like Peter, as he mentioned, because it did not fit with who he was culturally. Similarly, choosing a name that he could use in both in English and Spanish and could also pass for being feminine and masculine was perfect for him. In having agency in choosing his name became extremely important for Adrian being more aligned with his masculinity and allowed him to feel closer to himself and his truth that he was beginning to uncover in this sense. Adrian's experience not only shows us the importance of what a name change can mean for someone's resilience and validation on a social level, but it also signals to the consideration for understanding how Trans Latinxs experience various points of the transition process when it comes to the intersections of their racial, ethnic, and cultural level. This can provide a more nuanced understanding on the literature on transitioning.

Furthermore, Adrian goes on to describe how affirming it was for him to change his name to Adrian and what that meant to him in terms of his own gender presentation:

. . . it was instead of borrowing clothes, I was buying clothes. So, it's like that moment

> where you start to buy your own stuff and it feels really good to be like, "This is my shirt. I didn't steal it from my cousin. I didn't steal his boxers. These are my boxers." . . . So, I think that's what was happening. I was [Adrian]. I was having my own things. I was still kicked out. I was still homeless. I still traveled with a lot of my clothes, but it was just . . . [Adrian] just fit and it just stayed. It just stuck.

For Adrian, taking this large step to begin his social transition through changing his name allowed him to feel affirmed in his masculine identity. He was able to see himself as Trans and as masculine, and in doing so felt empowered and resilience in taking action and having agency in his gender presentation.

For Trans youth in particular, having the agency to have a chosen name becomes imperative and critical to their mental health and identity (Singh et al., 2011; Singh et al., 2014), especially because oftentimes as youth, they cannot yet legally change their name or medically transition without parents' approval. While Adrian was 18 years old and was technically an adult, a name change was one of the tangible ways he could make himself be visible as a Transman. His life circumstances had not changed much, his parents were still deported, he was still kicked out of his grandmother and aunts house and was struggling to have financial and housing stability, but being able to see himself as a man through the examples of Adam Torres and Aiden, affirmed him and essentially—at least in this moment—provided a mental stability in knowing who he was.

For Adrian, this was just the beginning of his journey into finding his truth in terms of his gender identity and gender presentation. While he first began to identify as a Transman, he shared with me his exploration of masculinity and idea of being a man. Although he was raised and socialized as a Latina, Adrian was very open about not hating his body or his upbringing.

For Adrian, the images he had up to that point suggested that Trans people do hate the bodies they are born in, and that they hate the gender they were socialized as. In this way, Adrian became critical of the Transnormativity he had experienced in mainstream narratives of Trans people. Yet, this was not the case for Adrian. For him, being masculine felt more comfortable, but he had to first figure out what masculinity meant to him as part of his journey in emerging into his identity. He acknowledges that in conversations he had with Aiden, and in the other representations he saw of Transmen in particular, there was no conversation about what it meant to be a Transman or Transmasculine. There was only an assumption as he internalized it—that to be a Transguy you were trying to embody a cis-male identity. Below he reflects on his journey in moving away from what he referred to as "commercially transman" grounded in masculinity identity toward a more fluid identity that encompasses the feminine parts of himself he was socialized with for most of his life:

> So, in my transition I'm trying . . . to change my entire life as if I was raised as a cis guy because you're just raised differently [as a girl]. It's just the reality of this life. You're just raised differently and you're treated differently.
>
> . . . I [identified] as a trans man at that point. I was like, "I'm a Trans guy." When I realized I was a Trans person versus a Trans guy, I realized that I no longer had to assume this false identity of masculinity, nor did I have to erase my identity as female, which feels really good to me now.
>
> . . . I'm the Trans guy, but I'm actually just Trans. That was an interesting conversation where it's like I'm actually not a Trans guy. I'm not a guy. There's no guy . . . It's not real. It's just not real. So, I'm Trans and for me being Trans really meant transitioning

my life into this person, who wasn't necessarily unhappy. I wasn't unhappy being a woman and I wasn't unhappy being social with women.

There's so much beauty that comes with that that I realize my transition isn't removing that, you know? So, it's like how do I . . . I feel like when I, for myself, call myself a Trans guy, when I introduce myself as a Trans man, people will remove that piece of me. So, when I say that I'm Trans, you don't actually . . . if I'm a Trans guy or if I'm a Trans woman. I think a lot of that it's like I've just transitioned my life to make myself happier . . . my Trans identity both includes male and female, both my female upbringing. I still deal with my emotions the way that I was raised to deal with my emotions. I never gave that up. Well, I did for a little bit and I was like, "Oh, man. Oh no, this is ridiculous. I'm making myself sick."

. . . I'm accepting the fact that I was raised a woman. That's a fucking real fact. My grandma raised me as a woman. She was like, "You're gonna cook. You're gonna clean. You're gonna learn how to do all these really useful/un-useful, things all at the same time because one day you will get married and one day you will do whatever." I have a ton of estrogen in my body and my body naturally produces a ton of estrogen, which is really obnoxious because, in those moments where I don't want to cry, I am bawling my eyes out.

This passage exemplifies the nuances in Adrian's journey into emerging into not only his Trans identity, but more overarchingly as he describes into a happier version of himself. Often in mainstream media, there are assumptions that Trans individuals transition from one side of the gender spectrum to the opposite side of the gender spectrum, without acknowledging those who choose nuanced and ambiguous gender identities (Norwood, 2012). Often there are assumptions

that Trans individuals seek to attain hegemonic norms of gender that exist within the binary (Fink & Miller, 2014). For Adrian, however, along with most of the Trans men in this study, he pushes back on that Transnormative narrative. Adrian's socialization as Latina was not something that he came to hate. For him, being his authentic self, emerging into his identity was based on his own self-definition and self-theorizing of who he is (Singh et al., 2014). And for him, the lessons he received from his grandmother, were truly important to him, even though those lessons were grounded in his gendered upbringing as a Latina, however, he is not discarding those parts of himself in order to transition, he takes those parts with him into emerging into the happier self. Adrian again, allows us to not only understand the fluidity of gender, but also how that pertains to an intersectional identity when it comes a Latinx context wherein family is important. Adrian's narrative and that of the Transmen in this study are similar, however, that is not to say that this is true of all Trans Latinx.

Becoming Wonder Woman in the United States: The Power of Womanhood

Unlike many participants in this study, Didi's experience of coming out to her family in Mexico, particularly her mother, was received warmly. And like many of the participants in this study, Didi knew that she was "different" from a very young age. While many participants in this study experience contentious reactions from family members and mothers in particularly upon coming out as Trans, through time and their own process of coming out (Norwood, 2012), parents tend to come around and accept their Trans Latinxs child. While this validation whether initially or overtime, may not important to all Trans Latinxs, since it is such a large heterogenous group, it has been important for individuals in this study. Additionally, while I share many of the barriers and gender policing that Trans Latinxs in my study experience, including in their families, here I highlight Didi to center why family and particularly a mother's approval is vital

to one's transition and resilience.

Didi (34 years old, she/her) is a Transwoman from Jalisco, Mexico. It should be noted that Didi's geographical location lent itself to a queer and Trans-affirming community once she was older. Guadalajara, Jalisco which is one of the largest metropolitan cities after Mexico City, and is known for being an LGBT friendly tourist destination along with Puerto Vallarta in Jalisco.[21] However, it would take time before she was able to find this community in Mexico.

Didi grew up with her mother, five siblings, and her grandmother. Didi migrated to the United States at the age of 18 with her family for economic reasons. I was put in contact with her through a mutual friend of ours and she invited me to her apartment in West Hollywood to interview her and her best friend Claudia, another transwoman who she met within the first year of migrating to the United States Having migrated to the United States at 18 years old, Didi felt most comfortable speaking in Spanish, which is how we communicated via Facebook Messenger when first planning and then during the interview. When she opened the door to her large two-bedroom apartment, she walked me straight into her bedroom where she and Claudia were hanging out for the night. Didi mentioned her old roommate was moving out and because the living room was baron and of furniture and the only things in there were boxes and luggage. Didi lives in a luxury apartment, as noted by the sign on the building, close to the Santa Monica Blvd. WeHo Strip, where she has lived for the last six years. Didi is tall and slender—close to 5'10"—and has long, dark brown hair with blonde highlights.

She was made to know that difference in kindergarten, when most children are taught about gender norms: as she tried to line up with girls, her own teachers moved her to the boys'

[21] The growth of the Queer tourism in Guadalajara and Puerto Vallarta has also contributed to the growth of queer subcultures, particularly gay and lesbian subcultures, yet it rooted in heteronormative representations of queerness (Cantú, 2009).

line. While she expressed feeling more comfortable being around girls, with girls, and seeing herself as a girl even at that young age, her teacher's action of moving her to the boys' line imprinted on her an idea that she continued to feel: "algo pasaba que no era normal" [something was happening and it wasn't normal/I wasn't normal].

As time went on after kindergarten, Didi continued to have similar experiences as being marked as a boy, even though she felt stronger as a girl and more comfortable being around girls. But from that experience in kinder, Didi knew first-hand how it feels to have her gender policed and corrected by her "mistake" of placing herself in the girls' line and then being forced to go to the boys' line. Yet Didi kept quiet about what she felt about being different, even as her feelings grew stronger throughout time. Didi shares, "me callaba porque yo sentia que si yo a mi mama le contaba algo, yo pensaba que ella me iba regañar a mi. Sentía que —yo ya empecé a sentirme culpable de algo que estaba mal. Y nunce dije nada." [I would stay quiet/wouldn't say anything because I felt that if I told my mom anything, I thought she would scold me. I felt—I started feeling like I was doing something wrong. So I never said anything]. Ultimately, as I have addressed in Chapter Two, Didi experienced the gender policing in her educational setting, but for Didi it was society writ large that made her feel this way, "la misma sociedad te van encasillando de que tú estás mal" [society categorizes you as something being wrong with you/being bad]. So in an attempt to safeguard herself from scolding or any trouble, she kept quiet and as many others in this study, she internalized this understanding of something being wrong with her desire to transgress male/masculine norms.

While Didi attempted to be silent and make her difference invisible, it no longer seemed to work for her as she grew into herself and made it to high school. While she continued to perform an outward masculine appearance through her clothes, her peers and younger siblings

began to notice her difference. In particular, her young siblings could note the differences but they accepted her as she was as they had seen her differences develop. While she maintained a masculine appearance, she notes that her mannerisms—how she expressed her feelings, and how she talked (intonations)—made her visible to her family and the outside world. At home her siblings generally accepted her as she was, except for one older brother who tried to police her gendered behavior. Ultimately the overwhelming acceptance from the majority of her family allowed her to disregard his commentary.

Up to this point, Didi still had not officially come out, nor broken her silence of her gender and or sexuality. In finding her gendered difference, she had also known from an early age that she was attracted to men. She kept this all to herself because, she did not think much about being in a relationship. Instead, she shared that as a teenager she mostly thought about being happy. For Didi, this meant having to not hide who she was. In that regard, her fear simultaneously kept her silent and in her place as a boy, although she dreamed and aspired to dress like her girlfriends. While most of her siblings and her mother never made commentary on Didi's mannerisms or feminine traits and in some sense she did feel acceptance for the small trangressions of masculine behavior she made with her femininity, she came to realize over time that "te das cuenta que estas en un pais pues machista, la sociedad es muy tapada, y haces algo mal y todo el mundo te señala. Y no se podía." [You realize that you're in a patriarchal country, where society is close minded, and if you do something wrong then everyone points the finger at you. So I couldn't (start dressing as a girl).]

While Didi kept trying to hide who she was so as to not garner any attention, the outside world began to notice and pass judgement. There were times that Didi walked alone down the streets of her neighborhood minding her own business, yet she would wear a flower in her hair.

At 14, Didi remembers how people really began to make comments about her, and she had found out that many of her neighbors and family friends in the neighborhood would make comments that were relayed to Didi's mother about the way she looked, when she walked too feminine, when she dressed in clothes that were too tight for a man, and all of her moves. Used to this type of policing, Didi knew that soon she would hear from her mother so Didi constantly tried to avoid being alone with her mother at home for fear of being pushed out of the closet and being punished (a) for her intersectional gendered identity, and (b) to a larger degree, the progress she had made based on the non-verbal permission she had received at home for being herself.

Eventually her mother did find a private moment to talk with Didi when all of the kids were out of the house. Scared of what would happen next, Didi's mom said, "Voy a hablar contigo (I'm going to talk to you)." Her mom mentioned she had been wanting to talk to Didi for a long while and wanted to ask her something. Didi recalls their conversation:

> [me preguntó] si me gustaban las niñas o los niños. Y yo le dije: "¡Ay!"—yo no tuve el valor de decirle en su carota: "Ay sí, me gustan los hombres y que importa." No pude hacerlo así. Simplemente le dije: "¿Sabes qué? Pues las niñas no me gustan." Fue todo. Sentí como que lo dije muy suave. "Las niñas no me gustan." . . . Ya obvio tienes que saber la respuesta. Si no me gustan las niñas, pues entonces los otros sí. Es obvio, ¿no?
>
> [(she asked) me if I liked girls or boys. And I told her "Ay!"—I didn't have the courage to tell her to her face: "Ay yes, I like guys and do what." No I couldn't do that. I simply said: "You know? Well I don't like girls." That was it. I felt like I said it so nonchalantly. "I don't like girls" . . . so obviously she'd have to know the answer. If I don't like girls, then the other option I do. It's obvious, right?]

Not knowing how to fully tell her mom what she was feeling and thinking, she indirectly

answered her mom's questions. While Didi's mom did not ask her about her gender identity and gender presentation, she did ask her to clarify and define her sexual orientation. For Didi, though, fearing the worst but also wanting to be honest with her mom, she indirectly answered her mother's inquiry. Specifically, Didi stated that she did not like girls, making it clear that she was different. In this case, as in many coming-out experiences for many participants in this study, Latinx parents often conflate sexuality and gender as a singular compounded identity and further, being "gay" often encompasses all LGBTQ identities for Latinx parents in this study.

After telling her mom that she did not like girls, which she shares should have been obvious, she went on to share what happened after responding to her mother, " . . . ella se soltó en llanto. Me dijo que no me preocupara, que yo no tengo la culpa de haber sido diferente, son cosas de Dios, son cosas que pasan, cosas de la vida . . . ella me va a querer como yo haya nacido, lo que me guste, todo." (She started crying. She told me not to worry, that it wasn't my fault that I was different, those things are up to God, those things happen, life happens . . . she's going to love me as I am, whatever I like, everything). This was a huge turning point for Didi in her adolescence because so much of the fear she had carried surrounded what her mother would think. This fear had been so strong that she self-policed as best as she could to hide herself and conform to normative masculine behaviors (Levitt & Ippolito, 2013), which include the assumptions of heteronormativity. For Trans youth in particular feelings of shame, fear, worry and isolation are common when experiencing so many pressures to conform to traditional gender norms. Similarly, for Trans youth this is further compounded with the additional layers of fear of potential loss of a familial relationship or even the possibility of being kicked out from one's home. For Latinxs, culturally mothers are extremely important within the family dynamic. Therefore, Didi had a greater worry or concern –not only for fear that she may be rejected, but

also that rejection would entail invalidation of her and who she was, and would suggest immorality, and to a large degree would entail cultural suicide.

From this moment forward the subject of Didi's gender and sexuality was never broached between her and her mom. Life continued on as normal. The only difference now, though, was that with her mother's blessing and affirmation, she was able to no longer feel as if she was bringing shame to her family, and secondly, she was no longer afraid of what neighbors would say to her mom if they saw her embracing her femininity on the street. In this way, this brief conversation served as a launching pad for Didi's confidence and conviction in who she was. Her mother acceptance countered all the fears she had developed, and the Transphobia she experienced and ultimately contributed to the development of her resilience in moving forward (Levitt & Ippolito, 2013).

Didi was just 14 when this conversation happened with her mom and she still did not dress as a woman or outwardly identify herself a woman yet. However, she did begin to let go of the barriers and limitations she had placed on herself through her own self-policing and the societal policing she had experienced on a daily basis. Didi talked about how impactful this brief conversation was with her mother:

> Ya nada me importaba . . . cuando mi mama me aceptó . . . desde esa vez, a los 14 años . . . Sentí que me aceptó, que me cobijó, que me protegió. Me sentí como que me dio un poder, me sentí como la mujer maravilla, de que nada te pasa, haces lo que haces y nada te pasa. Ni la lluvia, ni el sol te afecta. Eso sentí a esa edad, en ese aspecto . . . Si mis tíos o tías, si me enteraba que hablaban de mí en mis espaldas, sobre mi imagen o mi caminado, no me importaba. Que si en la escuela me decían palabras así medias culturales, esas palabras así que [duelen] . . . No me importaba nada. Que si un maestro

me hacía mala cara porque era diferente a todos mis compañeros, no me importaba nada. Que si un vecino me decía alguna palabra ofensiva para él, o me quería hacer sentir mal, no me importaba ya nada. Nada me importaba, ya nada. Con que mi mamá me aceptara, yo me sentía que yo era la reina del pueblo. Ya nada me importaba. Así me sentí cuando mi mamá habló conmigo. Y ya por eso de ahí en adelante, yo hice mi vida como quise. [Nothing mattered anymore . . . when my mom accepted me . . . since that then at 14 years old . . . I felt accepted, I felt like she provided a shelter for me, she protected me. I felt like she empowered me, I felt like wonder women, like nothing could ever happen to me no whatever what happened or what I did. Not even the rain or the sun could touch me. That's what I felt at that age, in that aspect . . . if my uncles or aunts, if I found out they were talking about me behind my back, about how I looked or how I walked, I didn't care. If at school kids would tell me things, I didn't care at all. If a teacher made a face at me because I was different from all my peers, I didn't care anymore. If a neighbor said something offensive to me, or wanted to make me feel bad I didn't care anymore. I didn't care anymore, at all. With my mom accepting me, I felt like the queen of my neighborhood. I didn't care anymore. That's how I felt when my mom spoke to me. And that's why since then and moving forward, I did what I wanted with my life.]

Ultimately, while Didi solidified her difference in this brief conversation with her mother, it was the only time that Didi, at the age of 14, had ever been validated and made to feel like her difference was not her fault—and more specifically that nothing was wrong with her. Her difference, as her mom put it in this case, had been in God's plan for Didi to be born exactly the way she was.

This affirmation and validation that she received from her mother, and ostensibly from

God, created a shield of protection for Didi which gave her the permission and the courage to live her life as she wanted to live—knowing that her mother had provided both shelter and protection, it solidified her acceptance in her home and in her community—regardless of how others felt about her presence. Similarly, because of how Latina mothers are venerated in Latino culture and seen as morally and culturally superior to all others, this validation carried a lot of weight for Didi.

Additionally, this whole experience made Didi feel like Wonder Woman. Wonder woman evokes notions of transformation; this character began as a seemingly mundane secretary who transforms herself into a bombshell, hyper-feminine goddess that with her iconic twirl goes from secretary to superhero, which many queer men have shared an affinity to feeling (Spieldenner, 2013) and many Trans women in this study have also identified with. By referring to Wonder Woman in this way, Didi evokes this transformation of going from hiding and erasure of who she was to stepping into being the woman with power and strength and her mother acceptance as her superpower. In a sense, her mother's conversation becomes the signature Wonder Woman twirl that began the process of allowing her to emerge as a powerful woman. This power is further illuminated in her interactions and relationships with men, as I describe in the following paragraph.

While Didi did not take to wearing women's clothes right away, although she wanted to, she knew that at 14, the rest of the world was watching intently and it was still too early to feel safe enough to embark on that journey in her community. It was clear that for Didi, while she found safety and refuge at home, the outside would remained hostile toward her. In the outside world she was met with constant surveillance, criticism and scrutiny of her body, gestures, character and, of who she was when she walked down the street. Little by little, though, her

mother's verbal acceptance signaled an approval for Didi to emerge into herself, even as the outside world contentiously saw her visible transgressions of the gender binary. As she grew older and moved through high school, Didi began to perform her gender in a way that was more affirming to who she was and how she felt internally.

Didi describes what it was like to begin to dress as a woman and the empowerment she felt as a result:

> Yo ya me vestía de mujer pues, empecé a vestirme a los 17 años. Y empecé a dejarme crecer el pelo, me había sacado la ceja, me había dejado crecer las uñas, me conseguía ropa, compañeras de la secundaria, compañeras mías, me prestaban ropa, me regalaban ropa. Y yo me la ponía, los puros fin de semanas para irme con mis amigas a los bailes, a las fiestas de entre vecinos, o amigos . . . me ponía una peluca, me ponía pantalón de mujer y blusas, y uñas, y colores, y aretes. Y los mismos hombres que sabían lo que éramos, y nos trataban como unas reinas. Yo me quedaba con la boca abierta al llegar a mi casa. Porque yo decía: "el poder que tiene una mujer, la imagen que tiene – el poder que tiene una imagen de una mujer. De que ellos sabiendo lo que somos, nos tratan como la reina del pueblo. Y yo dije: "no, esto es lo mío." Definitivamente, esto es mi vida. Pues más le seguí. Pero en aquel tiempo y en México, yo no tenía ni las posibilidades, ni trabajaba, ni la orientación de empezar una transición, ya como debe de ser. Ropa, cualquiera se puede poner.
>
> [I was dressing like a woman, I started dressing like a woman when I was 17 years old. I started letting my hair grow out, plucking my eyebrows, I let my nails grow, I would find myself clothes, friends from school and from the neighborhood would gift me clothes. And I would wear it during the whole weekend when I would go with my friends to

dances, parties with neighbors and friends. I would put on a wig, women's pants, blouses, fake nails, with colors and designs. And the same men who knew what we were would treat us like queens. I was in shock and would come home with my jaw dropped. Because I would say to myself, "being a woman has power, the image she has—the power the image of a woman has. Of those (men) knowing what we are, treating us like queens of the town." I said to myself: "no, this is me." Definitely, this is my life. So I kept going with it. But at that time in Mexico, I didn't have the options, the work, or the direction to know how to start actual real transition. Because anyone can put clothes on.]

For Didi, this passage shows various points in her thinking in how she has been given permission to pursue the image of her own self, and pursue her emergence as a woman. This permission to emerge as herself allowed her to be visible in her approach, letting go of implicit actions and behaviors, and moving toward visible, identifiable, tangible aesthetics and images of her womanhood. In addition to having her mother's approval, Didi was able to an affirming community of friends. Because of living in Guadalajara in the 1990s and she was able to find Trans women in her neighborhood in Mexico where she was further affirmed and validated as a woman. Affirming communities and particularly Trans-affirming spaces are crucial for individuals in their transition journeys toward become their authentic selves. Didi, having both affirming friends, and Trans friends in Mexico, was also a strong contraction to the transphobia she experienced in her community growing up. Her Transwomen friends, who were also dressing up provided a safe space for exploring their gender (Singh et al., 2014) as well as in their journey toward womanhood.

As the world began to see her as she saw herself, she was able to have agency in emerging and exploring her womanhood on the weekends when she was away from the gender

policing of school. Beyond the act of exploring and affirming her identity by dressing in women's clothes, and establishing a more feminine appearance with her hair, nails, and other physical appearance and aesthetics, what became more affirming in her experience is how others determined and began to legitimate her gender as a woman (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). This in particular not only happened by way of findings others like her, but also through the legitimization of her gender by men, who Didi says "knew what we were" referring to their knowing of Didi and her friends being Transwomen. Despite their knowledge of being Trans, the men treated Didi and her friends as queens, or a rather as *real* women despite her genitalia. For Didi, being seen and affirmed as a woman by cis-gender men who found Didi and her friends desirable created a sense of empowerment grounded in her womanhood and further legitimated her as a woman. For Didi, the attention and validation from men solidified her identity, as she shares "this is me . . . this is my life." Ultimately, this opened the door for her to recognize herself worth and the validity of her own gender identity (Singh et al., 2014) and this moment allowed her to continue moving forward.

But as she mentions, in terms of her identity and her transition she felt that there was not much else she could do in Mexico, when referring to the fact that anyone can dress in women's clothes. She is sharing a frustration of sorts in terms of what is possible as a Trans woman in Mexico, both in terms of accessing medical resources and beginning her transition, which she refers to as a "real transition." For Didi living in Mexico would become a barrier to her access to a medical transition, and larger barrier to embracing her true self. But living in Mexico also limited Didi in terms of her ability to have a sustainable livelihood as a Trans woman in Mexico. Thus, even for Didi who was able to find an affirming community due to the existence of queer subcultures locally, it would not translate to an accepting society more broadly. This is especially

true for Didi who is an individual that does not exist within heteronormative cis-gender standards.

When Didi turned 18 years old, immediate family decided to move to California for economic reasons. While her family originally migrated to Fresno, California, Didi's close gay friend from Mexico was living in Los Angeles and invited her to come to Los Angeles. Prior to moving to the United States, Didi was already dressing as a woman full time. She had long hair, nails, but had not dabbled with hormones or had any type of surgeries yet, although she did aspire to do so. Soon after moving to Los Angeles, it was through her gay friend that she met her friend Claudia, a Mexican Transwoman who was also a recent migrant. For Didi, Claudia was a model for everything she wanted to be. When they met Claudia had been on hormones for a few years already and had breast implants. Claudia began sharing with Didi what she could to do feminize herself, and essentially became, as Didi described, her fairy godmother who took her under her wing. In addition to meeting Claudia, Didi also met a man who would become her boyfriend for the next seven years. Her boyfriend, who loved her and affirmed her womanhood, also sustained her financially and helped her with her transition as she describes below:

> Ahora si ya empecé con mas, mi closet lo empecé a cambiar, ya empecé a comprar más y más cosas ya de mujer. El chico con el que yo viví me complació muchas cosas. El me pagaba renta, billes, comida, hormonas, peluca, maquillaje, zapatillas, ropa, ¡todo! Y él me ayudó mucho en mi transición al principio.
>
> [I started with changing my closet, I started buying more and more woman items. The guy I was living with/dating would buy me a lot of things. He paid my rent, bills, food, hormones, wigs, make up, shoes, clothes, everything! He helped me a lot with my transition in the beginning.]

Didi mentioned going from using hormones that she would buy on the street to then going to a Trans-specific doctor that helped her begin hormone replacement therapy. This doctor also recommended doctors who would help her get breast implants. Eventually after her breakup with her boyfriend, Didi would go on to get nose surgery, and breast surgery. Her goal was to take the steps necessary to be able to look enough like a woman, in order to fit within the hegemonic understanding of womanhood. She wanted to attain a passing image of a woman, without going too far.

> Me siento bien. ¿Sabes por qué? Porque yo creo que he llegado, he estado y me he rodeado con personas también de mi ambiente que ya pasaron por lo que yo estoy pasando y me he sabido rodear de gente que me ha ayudado en mi transición. En el aspecto de que me han ayudado u orientado a hacerme lo necesario, lo justo o lo aceptable. Por ejemplo, lo poco o mucho que yo me he hecho han sido detallitos como solamente para ayudar con una—para una imagen.
>
> [I feel good. You know why? Because I feel like I've gotten to where I am because I've surrounded myself with other trans people who are have gone through what I'm going through and I've surrounded myself with people who have helped me with my transition. They've helped direct or orient me to do what's necessary for my transition, what's acceptable. For example, the little that I've done in my [medical] transition have been small details to try to attain a certain image (of a woman).]

Ultimately, for Didi she has been able to feel confident in who she is and in her transition because of the people that she has been surrounded by. While she has experienced gender policing, and particularly so in Mexico, she has been able find people who have affirmed her, which include people in her family, as well her close friends. Moreover, while her family

migrated to the United States for economic reasons, for Didi, migration became crucial and necessary for who she wanted to be and how she wanted to life as her true self. For many LGBT migrants, migration to the United States becomes necessary for safety and economics stability (Cantú, 2009). However, for Transgender immigrants like Didi, homophobia and transphobia also prevents individuals from attaining adequate resources and medical care for their desired transition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have offered an understanding of how Trans Latinxs emerge into their identity as Trans. Unlike mainstream notions of transgender identity as being a monolithic and linear transition from one side of the gender spectrum to another, what I have attempted to do in this chapter is highlight the nuance of coming into one's own understanding of who they are and how they want to be seen and see themselves. Growing up in society, both in the United States and in Latin American countries, gender is generally strictly binary, and there are often no options or visible expressions of gender outside of the gender binary of man/male, woman/female. Thus, for the individuals in this chapter, as is true for the broader study participant pool, emerging into their Trans identity was not something they had an understanding of early on in their lives.

Often variant sexuality became something they identified with immediately, as bisexual, lesbian or gay. Yet, it was not until the participants had visible representations of Trans people in their lives either through social media, media, or in person, that allowed them to name and on a deeper lever understand their relationship to their gender, and thus take agency in identifying in the gender of their choice. Seeing themselves identified in other Trans people or figures created new possibilities that were not presented to them in the gender they were assigned at birth.

Finding a Trans affirming community, that was also ethnically and culturally relevant, as in the case of Didi who found her friend Claudia, who was also a Trans Latina migrant and showed her how to navigate the U.S. as a Trans women, was crucial in helping her attain the image of womanhood she aspired to. Lastly, for someone like Didi and others Trans individuals who migrated from Latin America, the United States became a place where a fuller transition was available, because of access to Trans healthcare and resources, as well as the perception of having more work opportunities.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRANS*FORMATIVE SPRITUALITY AND SELF-PRESERVATION

> I just identify with spirit . . . . It completely makes me happy, you know . . . . I'm starting to see more and more how it can be implemented into society or culture. But it's still really vague in my head because we're so used to . . . using gender and sex as an identifier for humans . . . but spirit has really calmed me. Identifying as spirit has really allowed me to feel more okay about being a human being. (Camilo, 28, he/him/they/them)

> My Rabbi explained to me that I need to be true to myself, that gave me the courage to transition. I am a spiritual person and attending services is part of my life and who I am as a Jew; that's why it is extremely important. (Reina, 40+, she/her)

As seen in the epigraph above, for Trans Latinxs spirituality is a source of self-actualization and resilience. I define religion as the institutional infrastructure wherein spiritual practices take place, such as the Catholic or Christian Church. I define spirituality by referring to Feminist Theologians and Chicana Feminist Theologians' definition of spirituality, which is made up of one's thoughts, core beliefs, and convictions (Carr, 1996; Rodriguez, 2002). The research questions guiding this chapter are: What role does spirituality play in the lives of Trans Latinxs? And how do Trans Latinxs practice spirituality? While Trans Latinxs have found various ways to cope with and heal from the dehumanization and violence they experience on a daily basis, my fieldwork, interviews, and surveys reveal that spirituality plays an important role in healing and resilience. My overall argument in this chapter is that Trans Latinxs do in fact embrace and practice spirituality either by (a) identifying as Christian or Catholic and/or engaging in Latino popular religion; (b) engaging in non-traditionally Latinx spaces such as other community groups, spaces, and religions to embrace their faith and spirituality; and even (c) exploring and creating their own type of spirituality.

I did not set out to focus on spirituality in the Trans Latinx community. However, it became a prominent finding when working in collaboration with Bamby Salcedo and the

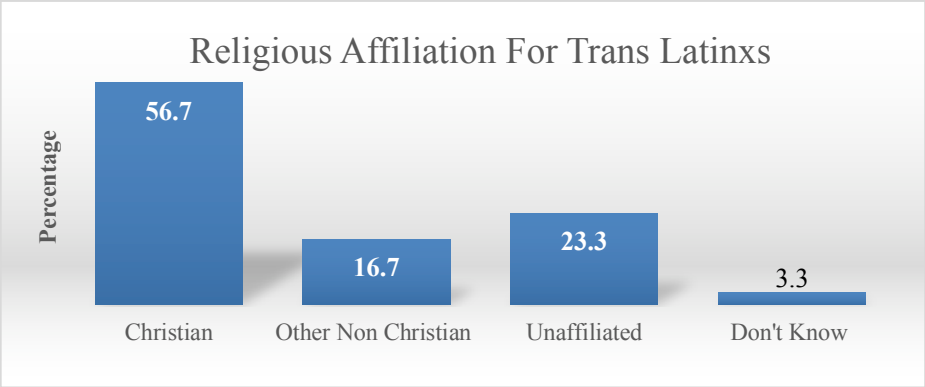
TransLatin@ Coalition. As Salcedo and I created a holistic needs based survey for Trans Latinxs in Southern California, Salcedo and the TransLatin@ Coalition Board members were adamant that we incorporate questions surrounding individuals' engagement and access to religious services and with spirituality more broadly. In the survey report titled, "TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society," Padrón, in collaboration with Salcedo and the TransLatin@ Coalition (2015), interviewed 101 Trans Latina immigrant activists throughout the United States to understand socioeconomic and legal barriers to their livelihood. While they did not ask any questions related to spirituality and religion, spirituality became a recurring theme in relation to Trans Latina's identity formation and resilience.

Building on that project, in our collaboration, Salcedo and I centered spirituality in our report in 2016, "The State of Trans Health: Trans Latinxs and their Health Care Needs." Spirituality became one of the six key factors we highlighted in trying to understand what is necessary to gain overall health and well-being for Trans Latinxs in Southern California. I was under the impression that Queerness, or in this context, Transness, was incompatible with religion and spirituality, so I was taken aback by the results of the survey data. The data showed that **73%** of participants reported that spiritual services are either extremely or very important to them; **66.4%** of participants mentioned that they do not need to hide who they are because of their religion; and **68.2%** of participants feel welcome and accepted by their religion. Trans Latinxs in this survey, as shown in Figure 2, most frequently identified with Christian denominations at 57% which is traditional and common for Latinxs in general. However, 16.7% of participants, like Reina whose epigraph opened this chapter, identified with other non-Christian religions. These include Santeria, Indigenous practices from North America, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. And 23.3% identified as unaffiliated to any religion, meaning

they either identified with being atheist, agnostic, or believed in nothing in particular but did believe in a higher power. Lastly, 3.3% acknowledged that they "Don't know" or feel unsure about what their religious affiliation is.

Table 2.

Religious Affiliation for Trans Latinxs



Among people who participated in the in-depth interviews, 27 out of the 28 participants were raised within a Christian denominational household. The one outlier, Gael, was raised practicing Nichiren Buddhism. While both his parents were born and raised Catholic in El Salvador, they both converted to Nichiren Buddhism before Gael was born upon their migration to Los Angeles amidst the civil war in the 1980s due to its emphasis on peace. Gael continues to practice Nichiren Buddhism. Of the 27 interview participants raised in a Christian denominational household, 25 of those identify as being spiritual, and identified that for them their spirituality was part of what kept them going. While a majority of participants identify as either Christian or Catholic, not many attend religious services.

Because of the ways in which Trans people in general are not represented as full human beings, we do not tend to think of them as being religious or spiritual. Yet as my research

reveals, spirituality is very important to this population. My findings in this chapter contribute to the dearth of empirical data that interrogates Trans & Latinx identity in terms of religious and spiritual involvement and practice. This is evident in the two epigraphs that opened up this chapter. More broadly speaking, as Aponte (2011) asserts, Latinxs in the United States, regardless of institutional or religious affiliation, are shaped culturally by the morals, values, and beliefs embedded in Judeo-Christian, African diasporic, and Indigenous spiritual practices. The amalgamation of these value systems is embedded in cultural understandings and functions of Latinidad and what it means to be Latinx. Thus, religion and spirituality are central to informing participants' moral compass as well as that of their families and communities and become crucial for maintaining ties to ethnic and familial enclaves (Acosta, 2013; Ocampo, 2013). Similarly, religion and spirituality shape how Trans Latinxs understand and make meaning of their humanity and their place in the world, while also contributing to their resilience despite living in a world that is hostile toward their existence as seen in the survey data.

While a majority of participants in my study shared experiences of discrimination and gender policing in their place of worship growing up, their faith as adults was not erased. They found ways to engage with, develop, and practice their spirituality as adults, which I detail in this chapter. For example, from the age of five, Sarita, a Trans Latina from Mexico, knew something about her was different. She was assigned male at birth, but never quite felt like she fit into being a boy. From this early age she knew that she was attracted to men and was drawn to take on feminine roles during play time with peers, while outwardly displaying feminine traits such as crossing her legs. From a young age, she also remembers being confused about her body and questioned if she was a woman trapped in a man's body. This confusion was exacerbated at church, where her peers and elders could sense her difference as well. She remembers people at

church telling her as a child, "*es que tú eres el demonio, vienes aquí a la tierra a que los hombres pequen*" [it's because you are the Devil, you come to earth to make man sin]. Yet, despite this painful memory wherein Sarita internalized the idea that something was in fact wrong with her from a young age, she continued to have faith and to this day still considers herself a deeply spiritual person. While she does not participate within a religious institution she has found other means of embracing and developing her spirituality through her engagement and involvement in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). As I will detail later in the chapter, for Sarita, AA is what has helped her heal the wounds in her familial relationships after having been estranged from her family for nearly a decade after being exiled from her family home.

As Sarita's story reveals, I have found that spirituality is an essential factor for understanding the experiences of Trans Latinxs and for interrogating the ways in which they make sense of who they are, their gender identity, and how they create community and affirm and validate their existence when no one else does. Over time, spirituality has not only been a source of healing for broken familial bonds, but also has been a source of strength and validation for who they are as Trans individuals. As Camilo and Reina mentioned in the epigraph above, their relationships to their spirituality allowed them to feel affirmed in their truth and in their bodies. I propose that Trans Latinxs are developing a way to engage in spirituality that I call Trans*Formative spirituality as they make sense of who they are and find home in their body. Trans*Formative spirituality is a journey of coming into one's own, finding truth in oneself, this process does not only convey a thorough and dramatic change in terms of appearance (the outer transformation) but also causes a marked change in someone or something (a transformative experience). Despite the structural inequality and dehumanization Trans Latinxs experience in other realms of their lives, through this transformative process, individuals show us that there

exists a humanity that goes beyond gender identity which has the capacity to convert one's beliefs, thoughts, and hearts.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide context to better understand the significance of religion and spirituality in the lives of Trans Latinxs. I then go on to elaborate on the concept of Trans*Formative spirituality and provide examples of how Trans*Formative spirituality plays out in the lives of my participants. The remainder of the chapter is divided into the three themes that encapsulate how I have understood how Trans Latinxs do spirituality: 1. By identifying as Christian and/or Catholic and engaging in Latino popular religion 2. Engaging in non-traditional spaces, communities or religion 3. Exploring and creating their own type of spirituality.

Latinx Spirituality

While the religious and spiritual practices of Latinxs have been underexplored (Aponte, 2011, p. 9), the field of Latina/o Theology is growing to address the growing population of Latinxs in the United States. Henderson-Espinoza (2015) asserts that Latina/o Theology contains three major features, including "*lo cotidiano, conjunto,* and movement" (p. 331). *Lo cotidiando*, refers to the daily lived experiences and practices in the search for God. Latina Feminist Theologians have especially discussed theology in *conjunto* which refers to "collaborating or creating theology in community" and centering dialogue and conversation in that theologizing (p. 331). The third, entails the notion of a "borderland movement and their persistent living *(en) la lucha*" (p. 331). Movement for Latina/os entails this movement between physical borders, but also other borders that are tied to political and religious commitments.

For immigrants, one's religious community is closely tied to their racial and ethnic identity (Ocampo, 2013). While many immigrants and Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals of Color often disassociate with religious institutions because of their sexuality (Acosta, 2013; Ocampo,

2013; Singh & McKleroy, 2011), others embrace and continue their own forms of spirituality, whether affiliated to a religious institution or not. Latina/o Theologians refer to day to day relationship with religion and/or spirituality as popular religion. This helps to capture forms of religious expression that come from the people, and describes how people, not the church/institution, practice and seek faith in God and that which is spiritual (Aponte, 2012; Espin, 1997; Pineda-Miranda, 2011).

Like Latinxs in general, Trans Latinxs practice and embody notions of popular religion. Yet for them, popular religion can also be a result of having to make sense of their own spirituality due to either being pushed out of or feeling isolated from a religious institution. As Latina/o Theologians posit, popular religion is tied to *lo cotidiano* (Aponte, 2011; Gonzalez, 2009; Pineda-Madrid, 2011), those practices and rituals that happen in daily life – that which are, "…daily mix of practices, beliefs, and rituals small and large in diverse contexts, that point to an abiding and overarching sense of compelling impulse and desire" (Aponte, 2011, p. 55). For Trans Latinxs, their practice of popular religion is grounded in Munoz's (1999) concept of disidentification. That is, Trans Latinxs appropriate the ideology and symbols of Christianity or Catholicism, yet they use it for their own humanity which runs counter to the experiences many of Trans Latinxs have experiences within Christian or Catholic institutions. This practice of disidentification is important because of the contentious relationship between the Church and their gender and sexuality. For many participants, their engagement happens in the form of prayer and/or their veneration to La Virgin de Guadalupe, or Jesus Christ, or God gives them a sense of hopefulness.

Similarly, while Latinxs may or may not identify with traditional religious or Spiritual practices from Latin America, Aponte (2011) asserts that,

> There is an overriding realization that Latino/as, whether they be Catholic, Baptist, Muslim, Buddhist, Pentecostal, New age or even Atheist, are the cultural heirs of and continue to be influenced by Iberian Catholicism as mediated and developed in the many Indigenous and African-diaspora multicultural contexts of Latin America. This influence manifests itself in the form of appropriation and reworking of Latin American Catholic traditions, or in the form of conscious efforts to distance oneself from such a heritage. (p 11-12)

Thus, due to this cultural legacy that Latinxs have inherited through their colonial history, Latinxs carry Iberian Catholic, Indigenous, and African diasporic influences that make up their cultural and moral values. This cultural memory impacts how Latinxs engage and come to move about the world, whether they choose to identify with their cultural and familial religion and/or spirituality. For Trans Latinxs in my study, this factor of Latinx Spirituality in Catholicism is the overarching spiritual inclination—as noted in my preliminary survey data above. However, participants also identify with indigenous practices, solely prayer, belief in a greater power, as well as with Judaism and Buddhism.

Regardless of the form it takes, spirituality often plays a major role in Latinx lives by allowing individuals to establish and rely on a support system, and cultivating healing and harmony within oneself and between others and their environment (Facio & Lara, 2014). This is also tied to the ways in which people relate to one another, and engage with each other. These core beliefs about how to *convivir* (co-live) with one another and amongst each other is important to Latinx Spirituality –and I argue that is crucial and necessary for surviving in the Trans Latinx Community –where community is necessary for survival. Notably, spirituality is something that everyone has access to and can develop and identify with. It is something that for

Latinxs, as Aponte (2011) notes is part of our cultural identity. Thus, spirituality is a crucial factor to understand when interrogating the experiences of Trans Latinxs and their resilience.

To elaborate on the notion of "*la lucha*" I draw on the book, *Mujerista Theology* by Isasi-Diaz (1996). The author develops the notion of *Mujerista* theology which centers and develops that sense of moral agency of Latinas and the importance in centering the Latina experience (p. 61). *Mujerista* theology is grounded in women's liberation, and the struggle or *la lucha* for women's liberation. This liberation is not tied to just Latinas, but extends out to their family and community. It is this struggle, or *la lucha,* in fighting for justice, which is a liberatory practice that is both intentional and reflective, she shares it is a "communal praxis that feeds on the realization that Christ is among us when we strive to live the gospel message of justice and peace" (p. 33). This praxis, or struggle for justice is a battle that is waged with family, friends and community in order to work for justice and transform the structures and systems in society that create inequality and injustice. This notion of "la lucha" is something that can be applied to the Trans Latinx experience, because Trans Latinxs are always *en la lucha* to be who they are, and many continue to wage the battle with society in order to become themselves, be themselves, and help others in being themselves through their activism, community building and creation of sacred spaces. Ultimately, I believe it is this fight for liberation that is most crucial in the Trans Latinx community.

Trans*Formative Spirituality

In *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, Theologian, Seminary Professor, and ordained minister, Rev. Patrick S. Cheng (2011), pushes forward the notion that Christianity is in fact a queer religion. He makes this assertion by noting that radical love lies at the heart of Christianity and the queer experience. Cheng notes, that radical love is not any kind of love, but

"a love so extreme that it dissolves existing boundaries that might normally seem fixed" (p. 50). He goes on to note that this radical love is so because it dissolves boundaries in regards to sexuality and gender identity to show that such boundaries are social constructions and not fixed categories. I believe this framework of radical love can be applied to narrative of Trans Latinxs, who break dissolve these categories of gender identity and sexuality. I believe as Latinxs, they embody this notion of *la lucha* (Isasi-Diaz, 1996) and through radical love are able to transform relationships with family, community and society at large. Grounded in this notion of radical love and *la lucha* for social justice, I push forward the notion of a Trans*[22]Formative spirituality that Trans Latinxs employ. I draw on Matovina's notion of spirituality as defined with the Latinx experience to define Trans*Formative Spirituality.

In *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church,* Matovina (2011) shares a story of a Guatamalan man, Dávila, who struggled with his indigenous identity. Dávila, had grown up internalizing hatred toward his own indigenous identity. However, his spirituality, allowed him as an adult to reflect upon that shame which he had internalized so greatly. Matovina (2011), depicts a Sunday morning Mass in Chicago, in which Dávila had a revelation. Matovina (2011) shares what Dávila realized and provides analysis for this realization:

> "to be spiritual involves getting reconnected with my roots, with the source of my life." He calls this reconnection nothing less than conversion, but not the typical sense of leaving behind one's former self to become someone new. His transformation was just the opposite: it enabled him to embrace the beauty and dignity of his family, his ancestors and himself, even the indigenous part of him that he had been conditioned to conceal and

[22] I use the asterisk to demarcate the significance in Trans as being an umbrella term that includes all Trans identity. While I use Trans without the asterisk throughout this dissertation, I use it as part of this concept to demarcate that the significance that gender and gender-variance is at the center of this concept of spirituality I am pushing forward.

despise. Dávila regards this "conversion to recognize ourselves as God made us" a life-altering enlightenment to see that no matter what rejection or shame we have experienced, each of us is a daughter or a son created in God's own image. (p.163)

I share this excerpt from Dávila's experience in Matovina's (2011) analysis, to highlight how spirituality in this context consists of an internal transformation that allows one to come closer to oneself, closer to one's roots, to one's truth as an individual—spirituality allows one to go on this journey, to get closer to oneself through releasing the shame and guilt that one has internalized because of family, community and/or society. In this way, this internal transformation or "conversion" to see himself and others as God made him is crucial in understanding of the experiences of Trans Latinxs. In defining Trans*Formative spirituality, it is necessary to understand the shaming individuals experience due to their transgression of the gender binary as seen in Chapter Two. While gender policing and shame brought onto Trans Latinxs via religion, culture and/or society attempts to strip them of their humanity and dignity while trying to normalize their gender and sexuality, Trans Latinxs resist day in and day out by revealing who they are and employ both an internal and external spiritual conversion.

I posit, for Trans Latinxs, transitioning [the act of identifying and/or performing their chosen gender] and owning that transition is grounded in radical love and is also a spiritual act in and of itself which allows individuals to feel at home in their body as a child of God. This journey of coming into one's own, finding truth in oneself is what I refer to as Trans*Formative spirituality. This process refers not only to a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance (the outer transformation), but also includes a marked change within someone or something (transformative).

Trans*Formative spirituality can be seen in each of the three ways in which Tans

Latinx's "do spirituality." These practices include engaging in traditional religion, non-traditional religious spaces for Latinxs, as well as engaging in the exploration of various religious and spiritual practices to understand what makes the most sense for them.

Trans Latinxs Doing a Christian/Catholic Based Spirituality

Sylvia, (44 years old, she/her) grew up in Mexico and migrated to the United States in 2001 when she was 21 years old. Sylvia is undocumented and has no path to citizenship. As an undocumented Trans woman and with little to no family in the United States, she has struggled in a multitude of ways. She learned early on in her time in the United States that being self-employed would be the only way to sustain herself, since both the transphobia and lack of legal status made is difficult to find any type of consistent and livable work. Even with a thriving party planning business, she has struggled financially and at the time of our interview she had been staying at a friend's house due to larger than normal remittances she had to send back home to family in Mexico after her mother's death. Her mother's death in particular impacted Sylvia deeply, since she was not able to travel to Mexico to bury her mom. Amidst her struggles as an undocumented Trans woman, Sylvia's spirituality is what has continued to give her hope to keep going. Her spirituality is deeply grounded in the beliefs she was taught by her mother. While her relationship with her mom was tumultuous due to her gender identity, over time, Sylvia and her mom became closer especially as her mother became sick in her later years. While Sylvia identifies as spiritual, she does not attend church or any type of formalized services. Yet, her spirituality is grounded in Mexican Catholic understandings of popular religion, as her mother ingrained in Sylvia from a young age. Sylvia shares what her spirituality looks like below:

> Yo creo en todos, en Dios, en la Virgen de Guadalupe, en San Judas Tadeo, en todos los santos. Yo siempre digo, "Diosito, protégeme. Diosito, dame. San Judas, dame trabajo.

> San Juditas, Virgen de Guadalupe, protégeme de todos mis enemigos, ciégalos, si alguien me quiere hacer daño . . . " Pero yo soy católica, creo en Dios, creo en la Virgen de Guadalupe, creo en todos los santos porque eso es lo que me enseñó mi mamá.
>
> [I believe in everyone, in God, in the Virgin Guadalupe, Saint Judas Thaddaeus, in all the saints. I always say, "God protect me. God give me. Saint Jude, give me work. Saint Jude, Virgin, protect me from all my enemies, blind them if anyone wants to harm me . . ." But I am Catholic, I believe in God, in the Virgin, i believe in all of the Saints because that's what my mom taught me.]

Sylvia's experience with prayer and veneration for God and the Virgin Mary and many Saints is commonplace for many of the Trans individuals in this study, and particularly so for those who migrated as adults to the United States from Latin America. Sylvia is practicing Trans*Formative spirituality through disidentification, she is using all of the symbolism and ideology that her mother taught her, to give her hope and resilience and find answers in her own life as an undocumented Trans woman living in the United States. As she shares, she used her prayer to manifest protection for herself and work. She is also practicing Trans*Formative spirituality to feel close to her family and particularly to her mother, despite her passing.

Elvis, (43 years old, he/him) was born and raised in Los Angeles and is third-generation Mexican and identifies as Chicano. Elvis' mother who he is very close to, is extremely Catholic and believes deeply in God and the bible. While Elvis does not believe in God of identify as being religious, for him, his Chicano cultural identity is very important to who he is as a Trans Chicano. He shares that his Chicano cultural identity is strongly grounded in Latino/Mexican Catholicism, and for him, while he may not believe in God or formal religion, he does believe in images. Elvis shares, "I think once you see somebody wearing the *rosario* (rosary) or showing

the image of The Virgin or showing roses or showing those images you can't help but to know who this person is a little bit; at least a little bit of their identity . . . " In this way, when he is able to identify with these culturally and spirituality Latinx images, he feels a sense of belonging, and sense of who he is, a sense of safety. While he does not believe in God, as his mother does, and as his mother has shared and taught him to, Elvis articulates the importance of Catholicism and more specifically how Latino popular religion is embedded in his cultural beliefs, morals, and shapes his belief system. It shapes how he sees himself, and how he sees others as being part of an ethnic collective.

Christianity is intertwined with Latinx culture and therefore Trans Latinxs are raised in and socialized with Christian values and beliefs. Whether Trans Latinxs choose to continue to participate in Christian practices, Trans Latinxs are immersed in religion and spirituality from a young age because of how Christianity is inextricably tied to Latinx culture. Spirituality remains an important part of Trans Latinxs lives in their adulthood and engage in spirituality as a means for hope and resilience to keep thriving.

> It was my survey collection with Bamby and the TransLatin@ Coaltion that took us to a LGBTQ Catholic Church in the Long Beach area. I was aware that LGBT Catholic spaces existed, but I had never stepped into one, so I was surprised when one of the TransLatin@ Coalition board members, Sofi, who resided in the Long Beach area invited us to this church for one of our survey gatherings. This church was smaller than a traditional Church parish. It is located within a commercial business space, nestled between other small businesses on a major street in Long Beach.

Sofi, is a board member of the TransLatin@ Coalition and is an active member of her church. As part of our survey collection, Sofi was able to secure the church as a gathering place

for participants to take surveys. Sofi has a strong relationship with the pastor of the church, an African American masculine of center Lesbian. A few weeks after congregating in Sofi's church for the survey collection I was able to interview Sofi at Long Beach City College where she is attending school for her Associates degree. At the time of the survey collection and interviews, Sofi was 47 years old. Sofi is tall with wavy blonde hair that trails down to her mid back. She identifies as Trans Latina, and she is originally from the rural outskirts of Acapulco, Guerrero in Mexico. She shared that as a young person, she always knew she was different because she was always attracted to men, and always gravitated toward girls as friends. She described many of her early schooling experiences in Mexico as being filled with gender policing from both teachers and students. She had many bullies who often "saw" her as "gay[23]" and treated her harshly verbally and at times was physically accosted as well. As Sofi began to explore her sexuality and gender expression she did so in secret—as best as she could. She would dress up in her older sister's clothes when she had a few stolen moments of having an empty house. She knew that being visibly different, or getting caught using make up, or hanging around other "gays" would only draw more attention to her.

As Sofi got to be a teenager, her family moved out of the rural outskirts and moved into the metropolitan tourist port town of Acapulco in Guerrero. It was the late 1970s and it was in Acapulco that Sofi's isolation subsided. She met gay men, drag queens, and Trans women and began to see herself reflected in others. At the age of 15 and 16, Sofi began to explore the Gay scene in Acapulco—she would leave her house at night and go to the bars and on weekends and she eventually had a boyfriend who whom she would go to the beach. Eventually Sofi's Gay

[23] Sofi mentions they could see that she was gay, and she is referring herself as gay as she reflects on herself as a child she didn't have the words to articulate that she was trans. Being Gay was marked by her mannerisms, acting feminine, and also her attraction or assumed attraction to men.

nightlife and activities got back to her mom, who was disappointed in hearing about her son from people in the neighborhood. As an attempt to both save face and protect Sofi, her mom forced her to leave Mexico and migrate to California to join her older siblings who were already living and working in Los Angeles.

When she migrated to the United States in the early 1980s Sofi went to live with her brother in the Los Angeles area and started going to high school. During this time Sofi began to explore the gay scene in Los Angeles. She would stay out late and go to gay bars, and her brother began to suspect that she was prostituting. Disapproving of her life choices of partying and going out, he kicked her out of his house. She had only lived with her brother for three months. She then went to live with a friend from high shcool whose family was very Christian. At this time Sofi still identified as gay and presented as male, but due to her living situation she could not be "out" about being gay. School would be the only place she would be able to open up about what she was going through. It was in her ESL class where she met her Christian friend who later housed her. It was also in school, where she met a gay male teacher, who supported the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) club on campus and who was very open about supporting gay students who had nowhere else to go during lunch. Sofi remembers this teacher being extremely nice and welcoming to everyone who he was able to perceive as Gay or queer, and it was one of her first experiences in the United States where she was affirmed and validated in her queerness. Sofi and her friend started to get involved and learn their rights as gay students on campus. One day during lunch, Sofi and her friend were attacked by a couple of young men off campus, and their teacher supported them in getting the assailants charged by the police. However, due to the fear that the men would return for retaliation, Sofi became scared for her safety, and dropped out of school altogether.

At every stage of Sofi's life—from migrating, to exploring her gender and sexuality both in Mexico and the United States—her consistent faith in God has kept her going. She described to me her relationship to God and attending church, "siempre me ha gustado las cosas de Dios, yo siempre he tenido . . . la fe en Dios . . . el [Dios] que te puede ayudar en muchas cosas . . . siento que se me hacen menos difíciles [las cosas] estando en la iglesia . . . " [I've always had faith in God. Him, God, that can help you with many things . . . I feel like things are less difficult for me when I go to church . . .] Regardless of what she has gone through, Church and god have always been consistent in Sofi's life. While she has not consistently gone to one specific church during the entirety of her adult life in Los Angeles, she has found a spiritual home in various church spaces and in the last years has found a home in the Unity Fellowship Church in the Long Beach area.

After being kicked out of her brother's house Sofi often moved between living with friends and also was housed at a Latino Christian Church in Los Angeles. The church offered temporary housing for individuals who had nowhere else to go. Sofi spent some time in that shelter, and very quickly the pastor there, Damian took to her defense when other church goers and folks in the shelter would make homophobic and transphobic remarks or refer to Sofi as "Satanas" [the Devil]. Even when Damian was receiving push back from other church members for housing Sofi, Damian supported Sofi and often consoled her with the word of God. He even helped Sofi find work, both in the church and outside of the church—from hiring her to work in the church as a florist and janitor or finding her office job outside of church.

Sofi was part of Damian's church in the mid to late 1980s and when the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) passed in 1986. Many churches including Damian's church became hubs of information and resources around immigrants' rights legislation and assisted

immigrants in filling out IRCA applications in particular. Individuals were informed about IRCA, who was eligible and provided application support to fund and fill out the applications. Because Sofi arrived in the early 1980s, she was eligible to apply for IRCA, but was afraid she might not be because up to that point she was still dressing as a man during the day for work and would dress as a woman in the evenings and on weekend.

Because this was also the time of the AIDS crisis, and under Reagan there was a harsh anti-gay agenda—immigrants who applied for IRCA after 1987 were required to be tested for HIV/AIDS and if they were results came back as positive, they were seen as "inadmissible" to the United States (Fernandez, 1992). Sofi recalls feeling a deep sense of fear for applying because she knew that "no querian a lo gays por la imnigracion" [immigration didn't want any gays (in the country)]. But with Damian's encouragement and direct support to help Sofi apply both in paper and covering the application fee, Sofi submitted her IRCA application. Additionally, Damian trained Sofi and she worked for the church helping other migrants fill out their IRCA applications. She would eventually have to take an HIV test for her legalization process and application, but at every step—even after disengaging form the church Damian continued to support her throughout the process of getting her citizenship which lasted a full 10 years, from initiation of the application, to getting sworn in as a citizen.

In terms of the Church that Sofi attends now, it is the Unity Fellowship church that is located in Long Beach, and it is part of a much broader community of churches that are non-denominational and LGBT friendly. She was invited to attend by a close friend of hers. She remembers when she first came to Unity Fellowship, she did not know what to expect, but she shares, "yo sentí como ese calor, ese… como ese cariño de la gente, que a donde te sentía ¡wow! Vienes a adorar a Dios y también sientes el amor de gente. Es una iglesia chiquita, digo, la

mayor parte de lesbianas pero me encanta…" [I felt the warmth…like that affection from the poeple there, and it was felt, wow! You come to worship God and you also feel love from everyone here. It's a small church, and it's mostly lesbians here, but I love it!].

The church is not only LGBT friendly. Those who attend serve and give service are also LGBT. It's a predominantly LGBT People of Color space—mostly Latinxs and Black attendees. So on a different level Sofi, feels at home in this space. Even though it is an English language church, and she would prefer a Spanish language mass, Sofi mentions feeling not only the energy and love of God but also the love of the people around her. This has not been a common experience for her. Her experiences at Christian/Catholic Latinx church at least in the early years, where she was still in her early days of transition, were filled with discrimination and harassment. And when Sofi is not at Unity Fellowship with is her primary church, she attends church in LA, at the LA Metropolitan Church in Hollywood which is also LGBT friendly. So while Sofi does not attend traditional Latinx Churches as she once had growing up and in her first years of being in Los Angeles, she continues to be drawn to churches that are grounded in Christian beliefs that center God in the way that she is used to hearing about.

Sofi is one few participants that attends a religious institution based in Christianity to practice her spirituality. As she mentions above, attending church us important to her because she feels that life is less difficult for her when she goes to church and is enveloped in the word of God. The importance of attending church for Sofi in important both spirituality and practically in her experience. Sofi has been able to connect to many resources because of her affiliation to the church once in the U.S. It was in the traditional Catholic Latinx church, where she found shelter in the beginning of her younger years in the United States. She was allowed able to find work in the church and sustain herself as a result. Lastly, the church also provided her with

resources to apply amnesty which eventually led to her naturalization as a U.S. citizen. Though Sofi received many services from the traditional Catholic church, she also faced a lot of stigma there. It was this stigma that moved Sofi from that traditional Catholic church to the LGBTQ church she worships at today.

In this way, Sofi is also practicing Trans*Formative spirituality. We see Trans*Formative Spirituality happening in Sofi's narrative in at least two distinct time periods. The first is during her time in Damian's church where Damian, the leader of her church, is defending Sofi's existence and right to be there. He consoles Sofi with the word of God, ignoring the social pressures to exile Sofi from the church. Sofi's practice in the church and Damian's support is Trans*Formative spirituality because not only is it pushing back against and changing the social stigma that Sofi faces as a Trans woman, but also prioritizes the root of the philosophy, the word of God, in Sofi's life. In this way, Sofi's presence and practice within the church is a model and emblem of resistance even to the other parishioners in the church. As Damian and Sofi focus on the word of God and push back on the social stigma, we see both an internal and external practice of Trans*Formative Spirituality. While both Damian and Sofi are pushing back on these social stigmas and changing the norms within the church, it is Sofi's presence as a Trans Latina that really is the catalyst for this practice of Trans*Formative Spirituality. Sofi's commitment to the church, her faith, and her abiding presence in the community is the stimulus that forces Damian to take a stand against the stigma of his congregation.

The second time we see Trans*Formative Spirituality in Sofi's experience is through her participation with the LGBTQ church. This is an internal shift in how Sofi's practice. Though the church is a Christian church, Sofi is able to be her full self and embraced by the community

of queer people of color. Sofi's relentless search for her own truth has led her to this church where she can be fully accepted. Her internal practice has shifted and she has allowed herself to practice her faith in a place where she can be her true and fullest self while she communes with and deepens her relationship with God. She is finally in a space where does not have to fight for her humanity while practicing her faith. This internal shift of being one's full self while practicing one's faith is key for Trans folks who are spiritual and/or religious. We can see how Sofi's experience is related to Davila's (Matovina, 2011) as he was able to embrace his full self within his spirituality just as Sofi is able to do so now within the church where she practices.

Finding Hope and Spirituality in Non-Traditional Latinx Spaces

Sarita (43 years old, she/her) grew up in Puebla, Mexico before migrating to Orange County at the age of 17 with her immediate family. Like many of the Trans women in the study, she did not fully get to explore her gender identity until she came to the United States. Through her exposure to the gay scene, drag shows, and meeting other Trans women in Los Angeles, she felt affirmed in being herself. She had always known that she was "different" and she was always made to feel that she was, especially as a kid growing up in church in Mexico. Upon telling her family about seeing herself as a woman, a year into living in the United States, her stepfather kicked her out of the house and for close to a decade she was estranged from her family. While her mother and siblings accepted her as she was, Sarita shares that her mother was not the type of person to "fight" or stand up for what was right. For her mother, keeping her stepfather happy was the priority because he financially provided for the family and she did not want to risk upsetting him for fear he would leave. In being rejected by her stepfather then, Sarita's relationship to her mother and siblings were lost. Her mother's silence in this arena would have a deep and lasting impact on Sarita and her family.

Ultimately, the familial rejection she experienced for coming out as a Trans woman, left her feeling isolated and alone. She shares as she reflects on that time in her life, "Pienso que eso fue lo que más me lastimó a mí, el rechazo de mi familia, porque yo siempre quise" [I feel like that's what hurt me the most—the rejection from my family]. With no one to turn to, and devastated by the loss of her family who she was extremely close to, she quickly found solace in drinking alcohol and doing drugs.[24] Sarita attempted to go to church during this time in her life, but in the midst of her transition, her hair was long, she was dressing as a woman, and when she'd go to church they would tell her, "es que te tienes que cortar el pelo, tienes que actuar como niño, tienes que hacer un cambio porque Dios nomás quiere eso, que seas como un hombre" [it's that you have to cut your hair, you have to act like a boy, you have to make a change because God wants, for you to a man]. She was met with blatant gender policing and a disregard for who she was. The message was clear, she could worship there if and only if she were to perform masculinity and "be a man." Yet, knowing she had no desire to "be a man" she declined.

This rejection from both her family and the church is what led her further into alcoholism and drug addiction. Through the decade of alcoholism and drug addiction, Sarita found herself in relationships with drug dealers who would take care of her and keep her inebriated. She never had to worry about working or getting her fix in this way. Using mostly alcohol and methamphetamine she was able to be herself as a woman. In those spaces, she was accepted, her partner accepted her as a woman, and she was able to explore her gender and find hormones.

It was about ten years into her substance abuse that she had an experience that scared her out of doing drugs and alcohol altogether. On this particular occasion she switched from

[24] LGBT's face a greater risk of substance abuse as a way to cope with rejection.

snorting methamphetamine to smoking it for the first time. For one week she did this. But things took a turn with smoking, and for the first time in the duration of her substance abuse, she started hallucinating. She saw helicopters that were not there and thought they were watching her and coming after her, and in a chaotic desperation she called 9-1-1. This would be the last time she did drugs. Hitting rock bottom, Sarita, knew something had to change.

Soon after this incident, Sarita ran into a friend she had met through an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group she was required to take for a DUI she had been convicted of years prior. Her friend was struggling with sobriety and asked Sarita to join him for an AA group. She went to AA as a support to her friend, but after a few meetings she began to go without him. In AA, new members are delegated a sponsor. A sponsor is a senior AA member who has been sober for a significant number of years and is able to support newer individuals through the 12-step process of sobriety. While AA was started by a minister and grounded in Catholic ideologies in the 1930s it is not tied to a particular religion. However, the foundation of AA and the 12-step program are spiritual in nature, as seven of the 12 steps refer to God or a higher power, and prayer. Additionally, the goal of the 12-step program as stated in the final step is to have a "spiritual awakening" wherein one can attain sobriety through a shift in perspective.

Below Sarita describes how after she left her first meeting she was given a sponsor number so she could call in case she felt like relapsing and how she felt in making that call.

> Y en eso los muchachos de la agrupación cuando yo fui me dijeron, "si un día tiene ganas de volver a beber…" porque te delegan un padrino, te dicen, "puedes llamarme pa' que no hagas lo que estabas haciendo." Y le llamo al muchacho y que le digo, "¿sabes qué? estoy en una fiesta y hay mucha cerveza, drogas – le digo – y me siento como incómoda." Dice, "pues vente a la junta, al grupo, a la agrupación."

Y desde ahí me di cuenta que a alguien sí le importaba. Y me di cuenta que a alguien sí le interesaba. Y llego a la agrupación – ellos se rigen por principios, por tradiciones y me leen una que decía que no les importaba quien era yo, que no les importaban los crímenes, ni lo que haya hecho, o lo bajo que haya caído, que no les importaba. Y eso cambió mi vida.

[And the guys from the group told me "if one day you get the urge to drink" . . . because they give you a sponsor, and they said "you can call me so that you don't go back to what you were doing" and so I called the guy and I told him "you know what, im at a party and there's lots of alcohol and drugs"–I told him—"I feel uncomfortable." He said, "well come to a meeting with the group."

And since then I realized I did matter to someone. And I realized that someone was interested in (my well-being). And I went to group—they are governed by principles, traditions, and they read me one of the principles that said that it didn't matter who I was, they didn't care about the crimes, or what I've done, or how rock bottom I'd fallen, none of that mattered to them. And that changed my life.]

For Sarita, who has struggled with a lot of rejection based on her gender identity in her life, AA gave her the first glimpse into what it felt like to be cared for no matter what her past had been, the crimes she may have committed and more importantly, they did not care or judge her for how she looked, dressed, or identified—in terms of her gender, sexuality, or otherwise. What she learned early on in her experience with AA was that they only cared about her as a human being, something that she was not used experiencing as a Trans woman. To her group, it did not matter that she was Trans, or that she was sleeping with men. For the first time in Sarita's life, she was experiencing an unconditional support, care, and affection that was

grounded in nurturing the dignity of her livelihood and recovering from alcohol and in Sarita's case, drug addiction as well. Sarita explains that this is part and parcel of the principles and traditions that AA is founded on. Furthermore, becoming part of AA became a crucial turning point in Sarita's life, as she states above, "Y eso cambió my vida" [this changed my life].

Sarita goes on to share what she felt in AA, "Me di cuenta que a alguien sí le importaba y que sí había gente que me podía ayudar. No me importaba que no fuera mi familia. Y conocí mucha gente buena y conocí a una madrina que en un año hizo el papel de mi mama" [I realized that i mattered to someone and that there was people who could help me. I didn't care that it wasn't my family. And I met a lot of good people, and I was given a sponsor who played the role of my mother for one year]. Her madrina, or sponsor took on this role by sticking very closely to Sarita. She would call her every day to check in on her, ask how she was doing, would refer to her as "mija" which is a colloquial term of endearment to say "my daughter." On days they both did not have to work, they would go out shopping, or run errands together, or just spend the day talking followed by going to AA group meetings in the evening. Sarita attributes not only her sobriety to her sponsor, but also shares that it was her sponsor who helped her get out of the bad place she'd been in for so long. Sarita called her a mother, not just her sponsor, because she taught her many lessons about life.

Her sponsor was not afraid to make Sarita look inward, reflect and acknowledge the pain that Sarita had accumulated for so many years, and the destruction she had caused with her substance abuse. With her sponsor's support, Sarita felt safe and supported enough to do the internal work she had been unable to do during her addiction. Through her sponsor, attending AA group nightly, and facing the 12-step program, Sarita was able begin to turn her life around in many aspects. One of those aspects included facing her family—since one of the steps of AA

is to make a list of those one has harmed and make amends with them all. With Christmas approaching, Sarita was strongly encouraged by her sponsor to reach out to her family after ten years of no communication since she was kicked out of her family home. While she was reluctant to take this step because she had no idea what to expect, she did it, knowing she had the support of her new AA family to support her and fall back on if she was met with rejection from her family again. On Christmas Eve, and with almost a decade of not seeing or hearing from her family, she went to her mother and stepfather's home and knocked on the door. She narrates that night, and what it meant for her:

> Y llego a la casa y toco la puerta de mi mamá, a la casa de mis papás, y sale mi mamá llorando, con lágrimas en los ojos y me dice que ella le estaba pidiendo a Dios que yo entrara por esa puerta. Te lo juro.
>
> Y ahí empecé a creer en los milagros, y empecé a creer que estos señores que me ayudaron me regresaron, me reencontré con mi familia, pero no fue fácil. Empecé un poquito ver a mi familia, resentimientos, odio, dolor, rechazo, preguntar por qué, ¿qué les hice? ¿En qué fallé? ¿Por qué? Y comencé a trabajar en los pasos, las tradiciones dentro de Alcohólicos Anónimos, dentro de una agrupación y eso me ayudó mucho para comprender mi situación, cómo me sentía, qué era lo que me hacía falta, qué necesitaba yo.
>
> [And I get to my mom's house and i knock on my mom's door, at my parents' house, and my mom comes out crying, tears in her eyes and she tells me that she was praying to God that I would come through her doors. I swear.
>
> And from there, I started believing in miracles, I started to believe that those guys who were helping me returned me, reunited me with my family, but it wasn't easy. I started

Little by Little seeing my family, resentment, hate, pain, rejection, and asking why? What did I do you all? How did I fail? Why? And I started working on the (12) steps, and principles in Alcoholics Anonymous as part of a group and that helped me so much to understand my situation, how I felt, what was missing, and what I needed.]

While AA is not technically a religious organization, it is rooted in Christian beliefs and ideologies in order to service and serve individuals struggling with their addiction to alcohol. While Sarita does not identify as Catholic or Christian as she was raised, it has been through AA that Sarita has been able to reaffirm her faith altogether. It has allowed her to develop and nourish her relationship with herself, with her family, and she has been able to stand on her own two feet and keep moving forward. She has gone from never working and depending on others to support her vices, to now just three years ago she was able to acquire her own business. She met her husband in AA, who she has been married to the last five years. She now owns a hair Salon where she does hair and make-up. But the greatest gift of all this has been that her and her husband have been able to now host their own AA group meeting at the salon. They referred to their own group as their "child" and hold it very dear to their hearts. They are both extremely involved in AA, and Sarita's story has been featured on the AA national magazines multiple times through the years. For her, AA has not only allowed her to regain faith in life itself, but it has also allowed her to love herself for who she is, and be proud of who she is.

At the time of our interview, Sarita had just had her ten-year anniversary of being part of AA. Below she explains what the last ten years in AA have given her:

. . . y durante esos diez años, en el transcurso que yo me acepto tal y como soy, y que dejé de batallar mucho por cómo eran mis sentimientos. Ya no era el niño que quería ser mujer, ya no era el cuerpo de un hombre atrapado a una mujer, o al revés. Me di cuenta

que yo era un ser humano, y como ser humano yo tenía las mismas oportunidades y los mismos derechos de cualquier persona."

[. . . and during those ten years, in that journey I have come to accept myself as I am, and I stopped struggling with the feelings I had. I was no longer the boy who wanted to be a woman, I was no longer a woman trapped in a man's body, or the other way around. I realized that I was a human being, and as a human being I had the same opportunities and the same rights as any other person.]

Sarita is "doing spirituality" by devoting herself to the community and institution of AA. She follows the twelve step program and has dedicated a large portion of her life to fostering the community within AA. Through this practice she has seen changes within herself and others. In this sense, it was her time in AA *conviviendo,* or co-living and creating community with and in relation to others that embraced her unconditionally, without trying to normalize her gender, that showed her that it was okay to embrace herself and forgive herself, and forgive others. This journey in AA, gave her a sense of family, and through practicing the principles and traditions of AA she has a sense of home and foundation from which to rebuild herself. Additionally, AA gave Sarita more than her sobriety, it made her believe it restored her faith in humanity and in herself. She was no longer conflicted about who she was as a Trans woman because this ten-year journey brought her closer to herself. This growth from within is a part of Sarita's practice of Trans*Formative Spirituality.

Sarita's practice of Trans*Formative Spirituality can also be seen in the healing work she has done to mend the wounds in her familial relationships. Just as she grew to love and accept herself she was emboldened by her faith in the twelve steps of AA to seek out her family's acceptance and love once more. It was through this experience that Sarita starts to believe in

miracles again because reuniting with her family was something that seemed impossible because of her gender identity. However, through her new-found faith she was able to face this extremely difficult task. While the relationship with her family took time to heal and develop, her spirituality allowed her to take courageous action to re-develop her relationship to her family.

Exploring and/or Creating Other Forms of Doing Spiritual

For many participants in this study, disassociation from religion as an institution altogether is necessary for embracing oneself and living one's truth. While many participants find their spirituality grounded within the broader Christian faith, not all continue to believe in Christianity, or stay close to Christian or Catholic churches or popular religious practices. For Trans Latinxs in this study, this is often a result of their experiences in the Catholic church and the discrimination and harassment they have received either directly or indirectly at Church by leaders or church members as seen above. However, while some have continued to identify as Christian or Catholic, this is not always the case for others. In the examples below, I offer the narratives that speak to how Trans Latinxs explore and/or create their own spirituality in the face of transphobia.

Amalur, (37 years old, she/her) who was born and raised in Mexico and migrated to the U.S. in her late teens with her family. She is very critical of the Catholic church and the Catholic religion that she was raised in. While she does not consider herself to be very spiritual she does acknowledge her spiritual grounding within Christianity based on what she was taught as a younger person growing up as a "Mexicana. In terms of being spiritual, she does identify more closely with a higher power. She shares, "Cuando me acuerdo que hay un ser supremo, yo no sé, llámese Dios, llámese una luz, llámese como sea, sé que hay algo supremo, que todo lo rige. Que lo rige, que lo creó, que por algún motivo lo hizo y estamos acá. Ese es mi concepto" [when I

remember that there is a higher power, if it's called God, light, whatever you want to call it, I know there is a higher power that governs it all. That governs everything, that created all, and that's why we are here]. Thus, for her it is less about what the higher power or high being is called, and more so about the connection that she feels to this higher being is what brought us all here as she believes. Amalur acknowledges that she rarely goes to church because of the transphobia she has experience. Thus, much her experience at church and religion has been tainted by the way in which see the experience of going to church to seek God. Below she describes her understanding of what church and one's relationship to God is supposed to be:

> Pero es un punto de reunión donde nos vemos las caras, donde la pasamos bien, contamos el chiste, platicamos, y a compartir. Y las mismas escrituras lo dicen ¿qué es la iglesia? Tú eres la iglesia. Eso es un templo, una casa donde vamos a convivir con el hermano, pero la gente va ahí, porque creen que allá ya está Dios, mentira… Dios está aquí dentro de mí . . . . pues Dios estará más cerca de mí que de ti, porque yo ando pecando, y dicen que Dios quiere al pecador, no al pecado, al pecador. Al que anda pecando, lo trae aquí cerquita, más cerquita que el que está bien, porque dice: "Bueno, ese ya está bien"
>
> [It's a place to congregate where we see each other's faces, where we have a good time, where we make jokes, we talk, we share ourselves. That is a place of worship, a place where we go to co-live with our brothers, but people go there because they think God is there, lies . . . God is here, inside of me . . . God might be closer to me than you, because I am sinning, and they say that God loves the sinner, not the sin, the sinner. The one who is sinning, he has them real close, closer than the one who is better off, because [God] says, "well, that person is fine."]

For Amalur, her criticism of church falls back on her own study of the bible and God's words

and she questions, "what is the role of church?" She concludes that while it is supposed to be a place to co-live and coexist with others and seek God, that has not been her experience. Because of her identity as a Trans woman, she has come to conceptualize the idea that for her, church, is the place where one finds God is none other than one's body, it is the temple, that is what must be worshiped. She is shedding light on her belief that God is found within one's own body and that the body itself is a place of worship, which runs counter to the Transphobia that she and many Trans people have experienced in church as being seen as demons, or physical manifestations of Satan. For Amalur, church is not a necessary part of her spiritual experience her gender identity has led her to believe in a higher power that exists within each and every person, including herself. That is the core belief that guides her own spirituality.

Unlike Amalur, Sage (28 years old, they/them) was born and raised in the United States. However, like Amalur, he was raised in a religious household as well. Sage, like Amalur, also carries criticisms about Christianity because of the Transphobia and homophobia he saw his family enact when they were growing up. Sage refers to Western religions as "man-made religion." They share distaste of such religions, stating, "man-made religion is bullshit because man-made religion has been very interpreted by man that has no understanding about themselves." Sage acknowledges their own understanding of the bible and that there is an incongruency between what is actually said in the bible and what is practiced by "man-made religion" as they have experienced it. That is why Sage shares that there is no understanding of themselves—there is not a deep understanding of each other's humanity. If there was, they would not have seen his family and church community growing up being critical and judgmental of others because of their gender or sexuality. Instead, Sage noted there is a deep judgement and power and control that has taken over organized religions. Sage has chosen to completely

disassociate from their parents' religion since going to college in northern California. They assert, "I'm spiritual. I believe in a higher power. I believe that there's a great mystery out there that I cannot fathom . . . I know that there's a bigger plan and a bigger purpose that I cannot grasp with my human mind." While Sage does not have a distinct practice, Sage is engaging in creating their own spirituality which they are currently exploring and includes Native American practices as well new-age types of spiritual thought community which they describes as a "a spiritual gathering of like queer people because a lot of us have a bad relationship with organized religion."

Not only does Sage believe in a higher being, but they believe in a higher being as a woman, which is not what is typically taught about God within the patriarchal order of Catholicism. Though theologians acknowledge that God or the holy spirt are genderless (Martell-Otero, Pérez, & Conde-Frazier, 2013). God is associated with masculinity and a male gender due to patriarchy and misogyny. Thus, for Sage, and others who are more critical of their Christian upbringing, they see their spirituality and the broader universe as functions through this higher power.

Many participants in my study experienced discrimination and gender policing from a young age, especially Trans women who embodied visible markers of femininity, as discussed in Chapter Two. Sage however, did not experience gender policing directly, he experienced it indirectly by the comments he saw his parents and other church members talk about gay and Trans people. For Camilo (28 years old, he/him/they/them) this was not his experience. In what comes I go in depth into Camilo's experience with discrimination as an adolescent who was highly involved in the church which served as a catalyst for his exploration on a new spirituality that could better serve him holistically.

Camilo began medically transitioning to achieve a more masculine outer gender performance at the age of 20. Camilo and his family came to the United States when he was 8 years old. Camilo is about 5'1, thin, is light-skinned and passes as White. He has long, light brown hair that that he carries in a ponytail that goes down past his shoulder. He also has a full mustache and goatee and visibly passes as male. He and his family have always been closely tied to the Catholic church. Upon their arrival to the United States, Camilo began attending his mom's boss' Christian church separate from his family, because of its closer proximity to his school. While his family attended a Catholic church, he became actively involved in his new Christian church's choir—Camilo and his family have always loved singing the gospel. Through his adolescence and as a teenager he has always stayed a very active member of his church and particularly in the church choir and even took on the responsibility of being a youth leader. For Camilo, church was like a second home, where he had grown up and created a family with his peers. He felt loved in that space. Even in middle school and high school when he began to explore his sexuality and continued to dress as a tomboy, he still stayed close to the church and always felt "accepted and loved" by his church community. His relationship to God and scripture was very developed, he read from the bible often, and even amidst his depression of questioning who he was he turned to God and scripture to understand his purpose and why he was different.

It was not until Camilo left for college in northern California that he began to acknowledge that he might be Trans. Even though he was going to school in Northern California, was still dedicated to his Church in Los Angeles, and when he moved back home after college, it was as if he'd never left in terms of his responsibility within the church. Feeling more sure of who he was and that he wanted to begin his medically transitioning to embody

more masculine features, at the age of 20 Camilo began taking hormones. He began this process without "coming out" or telling anyone from his choir. Camilo mentioned that at first people in his choir would ask him if he was sick, because of hormones, testosterone in particular, lead to a drop-in pitch of one's voice. During the interview he giggled, as he remembered affirming that he was in fact sick instead of coming outright with what he was going through. He referred to what he was going through, as many others in the Trans community when they begin medically transitioning, "a second puberty." Camilo affirms, it's not that he did not want to tell them, he just needed time to "be centered enough to have that conversation without breaking down in front of them."

During rehearsal practice one day, Camilo was approached by the choir director, Becky, and asked to join her in a room privately. Camilo describes what happened next as Becky, in the most loving and gentle way, asked Camilo if he was identifying as male and transitioning—taking hormones. He shyly laughed as he retold me the story, wherein he openly admitted to Becky and John that he was in fact transitioning and taking hormones. He didn't feel the need to hide this any longer, since they blatantly asked him if this is what was happening. This confrontation came right before a large choir competition that would take their choir to South America to sing the gospel. Camilo recalls Becky telling him the following:

> You know we can't have you singing outside of our home church. We will allow you to sing in our home church, because you know, you grew up there and we love you. And it's good to sing to God. But in terms [of] anywhere else outside the church with our choir, we don't want to give the impression that we're okaying and condoning what you're doing. Because you would be in a leadership role and we don't want that to be something

that our youth is okay with. We don't want you to be a leader if you're going to do this kind of thing, unfortunately, so we won't have you come with us to the trip.

While Camilo notes that in some way he was expecting this to be the church's reaction, it was something that really impacted his relationship to his church, the community and to his own spirituality. He was asked if he could have God change "this" about him, would he? And she continued to question him as if it were something he knew was wrong but continued to do. At this point, angry and offended he would say "NO."

Camilo spent years being depressed and in his own isolation asking God why this was happening to him, asking God to take this away, and reading and becoming well versed in the bible about gender and sexuality. Through his deep study and understanding of scripture and constant prayer, Camilo came to realize that his gender identity was a gift that was being given to him by God. In trying to understand God and his own gender and sexuality, which let him to study deeply, he was able to develop a deep relationship with God—despite what they believed. This conviction in his relationship to God is what allowed Camilo to at this point of questioning have a firm understanding as he shares, that "God doesn't make mistakes, and I'm one of the things that he didn't mess up on."

Camilo carried a deep conviction of himself as a child of God, but yet felt betrayed by his church leaders. While he still felt a lot of love and affection toward his church community, this event bifurcated his relationship with the structure of the church. One day Camilo driving in his car, was listening to a Christian radio station. Camilo shared that the emcees on the station were talking about different problems happening in Churches throughout LA and they were taking calls from people who wanted to get advice on working through whatever problems were coming up in the church. Not thinking twice about it, Camilo pulled his car over on the residential street

he was driving on close to home and called in to the radio station. He recalls not knowing what had come over him, but he felt the urge to confide in the emcees about what had occurred within his church. Camilo shared with them what had happened to him, and how he was essentially targeted and was no longer allowed to travel with the choir and how hurt he was about it all.

Camilo recalls their response here:

> Do you know how God sees you?'
> He was like, "God sees you as a spirit - first and foremost, you're a spirit"
> He was like, "so when you feel lost just identify with spirit . . . God will guide you . . . identify with what he sees you as. Look at yourself through what God sees you, and that's through spirit."

He was taken aback by the response he was given, because he shared, "I was not expecting that, you know. I don't know what I was expecting but thinking back on it, it probably could have been, like "you're a girl! God will lead you to that!" Instead though, this was the Christian Radio's response, and for Camilo this became a pivotal movement in his own transition and his spirituality. Camilo confirmed that since the call he has begun to "just identify with spirit."

Identifying with spirit in this way, he shares, "completely makes me happy, you know… I'm starting to see more and more how it can be implemented into society or culture. But it's still really vague in my head because we're so used to . . . using gender and sex as an identifier for humans . . . but spirit has really calmed me. Identifying as spirit has really allowed me to feel more okay about being a human being." Identifying with spirit allows Camilo to move beyond categorizations of gender and he is able to see himself not just as a gender tied to notions and ideas of gender, but he is able to see himself as a human being. As he himself goes through this spiritual awakening, that he is more than a "man" or "woman" or just a gender, he is a spirit, he is human.

Identifying in this way for Camilo, has led him on a spiritual journey of self-discovery and finding community and solace in various communities where he as felt embraced and affirmed as spirit, as a human being, and as a Trans person and in his decisions to move forward with his medical transition. He shares:

> . . . I've been led to unexpected places and a lot of them have been with the Trans community . . . . It's brought me to indigenous communities where there are two spirited people and into [other] indigenous [spaces] where there are self-modifications and it is okay and it's not blasphemy . . .
>
> It's not saying, oh no, you cut a piece of your body off, which is something that I had a really hard time with, and I still do . . . like I had chest surgery.
>
> But Identifying with spirit has let me to communities that have done similar, not completely, but similar things to their bodies and it's okay. Its seen as a transition, as growth, as a breaking of the egg, you know not staying in your cocoon …

For Camilo, like many other Trans people, the act of self-modification and medical transition via hormones and surgery, such as top surgery—as he shares, can lead to a moment of contention. Because of the fact that we are often told, "God made your body this way" and ideas of not altering our bodies because they were made in the vision of God. However, in this example we can see how Camilo's proximity to indigenous communities, who embrace self-modification as a ceremonial/growth ritual have allowed him to embrace and allow himself to choose top surgery knowing that in other cultures it is not seen as a sin, but seen as a marker of growth. For him, having a different lens for understanding his transition grounded in spiritual growth was necessary in affirming and validating his choice with his medical transition.

While Camilo has been a devout Christian for most of his life, his transition, particularly his medical transition was met with contention inside of his church. He experienced Transphobia from his choir director and the priest in their request that he not travel with the choir, and was removed from youth leadership positions. This contention and Transphobia he experienced opened the way for Camilo to begin a spiritual journey that took him outside of the confines of the religious institution of Catholicism, and he was led to other spaces in which his spirituality, and his identity as spirit was both affirmed and validated. Furthermore, as he began to associate with indigenous communities and indigenous spirituality wherein a two-spirit gender identity exists, he has been able to see his own [medical] transition as being a source of growth and empowerment. This is so not just as a form of being closer to who he is, but for him this transition becomes a rupture in his own sense of self, it signifies a rupture in his consciousness, in the confinement of the structural gender binary. It signifies a rupture that led to his spiritual awakening that helps him to better understand who he is, and offers him a glimpse of how society can be without structures of gender. Moreover, Camilo's experience symbolizes what I have termed a Trans*-Formative spirituality—while he embraces a transition of gender in both his self-identification and physical appearance, he is also internally transforming his spirituality. Becoming himself, becoming spirit, takes him on an unexpected journey of self-discovery which is not isolated to his gender identification. This experience becomes transformative in many ways.

While his spirituality is still very much grounded in his core understanding of Christianity and the bible, which he believes in still, Camilo continues to be spiritual and embracing of a newfound spirituality that he is still building as he progresses along on his journey. In beginning this spiritual journey toward self-acceptance, self-love and acceptance of

himself as spirit, his journey to indigenous communities could be said to be an act of decolonizing practices that bring him closer to practices of identity that have been erased through the colonization and genocide of indigenous identities and epistemologies which believe in multiple genders. In this way, his spiritual Trans*-formation creates a new world of possibilities.

Conclusion

Given these examples I am arguing for a Trans Latinx Spirituality wherein individuals disidentify with the Catholic or Christian religion they were raised with in order to create new possibilities for their own understandings of spirituality, but also as a means of understanding and validating their own experience. For many, it is their spirituality that has allowed them to remove the internal conflict between who they wish to be and what society sees them as. What I have offered in this chapter is an understanding that yes, Trans Latinxs are in fact spiritual beings and seek out spiritualty. Beyond being spiritual beings, spirituality becomes crucial in understanding and affirming their own dignity and humanity. While many of my participants experienced painful discrimination that told them directly or indirectly that they were not and are not deserving of the same love, support, and understanding of God and all that is holy, their faith was not erased. While their faith may have been shaken, Trans Latinxs teach us that spirituality plays an important part of everyday life in remaining resilient despite marginalization they may experience. More importantly, however Trans Latinxs "do spirituality" whether through engaging in Latino popular religion, seeking alternative spaces or communities for support, or exploring and creating their own spirituality, they do so in a way that is transformative.

As we see with many of my participants, their journey toward becoming themselves and finding truth in who they are requires them to take on a dramatic change both outwardly and inwardly—not only in regard to how they display and embrace their gender but also in how they

practice their spirituality. Their journey as Trans Latinxs catalyzes an internal change that takes them on a spirituality journey toward their truth—and allows them own who they are, while also converting other's hearts over time. This transformation that shifts them internally also has external manifestations, and it is what I have called Trans*Formative spirituality.

CHAPTER FIVE: STRATEGIES OF SELF-PRESERVATION

> Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare. (Lorde, 1988)

> Self-preservation is the biggest form of resistance. (Preston, 2018)

To this point my dissertation has offered an insight into the lives of Trans Latinxs as they navigate discrimination and marginalization in everyday life. In doing so, I have also centered Trans Latinxs resilience through understanding how they affirm and make meaning of who they are as they find ways to cope and heal from the wounds they have endured as gender-variant individuals at the intersection of their race, class, gender, sexuality, and legal status.

What I offer speaks to the experiences of Trans Latinxs in Southern California that shared their stories with me through the 129 surveys I collected in collaboration with Bamby Salcedo and the TransLatin@ Coalition, and the 28- in depth interviews. This dissertation provides a glimpse into the varied experiences of Trans Latinxs as they pertain to this specific geographical location in a one of the most progressive states and cities in the United States when it comes to Trans right and immigrants' rights. However, the geography of Southern California and the progressive politics of the state, do not protect Trans Latinxs from the very material effects of a society and a culture that is inherently embedded in patriarchal, cis-gender, heteronormative, xenophobic, and racist values, which becomes apparent in the Trump Administration's memo that opened this chapter.

On the other hand, because Trans Latinxs who experience much of their policing within the Latino community, whether it was in their countries of origin or growing up in the United States. My attempt in this dissertation is not to further pathologize the Latino culture and community as transphobic and homophobic. In my experience, learning from the people I have

interviewed and my field work, it is quite the opposite. I have learned that the human heart is malleable. Malleability of the heart lends itself to conversion. Conversion in this sense, means the capacity to change and adapt. While structures and inherent systems embedded within our country and laws are not as quickly malleable, people; especially those we share close bonds with. Through time, Trans Latinxs in this study have been able to use the affirming spaces they have created and through the development of their faith and spirituality have been able to find self-worth in who they are. For most this has translated into healing the wounds and creating understanding among and between parents and family. Again, while this is not true of all Trans Latinxs, this became apparent in this study. I believe many factors contributed to this. First, while the only perquisites of this study were that individuals had to identify as Trans and be of Latinx descent, and be over 18, the median age on my interview participants was 35. Due to this very fact, many of the participants in my study had transitioned and come out years prior to the interview. The time between coming out and the interviews were between one year and three decades. As I mentioned before, only one participant was not out publicly nor to her family. However, the majority of other participants experienced an initial rejection or contention with their family. Yet, this rejection or contention was not static.

Due to my survey collaboration with the Coalition, and the initial interview participant pool coming directly from the coalition, many participants in my study were connected to Trans-affirming spaces like the Coalition. As such, many individuals were either activists or closely tied to activists in their community, I believe this also contributed to the further development of their self-worth. Similarly, even those participants who were integrated into the study via my snowball sampling were also either active in the Trans community or tied to individuals who were. I say this to note that, this study is capturing the experiences of individuals who have had

the time and space to explore and affirm their identity with others like them. Similarly, these spaces are not just Trans-affirming spaces, but also Latinxs affirming spaces. While I offer an understanding of Trans Latinxs who are active in their communities and also make themselves visible as this study does not capture the experiences of those Trans Latinxs who are not plugged into this particular community and who might rather not be open about their Trans identity.

As Anzaldúa (1999) called to Chicana/o Studies in the 1980s, "People, listen to what your jotería is saying." Today, I believe this too applies to broader Latino community, and Chicanx/Latinx Studies in understanding the experiences Trans and gender variant individuals (Cuevas, 2018). Similarly, Queer Theory and Transgender Studies Trans Chicano scholar, Francisco Galarte's (2011) builds on Anzaldúa's call to say "jotería, listen to what your Trans* brothers and sisters are saying, and remember those long forgotten" (p. 229). Ultimately, while there have been inroads in Jotería Studies within Chicanx/Latinx Studies, much of it has centered on LGB experiences, and as Galarte (2011) and Cuevas (2018), there needs to be a push to look at gender variant and Trans individuals within this discipline. I add that beyond Jotería Studies, I believe this work also pushes Queer Migration Studies look at the role Trans and gender variant identity in the roles of migration. Alternatively, while Trans Studies acknowledges the experiences and barriers that Trans Latinxs and experience, more work is needed to understand experiences outside of white Trans individuals.

As a number of Trans lives continue to end because of the inability for people to see their humanity, I believe it is important to center these experiences. As the assaults and death of Trans lives rise, it is also imperative that we not only talk about Trans Latinxs once they are dead, detained or beaten but rather as I have done in this dissertation, I shed light on the lived experiences and struggles of Transgender Latinxs as they make meaning of their intersectional

identities in everyday life. I have aimed to capture how individuals have diverse and nuanced experiences within as they grow up and emerge into their selves, and similarly in how they cope and heal from the wounds they have endured due to the gender policing they have endured because of the fear of ambiguity in society.

We Will Not Be Erased

On October 21, 2018 a memo from the Trump Administration's Department of Health and Human Services was leaked to the New York Times suggesting a movement toward the erasure of Trans identity and Trans protections. The leaked memo advised that key government agencies had to strictly adopt a rigid definition of gender that as determined "on a biological basis that is clear, grounded in science, objective and administrable" (Green, Benner, & Pear, 2018). Compounding sex and gender, the memo went on to say "sex means a person's status as male or female based on immutable biological traits identifiable by or before both" meaning that one's gender would be defined by one's genitals, at birth, and is unchangeable (Green et al., 2018). It went on to state that any question of one's gender/sex need undergo genetic testing to be clarified, or shall be confirmed by one's originally issues birth certificate (Green et al., 2018). Ultimately, if the definition of sex as stated in this memo were to be adopted: (a) it would deny and erase the existence of Transgender people, and (b) it would have direct impacts on federal civil right projections in education, employment, and access to health care; rolling back many of the civil rights that the Transgender community received under the Obama Administration (Green et al., 2018). Such an adoption of a definition of sex would justify discrimination and marginalization and it would create even greater barriers for Transgender individuals living in the United States.

In response to Trump memo, many took to social media and the streets to protest the findings on the memo. Throughout the country, the hashtag, #WeWillNotBeErased was used in response to let the Trump administration no law or policy could or would erase the Trans community—they will continue to fight for their lives and for their rights.

The following day on October 22, 2018, in Los Angeles, the TransLatin@ Coalition in collaboration other groups organized a rally in front of City Hall in Los Angeles to gather Trans people and allies throughout Los Angeles. The gathering would be to let local government and the Trump administration know that the Trans community will not sit down or back down from their fight to be seen full human beings deserving of dignity and respect and equal protection of the law.

As I arrived to city hall at 7 p.m. on a Monday evening in October, there were about 100 people already gathered on the on lawn of City Hall. As I got closer to the crowd gathering the smell of copal wafted in the air. I could see the smoke as approached the area where members from the TransLatin@ Coalition had set up a stage for the nights rally. I recognized Bamby Salcedo, Maria Roman a co-founder of the Coalition, and many other of the Coalition's board members and general members. The crowd was diverse, while TransLatin@ Coalition took the lead in organizing the rally, there was people from various organization across the Trans community and many allies, too. The majority of people gathered and leading the rally were Trans people of color. As the rally began, the feeling in the air was somber from the new of the memo the night before.

This rally felt different from the other protests and actions I had been to during my fieldwork. Bamby and the Coalition had organized a list of speakers to talk for the two hours they were out in front of City Hall. The speakers were mostly Black and Brown Trans women,

and some Trans masculine and gender queer folks. As the copal kept burning, Ezak Perez, who is Mexican and Native American and Director of Gender Justice LA, led everyone in an indigenous prayer and meditation to kick off the rally. As the copal burned he had everyone in the large crowd turn and acknowledge each of the four corners. In his prayer he acknowledged the use and importance of medicine, such as copal and community. He spoke on how we needed that medicine now more than ever in moments such as these. As the copal continued to burn and smudge the air in from of City Hall, it felt as if the space was being cleansed of the negative energy of prior night's news. The space felt sacred, it felt like a spiritual gathering.

As Ezak ended the prayer, Maria Roman, co-founder and board member of the TransLatin@ Coalition spoke. Maria opened the evening with these words:

> We will not be erased! We stand on the shoulders of on ancestors and together we will fight beyond marriage equality . . . leave here today and hold people accountable when they say LGBT . . . . I am just fucking angry. I want to let all of you know my Trans brothers and sisters, I want you to know we are not the enemy!
>
> Turn to your brother and your Trans sister and say
>
> "I see you!"
>
> "I hear you!" and
>
> "I love you!"
>
> Let us heal, and let this administration know that our spirits are resilient and if we know one fucking thing, we know how to fight!

As many speakers and shared their fears, and concerns of the fight that lay ahead. Ashlee Marie Preston, a Black Trans woman, and first editor and chief of a major magazine spoke:

> We are not here to wallow in defeat, we are here to raise our consciousness, we are here to raise our vibration, and we are here to raise our voices in celebration of the victory that lies ahead.
>
> Repeat after me: The T is never Silent, The T is never Silent, the T is never silent, the T is never silent!
>
> It is important for us to let each other know that we are behind one another.

> We are the descendants of brick throwers! If Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were here today to witness this they would suit up, and show up, and FUCK IT UP!"
>
> So today if there are any tears you see coming from this stage, they are tears of joy because this is what community looks like, this is what resistance looks like, this is what solution looks like, this is what America looks like.
>
> And speaking of America for those of you who don't know, the actions of this administration is nothing more than smoke and mirrors, if we haven't figured it out by now, the Trans community is the first track on the political playlist of this administration. So, they think they can access our trauma, they can access our pain, the can access our experiences and use it against us on a whim
>
> But we are here to show them quite the opposite! Not only will we resist but we will thrive!

I share the words of Maria Roman and Ashlee Marie Preston and acknowledge the work of Bamby and the Coalition, because in this dissertation I have tried to convey that the existence of Trans people is their resistance. As my title notes, "Mi Existir Es Resistir" [My existence is my resistance], to choose to exist whether activist or not, choosing to emerge as a Trans person in our cis heteronormative society is an act of resilience. It is an act of self-preservation. And as Lorde (1988) tells us, it is an act of political warfare. While this administration in particular tries to wage war on immigrants and Trans people and while structures and society tries to erase, dispose, and eradicate the lives of Trans people, and especially that of Trans people of color, what stands out is the legacy of resilience that Maria and Ashlee speak to. This resilience, is the resilience that Trans people have historically embodied and continue to employ as a means to fight, emerge, and just simply exist.

APPENDIX

Survey Protocol

Needs of Transgender Latinas/Latinos in Southern California
Survey Protocol

Please read and answer each question carefully. For each answer, mark an X in the appropriate box. If you want to change an answer, erase your first answer completely and mark the X of your new answer. You may decline to answer specific questions.

Demographics:

1. What is your age?
   - ☐ 18-24
   - ☐ 25-34
   - ☐ 35-44
   - ☐ 45-54
   - ☐ 55-64
   - ☐ 65+
2. What is your zip code?
   Zip: _____
3. Do you consider yourself Latina/o?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Other: _____
4. What is your U.S. Citizenship status?
   - ☐ U.S. Citizen
   - ☐ Documented non-citizen
   - ☐ Undocumented non-citizen
5. If you did migrate, how long have you been in the U.S.?
   _____years
6. If applicable, what country/countries did you or your families migrate from?
   _____
7. Which sex was assigned to you at birth, on your birth certificate?
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
8. How do you identify now?
   - ☐ Male/man
   - ☐ Female/woman
   - ☐ Trans
   - ☐ Transgender
   - ☐ Transwoman
   - ☐ Transman
   - ☐ Other: _____

9. People can tell I am transgender/gender non-conforming even if I do not tell them?
   - ☐ Always
   - ☐ Most of the time
   - ☐ Sometimes
   - ☐ Occasionally
   - ☐ Never

10. How many people know that you are transgender?

	None	A few	Some	Most	All	Not applicable
At home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On the job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
At school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In private social setting	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In public social settings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When seeking medical care	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. To the best of your ability, please estimate the following ages. If it does not apply to you, or you have no desire to transition, mark "N.A." for not applicable.

	Age in Years	N/A
a. Age you first recognized you were different in terms of your gender.		☐
b. Age you began to live part time as a transgender/gender non-conforming person		☐
c. Age you began to live full time as a transgender/gender non-conforming person.		☐
d. Age that you first got any kind of transgender-related medical treatment.		☐

12. For each of the following documents, please check whether of not you have been able (allowed) to change the documents or records to reflect your current gender. Mark "N/A" if you have no desire to change the gender on the document list.

	Yes, changes allowed	No, changes denied	My legal status does not allow me	Not tried	N/A
Birth certificate	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drivers License and/or state issues non-driver ID	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social security records	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Passport	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Work ID	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Military discharge papers (DD 214 or DD 215)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Health Insurance Records	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Student records	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Professional licenses or credentials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. What is the highest level of education you have completed (either in the U.S. or country of origin)?
    - ☐ No formal education
    - ☐ Elementary School
    - ☐ Some high school
    - ☐ High school graduate –HS Diploma or equivalent (GED)
    - ☐ Some college credit
    - ☐ Technical school degree (such as cosmetology, computer technician, or mechanic)
    - ☐ Bachelor's Degree
    - ☐ Associate's Degree (AA, AS)
    - ☐ Master's Degree (MA, MS, ME, Med, MSW, MBA)
    - ☐ Professional Degree (Md, DDS, DVM, JD)
    - ☐ Doctorate Degree (PhD, EdD)
    - ☐ Other:_____

14. What is your **individual** income (before taxes)?
    - ☐ Less than $10,000
    - ☐ $10,000 to $19,999
    - ☐ $20,000 to $29,999
    - ☐ $30,000 to $39,999
    - ☐ $40,000 to $49,999
    - ☐ $50,000 to $59,999
    - ☐ $60,000 to $69,999
    - ☐ $70,000 to $79,999
    - ☐ More than $80,000

15. How many individuals currently rely/depend on your income? (Mark all that apply)
    - ☐ My child/children, if so how many: _____
    - ☐ My parent(s), if so, how many: _____
    - ☐ My sibling(s), if so, how many: _____
    - ☐ Other relatives under 18, if so how many: _____
    - ☐ Other relatives over 18, if so how many: _____
    - ☐ Friend(s), if so how many: _____
    - ☐ Spouse/Partner
    - ☐ Other: _____

16. What is your sexual orientation?
    - ☐ Heterosexual
    - ☐ Homosexual
    - ☐ Bisexual
    - ☐ Asexual
    - ☐ Auto sexual
    - ☐ Other:_____

17. What is your relationship status?
    - ☐ Single
    - ☐ Partnered
    - ☐ Domestic Partnership
    - ☐ Civil Union
    - ☐ Married
    - ☐ Separated
    - ☐ Divorced
    - ☐ Widowed
    - ☐ Other: _____

Housing & Health: The following questions are related to your housing situation and accessibility to stable housing and how that relates to your wellbeing. Please answer questions below

18. What is your current living situation?
    - ☐ Homeless (This includes if you are sleeping on a friends couch)
    - ☐ Living in a shelter
    - ☐ Living in a group home facility
    - ☐ Living in a nursing/adult care facility
    - ☐ Living on campus/university
    - ☐ Living with parents or family you grew up with
    - ☐ Staying with friends or family temporarily
    - ☐ Living with a partner, spouse or other person who pays for housing
    - ☐ Living in house/apartment/condo | RENT alone or with other
    - ☐ Living in house/apartment/condo | OWN alone or with others

19. If you are currently homeless, do you know where there is a shelter where you feel you will be respected for who you are and will sleep at peace tonight?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    If yes, please tell us the name of this place

    _____

20. Have you been homeless in the past 12 months? (being homeless means sleeping at a friend's couch, or temporarily staying at someone's house that is not your permanent place of living)
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

21. If you have experienced homelessness in the past 12 months, please briefly tell us what caused you to be homeless: Please explain below

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

22. If you are or have experienced homelessness, what do you need order to secure stable housing? Please explain below

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

23. Do you believe that having stable housing is important to your health?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    Please explain why **it is** important or why **is not** important.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Employment & Health: The following questions are related to your employment situation and how employment relates to your wellbeing. Please answer questions below

24. What is your current employment status? (Mark all that apply)
    - ☐ Full-time
    - ☐ Part-time
    - ☐ More than one job
    - ☐ Self-employed, own your business
    - ☐ Unemployed but looking
    - ☐ Unemployed and stopped looking
    - ☐ On disability
    - ☐ Retired
    - ☐ Other, please specify:_____

25. If you are currently employed please describe your work or vocation:

    _____

26. If you do not have what is typically called employment, please describe how you sustain yourself.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

27. Do you have employment that provides you with health care insurance
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    If no, please explain why not:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

28. If you do have health insurance through your employer, does your insurance and/or doctor provide trans-related care and coverage?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

29. If yes, please explain what your insurance covers under trans related care.

    _____
    _____
    _____

30. Do you believe that having permanent employment is important to your overall health?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    Please explain why you think having employment **<u>is important</u>** to your health or why is **<u>not important</u>** to your health.

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

31. Please describe what would be the ideal job that you would like to have in the next three years.

    _____
    _____
    _____

Medical Care & Health: The following questions are related to your health care and how that relates to your wellbeing. Please answer questions below.

32. What type of health insurance do you have? If you have more than one type of coverage, check the one that you usually use to cover doctor and/or hospital bills.
    - ☐ I have NO health insurance coverage
    - ☐ Insurance through a current or former employer (employee health plan, COBRA, retiree benefits)
    - ☐ Insurance through someone else's employer (spouse, partner, parents, etc.)
    - ☐ Insurance you or someone in your family purchased
    - ☐ Medicare
    - ☐ Medicaid/Medi-Cal
    - ☐ Military health care/Champus/Veterans/Tri-Care
    - ☐ Student insurance through college or university
    - ☐ Other public (such as state or county level health plan, etc.)
    - ☐ Other, please specify:_____

33. Are currently enrolled in health insurance through Covered California?
    - ☐ Yes,
    - ☐ No

    If no, why not?

    _____
    _____
    _____

34. What kind of place do you go to most often when you are sick or need advice about your health?
    - ☐ Emergency room
    - ☐ Private Doctor's office
    - ☐ Health clinic or health center that my insurance pays for
    - ☐ Free health clinic
    - ☐ V.A. (veteran's) clinic or hospital
    - ☐ Alternative medicine provider (acupuncture, herbalist), specify: _____
    - ☐ Not applicable, I do not use any health care providers
    - ☐ Other: _____

35. The following are a list of possible reasons why you may not get the health care you need. Based on your own situation, please rate your agreement or disagreement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
a. Lack of personal resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Clinics having fear about Trans people or dislike of Trans people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Lack of health professionals adequately trained to deliver healthcare to Trans people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Long distances to Trans sensitive medical care facilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Doctors and other healthcare workers who refuse to provide services to Trans people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Fear that if medical personnel find out I'm Trans, they will treat me different	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Lack of transportation to get to the services I need	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

36. Please mark below the overall medical services that you have had access to in the past 12 months.

	Yes, I paid out of pocket	Yes, my insurance covers	No, Was unable to access	Do not know what this is
Annual Physical Exam				
Routine Prescriptions				
Dental Care				
Routine Medical Screening				
Emergency Room Visits				
Vision Care				
Routine Hospitalization				
Specialist Care				
Gynecological Care				
HIV Care				
High blood pressure				
Cardiologist				
STD testing				
Dermatologist				
Nutritionist				
Foot doctor				
X-Rays				
Surgeries (what type: write in below)				
Endocrinologist				

Other (please specify):

_____

37. Please mark below if you received or want to receive health care related to being transgender/ gender non-conforming. If you have no desire to do so, please mark not applicable.

	Do not want it	Want it someday	Have had it	Not applicable
Counseling	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hormone Treatment	☐	☐	☐	☐
Top/chest/breast surgery (chest reduction, enlargement, or reconstruction)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Male-to-female removal of the testes (orchiectomy,	☐	☐	☐	☐
Male-to-female genital surgery (vaginoplasty; removal of penis and creation of a vagina, labia, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Female-to-male hysterectomy (removal of the uterus and/of ovaries)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Female-to-male genital surgery (clitoral release/metiodioplasty/creation of testes)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Female-to-male phalloplasty (creation of penis)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Facial cosmetic surgery	☐	☐	☐	☐
Electrolysis	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other:_____

_____

38. If you have marked had any of the procedures done in Question 37, please tell us how you have/ or are you accessing those services:

_____
_____

39. Do you believe that having access to the procedures listed above (Question 37) are important for your overall wellbeing?

☐Yes
☐No

a. Please explain why yes **it is important** or why not, is **not important**?

_____
_____
_____
_____

40. Do you believe that having access to a doctor on a regular basis is important to your health?

☐Yes
☐No

a. Please explain why yes **it is important** or why not, is **not important**?

_____
_____
_____
_____

41. How important is it to you to have a regular doctor that supports your health goals?

☐Extremely Important
☐Very Important
☐Somewhat important
☐Not important at all, I can be healthy even if I don't have a regular doctor

Sexual Health The following questions are related to your sexual health care and how that relates to your wellbeing. Please answer questions below.

42. Do you use protection when engaging in sexual activity (penetration/oral)?

☐Yes
☐No
a. Why or why not

_____
_____
_____
_____

43. Do you feel knowleagble about practicing safe sex?

☐Yes
☐No

44. Do you know where to learn about safe sex practices?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

45. Have you ever been tested for HIV and STDs?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

46. If yes, how often do you get tested for HIV and STDs?
    - ☐ I've only been tested once
    - ☐ Every six months
    - ☐ Every year
    - ☐ Every time I am with a new intimate partner
    - ☐ Other:_____

    a. If yes, where do you go get tested for HIV and STDs?
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

47. Have you not been tested for HIV because of any of the following reasons (mark all that apply.)
    - ☐ I feel healthy
    - ☐ I always practice safe sex
    - ☐ I don't know where I can get tested
    - ☐ I don't want to experience shame
    - ☐ I'd rather not know my status
    - ☐ Other:_____

48. What is your HIV status?
    - ☐ HIV positive
    - ☐ HIV negative
    - ☐ Don't' know

49. If you are HIV positive, are you currently receiving treatment?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

50. If you are receiving treatment, is it covered by your insurance?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

51. If you don't have insurance, how are you obtaining HIV treatment/prescriptions?

_____
_____
_____

Mental Health: The following questions are related to your mental health care and how that relates to your wellbeing. Please answer questions below.

52. Have you ever received a gender-related mental health diagnosis?
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Yes. My diagnosis is:_____

53. Not including a gender-related mental health diagnosis, do you have a disability (physical, learning, mental health) that substantially affects a major life activity?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ NO

54. If yes, what is your disability? (Mark all that apply.)
    - ☐ Physical condition
    - ☐ Learning disability
    - ☐ Mental health condition

55. Have you ever been a victim of domestic violence or intimate partner violence because of being transgender?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

56. Do you struggle with any of the following to cope?

	I currently do	I have in the past	This increased after my transition	This increased after another life event (job loss, death, etc)	Not applicable
Anxiety					
Clinical or severe depression					
Alcohol abuse					
Drug abuse					
Weight problems					
Anorexia					
Auto-immune problems					
Smoking					
Cutting					
Anger					
Psychiatric issues					
Thoughts of Suicide					
Hurting myself or others					

Other:

_____

_____

57. For those boxes that you marked and you are currently struggling with, are you getting any assistance/ help?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

58. If not, would you like to get a referral?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

59. The following are a list of possible reasons why you may not get the mental health care you need. Based on your own situation, please rate your agreement or disagreement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N/A
a. Lack of personal resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Long distances to Trans sensitive mental health care facilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Fear that if mental health professionals find out I'm Trans, they will treat me different	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Lack of psychologists, social workers, and mental health counselors who can help Trans individuals with mental health issues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Not enough psychological support groups for trans people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Lack of transportation to get to the services I need	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

60. Please let us know of any barriers that may keep you from accessing mental health help and support.

    _____
    _____
    _____

61. Do you currently have a social supportive system (including friends, family, other trans friends, etc.)?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    a. If yes, please explain who is your social support system, if not please explain why you do not have a social support system currently

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

    b. How does the social supportive system you have in place impact your overall wellness?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

62. Do you believe that having access to Mental Health services on a regular basis is important to your health?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    Please explain why yes, it **is important** or why you think is **not important**

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

63. How important is to you to have regular Mental Health services that supports you to be a healthy individual
    - ☐ Extremely Important
    - ☐ Very Important
    - ☐ Somewhat important
    - ☐ Not important at all, I can be healthy even if I don't have a regular mental health services

Religion/Spiritually The following questions are related to your Spiritual Health care and how that relates to your wellbeing. Please answer questions below

64. I partake in the following spiritual practices:
    - ☐ prayer
    - ☐ faith healing
    - ☐ homeopathy
    - ☐ magnetic therapy
    - ☐ numerology
    - ☐ astrology/horoscopes
    - ☐ gem-stone/crystals
    - ☐ Palmistry
    - ☐ Tarot

65. My religious affiliation is (Mark all that apply)
    - ☐ Christian
        - ☐ Protestant
        - ☐ Evangelical
        - ☐ Mainline
        - ☐ Catholic
        - ☐ Orthodox Christian
        - ☐ Mormon
        - ☐ Jehovah's Witness
        - ☐ Other Christian faith, please specify_____
    - ☐ Other Non-Christian Faiths
        - ☐ Santeria
        - ☐ Native American religions/practices
        - ☐ Buddhist
        - ☐ Jewish
        - ☐ Hindu
        - ☐ Muslim
        - ☐ Other non-Christian faith, please specify: _____
    - ☐ Unaffiliated
        - ☐ Atheist
        - ☐ Agnostic
        - ☐ Nothing in particular (believe in a higher power)
    - ☐ Don't know

66. Do you feel welcome and accepted by your religion and/ or place of worship?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

67. Do you feel that you have to hide who you are because of your religion?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

68. How important is to you to have regular spiritual/religious services?
    - ☐ Extremely Important
    - ☐ Very Important
    - ☐ Somewhat important
    - ☐ Not important at all, I can be healthy even if I don't have regular spiritual/religious services

69. Do you believe that having access to spiritual/religious services on a regular basis is important to your health?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

    Please explain why yes or why not:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

70. Anything else you'd like to tell us about your needs as a Latina/o trans/transgender person?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Interview Guide

Needs of Trans Latinas/Latinos in Southern California
Interview Protocol

This study aims to answer the following questions: 1) what social supportive services exist for Trans Latinas/Latinos overall health and livelihood? 2) What services/resources are necessary to ensure overall health and well being of Trans Latinas/Latinos?

Background

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself:
    a. How old are you?
    b. What sex were you assigned at birth?
    c. What is your gender identity now?
    d. Where were you born and raised?
    e. If you were born in the U.S. what generation are you?
    f. If you were born outside the U.S., how long have you been living in the U.S.?

Housing and Health

2. What is your current living situation like?
3. Have you ever been homeless?
    a. If you are, or have been homeless what do you feel is the reasons for which you were homeless?

Employment and Health

4. What do you do for a living?
5. Have you ever been discriminated at work?
6. Does your work provide you with health insurance?
7. Do you feel that your work contributes to your overall health and well being?

Medical Services and Health

8. Do you currently have health insurance?
9. When you get sick or feel ill, what do you do?
    a. Do you go to seek medical/ health help?
    b. Why or why not?
10. What challenges do your face in trying to attain medical services?
11. What medical services do you currently partake in?
12. Are you familiar with services and resources specific to trans Latina/os?
    a. Can you tell me where you go to receive medical/health services?
13. How have you/how do you pay for medical/health services?

Sexual Health

14. Tell me a little bit about your sexual health
    a. Are you sexually active?
    b. Do you practice safe sex?
    c. How often to you get tested?
    d. Do you know of the places where you can learn more safe-sex practices?
    e. Do you know of places/resources/services that provide STD and HIV testing?

Mental Health

15. Tell me a little about the mental health resources and services you currently use/partake in.
16. Is there any mental health services you are not currently taking advantage of but need to/would like to?
17. Do you have any alternative ways of coping with whatever you may be feeling? (i.e. addictions, cutting, etc.)

Family Acceptance and Health

18. Tell me about your relationship with your family.
    a. Biological family
    b. Chosen family
    c. Children?
19. Are you out to your biological family about your transgender identity?
20. Who do you consider to be your social support system? (i.e. friends, family, chosen family)
21. What role does your family (whether biological or chosen) play in your overall health and well being?

Religion/Spirituality and Health

22. What is your relationship to religion/spirituality?
    a. Do you identify with any religion or spiritual practice?
    b. Do you participate in any religious or spiritual practices?
23. Do you feel welcome at religious/spiritual services?
24. What role does your religion/spirituality play in your overall health and wellness?

Further Questions about overall Needs and Services

25. What do you feel are the resources and/services are necessary for transgender Latina/os to be fully healthy individuals?
26. What do you need to be a healthy individual?

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