

WORKING WITH SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE LATINX COMMUNITY:  
*TESTIMONIOS* AND STORIES OF RACIALIZED WOMEN WORKERS

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## ABSTRACT

Working with Sexual Violence in the Latinx Community: *Testimonios* and Stories of Racialized women Workers

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This narrative qualitative research study explores the experiences of Latinx women working with sexual violence in the Latinx community. It explores the stories and showcases the *testimonios* of two women who have worked in the field of sexual violence within the Latinx community in Toronto, Ontario for many years. Both participants shared similar stories, as well as different experiences with their own individual lenses. The theoretical framework draws from a critical race feminism theory as well as Latinx feminism, creating a *mestizaje* of theory. A narrative approach was used to collect data, along with an arts-based portion to honour traditional methods of knowledge sharing and expression. Data analysis included a thematic analysis to further look into the themes that emerged from the findings. Implications for future social work research and practice under an anti-oppressive lens are discussed in the conclusion.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this major research paper to all of the *guerrrxs* out there, and the  
*guerrrxs* to come.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	28
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS	33
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION	54
Appendices	63
References	71

## LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
Appendix A- Consent form	63
Appendix B- Interview Guide	60
Appendix C- List of Resources	70

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The topic that will be explored in my major research paper is the experiences of racialized women workers working with those who have been sexually violated in the Latinx community. For the purpose of this research study, I will use the term “Latinx”, as it is a term that is inclusive to the fluidity of gender identities. My research will look at how racialized women workers experience working with Latinx survivors of sexual violence, in hopes of gathering their narratives. My research question is: “How do racialized women workers experience working with survivors of sexual violence from the Latinx community?”. This research touches upon themes of self-care, forms of resistance, and captures social workers’ experiences in the field, within the sector of sexual violence.

I believe that my work is a step towards filling in the gaps of knowledge and literature available in centering the voices and experiences of racialized workers who work with Latinx women. In the Canadian context, Latinx women do not have much recognition in academia or in the creation of knowledge. I am using narrative research for my methodology, along with a thematic analysis of the voices of the women who I spoke to for the purpose of this study, which will be further discussed. This method honours traditions of oral story telling through open ended questions, complemented by an arts-based approach through a poem or written *testimonio* (testimony) provided by participants representing their experiences of working with survivors of sexual violence within the Latinx community. The poem or written *testimonio* (testimony) will be an expression of their experiences in this field. There will be words written in Spanish in order to honour the language in which the words and concepts originated. This research will also be a way to add to the little research and literature available centering Latin

American identities, and experiences of women workers in relation to the field of sexual violence. Working in the field of social work in Canada, I have realized that there has been an increased demand in having Spanish-speaking workers, which increases the relevance of this research to social work practice.

This research topic is important to me at a personal level as well. I identify as a Latina woman who has worked with sexual violence in the field as a survivor of sexual violence. Initially, I wanted to explore experiences of survivors in the Latinx community, and then I realized that I could look into the experiences of other women social workers who worked in this field, and could relate to my own experiences. When I worked in the field of sexual violence, I began to learn a lot about myself through the work. In my experience, I did not feel the agencies that I worked for were safe spaces for me to come out as a survivor and share the feelings and other reactions I was experiencing while encountering narratives from service users that were similar to my own narrative. Seeking ways to self-care and support myself became a priority. In my practice, I encountered limitations as a worker with a critical lens that clashed with Eurocentric therapeutic models and clinical work. I looked continuously for ways to resist, and questioned the work that was expected of me. I had to carefully resist due to the precarious nature of my job. I found that resisting within my interactions with service users, one-on-one was how I could facilitate critical perspectives when speaking with other Latinx survivors about their experiences.

Through my process of learning and unlearning, I developed knowledge about identities along with the history of Abya Yala (Latin America) and how identities inform someone's embodied experiences. This is important in the understanding of my healing,

as well as service users' processes to reach collective healing as a community, acknowledging traumatic histories and experiences. Having an opportunity to write this paper sheds light on the voices of racialized Latinx women who have had a range of experiences working with sexual violence in their own communities.

This major research paper will outline the experiences of racialized women workers working with sexual violence in the Latinx community. The theoretical framework draws from a critical race feminism theory as well as Latinx feminism, creating a *mestizaje* (mix) of theory. A narrative approach was used to collect data, along with an arts-based portion to honour traditional methods of knowledge sharing and expression. Data analysis included a thematic analysis to further look into the themes that emerged from the findings. Implications for future social work research and practice under an anti-oppressive lens are discussed in the conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework that I used is critical race feminism and as a secondary theoretical framework I used Latinx feminism. Using Latinx feminism complements critical race feminism by addressing experiences specific to the community about whom I have conducted this qualitative study. Critical race theory “challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make made toward objectivity, meritocracy, colourblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). It also recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of colour, challenging traditional research paradigms that centre whiteness (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). My work draws on the lived experiences of women of colour, and their work within the field of social work. Critical race theory has informed critical race feminism which will be further discussed. Critical race feminism and Latina feminism are lenses that allow for the voices of racialized women to be heard, focusing on their racialized and gendered experiences.

Critical race feminism emerged from critical race theory and legal studies (Few, 2007). The basic aspects of critical race theory that are crucial to understanding the praxis of critical race feminism are outlined as the following by Delgado and Stefancic (2001):

- (a) (racial and/or ethnic) identity is a product of social thought and is not objective, inherent, fixed, or necessarily biological;
- (b) individuals have potentially conflicting overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances;
- (c) racial and/or ethnic individuals and groups negotiate intersectionality simultaneously in their lives in relation to other groups and within the groups with which individuals are affiliated; and
- (d) minority status presumes a competence for minority writers

and theorists to speak about race and the experiences of multiple oppressions without essentializing those experiences. (p. 9)

Few (2007) addresses that scholars need to be more explicit about how we use and develop race-consciousness theories within our research processes. To relate this back to my research process, I am using critical race feminism and Latinx feminism to use and develop a theoretical framework with gendered race consciousness when analyzing and working with racialized women. Few (2007) acknowledges that critical race feminism pulls from a variety of feminist theoretical scholarship and has been informed by the writings of Black women and women of colour such as bell hooks, Angela Davis, Cherri Moraga, Gloria Anzaldua, and Audre Lorde to name a few. Critical race feminism, Latinx feminism, as well as Black feminism inform us that “[the] ‘truth’ of experience is multiple, contingent, partial, and situated” (Few, 2007, p.457). These theories centre the research process in a way that is critical and empowering for participants of colour acknowledging their truths. These theories acknowledge lived experiences, and centre the voices of racialized women resisting Eurocentric models and theoretical perspectives that centre whiteness and evidence-based information, differentiating these theories from feminist theory generally; it is this perspective of resistance that I aimed to use in this research paper.

Critical race feminism in Canada specifically has more explicitly engaged in the experiences of Indigenous Peoples within the Canadian settler state, more so than in other countries (Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010). Critical race feminism engages in the possibilities and limits of an anti-colonial lens in this settler state, being Canada. Race and gender are understood as social constructions that order, constrain, and interlock with

other systems of power, privilege, and oppression, most notably Western patriarchy (St. Denis, 2013). Razack, Smith, and Thobani (2010) explain that critical race feminism, like critical race theory, interrogates, in a broader perspective, questions about race and gender through a critical emancipatory lens. This theoretical framework poses fundamental questions about the persistence of race and the “colour line” in the twenty-first century (Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010). The questions that are looked at through critical race feminism include questions about racialized, gendered, and relations in a race and gender neutral liberal state, and how these interlink with continuing coloniality and Indigenous dispossession in the settler state. Razack, Smith, and Thobani (2010) state that critical race feminism in Canada has become part of a movement and a constellation of theoretical standpoints in North America and around the world that also include Latinx critical theory, demonstrating that Latinx theoretical frameworks have already been linked to critical race feminism.

Critical race feminism is also relevant to anti-oppressive theoretical practice. Healy (2005) describes anti-oppressive practice as part of the critical social work tradition, and that this entails analysis and transformation of power relations at every level of social work practice. Anti-oppressive approaches view the issues faced by service users through a lens that deconstructs structural contexts of marginalization. Within critical social work practice and anti-oppressive theory, social workers are urged to facilitate the critical consciousness of those affected by systemic barriers and injustices (Healy, 2005). It is important to note that critical social work is an umbrella term that refers to the broad range of practice approaches that include, but are not limited to:

radical social work, feminist social work, anti-racist social work, and anti-oppressive social work (Healy, 2005).

As mentioned previously, the experiences that have been centered within my research is of racialized social workers working with Latinx women service users. While the study was open to any racialised workers in this field, both participants in the study identify themselves as Latinx social workers. Latinx feminism is really important for me to use as a theoretical framework, to make known Latinx scholars and to capture the experiences through two theoretical lenses that complement each other, as previously mentioned. Latinx feminism specifically works hand in hand with critical race feminism, as Latinx feminism focuses on a population with diverse identities.

Latinx feminism has a transnational nature, which will provide a lens that looks at the experiences of Latina identified women's identities in different contexts (Reyes, 2014). Latinx feminism is continuing to evolve, and its roots are in Chicana Feminisms that had its early stages in the 1980s (Flores & Garcia, 2009). The transnational piece is missing within critical race feminism, which is important to acknowledge when interacting with racialized women with transnational identities, as it is a key concept within my research that the participants identify with, influencing their practice. Sanchez (2009) uses Chicana feminism to inform their study and determines that transnational lives are often not recognized by "the status quo, general public, schools, or mainstream literature" (p. 88) among others.

Rupi Kuar (2014) describes the experience of transnationalism in her poem "first generation immigrant":

they have no idea what it is like  
to lose home at risk of  
never finding home again  
have your entire life  
split between two lands and  
become the bridge between two countries (p. 11)

The poem provides an insight on the impact of having experiences that cross borders and are split between two lands figuratively and literally.

Anzaldúa (1990), a Latina feminist scholar, speaks to the need of theories that will “rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis...” (p. xxv-xxvi). She continues on to discuss the way that in mixing theories and creating new ones, we create new categories for those who have been left out of existing theories. Anzaldúa (1990) calls this *mestizaje* theories. Sanchez (2009) speaks to “homemade theories” (p. 86) that they developed through their study, and relates it back to Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) concept of *conocimientos* (knowings) which are essentially alternate ways of knowing that make room for reflection and action to create that knowledge that dismantles and challenges hegemony.

Monture (2010) speaks to the way that marginalized bodies are continually silenced and rendered invisible through the failure to take issues of race and social oppression seriously, and through the negotiation of multiple lived experiences with alternative knowledges and layers within the Canadian context. Using critical race feminism and Latinx feminism together also work to fill in gaps that each theory on their own may have. In my process of further understanding Latinx feminism, I found that it

centers identities in a transnational context, looking at the experiences of women who have a history of not belonging in a western society, but who also have experiences of not belonging within the contexts of their homelands as expressed in Rupi Kuar's poem above (Kuar, 2014). The experiences become intertwined with identity, shedding light to the struggles of women, like myself and my mother, who I have seen struggle to adhere to cultural standards within the Latinx community, and struggle to navigate the systemic inequities present in countries like the United States of America or Canada. Both theories together create an intersectional lens where one theory looks at race and women and the other theory looks at the experiences of a specific group that also fall under the spectrum of racialized women. Intersectionality is a crucial concept to include through the theoretical frameworks that I have chosen for my research as our embodied experiences are made up of layers of our social locations in relation to interlocking systems of oppression (Moore, 2012). In my research, intersectionality and the complexity of identity are discussed as the participants speak to their experiences rooted from their skin colour, their socioeconomic status, as well as their gender among other aspects of their identity. Through Latinx feminism and critical race feminism lenses the interlocking systems and identities are represented, and specifically centre Latinx experiences.

The practice approaches of critical social work align with the theoretical perspective of critical race feminism as it is inclusive of anti-racist and feminist social work. Within anti-racist approaches, anti-racist social workers sought to transform social work practices towards recognition and collective responses to racial injustices (Dominelli, 1988). Healy (2005) cites Dominelli (1988) when speaking to how critical social workers were concerned that issues of racial injustice were "inadequately

addressed by classed-focused analysis” (p. 177). In light of these concerns, anti-racist approaches emerged during the 1980’s as a necessary extension, where anti-racist social workers brought forth awareness surrounding the way racial oppression was and still is a significant and distinct form of oppression (Healy, 2005). Dominelli (1988) speaks to the way social workers’ attention has typically been around resolving service users’ personal struggles, and how social workers teach service users to change their behaviours, and facilitating service users to conform to “acceptable” standards. Dominelli (1998) explains that for Black clients, white social workers tend to ignore the specific circumstances and embodied experiences through which racism affects the livelihoods of Black people by depriving them of their basic human rights. Healy (2005) places emphasis on the fact that a specific kind of oppression will not provide the basis for commonality, and that necessities differ, as racial oppression cannot be assumed as the basis of commonality in all contexts.

Relating this back to my research study, through an anti-oppressive practice approach, it is essential to recognize both commonalities and differences between embodied experiences of oppressions. Within my study, I interviewed Latinx women and use critical race feminism and Latinx feminism as a means to reflect the experiences of the communities that these women work with. As mentioned previously, Latinx communities represent a range of races and identities. Approaching the research with a praxis that acknowledges and recognizes those commonalities and differences between embodied experiences will centre the experiences of Latinx women through the stories gathered and address the commonalities and differences within that community in its own way to avoid essentializing.

Research in my chosen topic is almost non-existent as will be outlined in the literature review. Articles and studies focusing on the embodied experiences of Latinx women are often times not considered “academic” as these articles center lived experiences and experiential knowledge. Chicana/Latinx feminisms have earned a space in academia, and their concepts have been cited throughout this paper. Through Chicana/Latinx feminism, scholars have created their own *conocimientos* (knowings) (Anzaldua, 1999) or *mestizaje* (mixing theories) (Anzaldua, 1990) to create an accurate depiction of their embodiments. Through my use of critical race feminism and Latinx feminism I have created a *mestizaje*. This literature addresses Canadian transnational experiences for Latinx women through the key concepts mentioned above from both theoretical frameworks.

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

As mentioned previously, there is not a lot of literature available on this specific topic, or literature and research available on the Latinx community, especially research that engages in the language “Latinx” as it is also fairly new. To begin my search of literature, I had to search different key words and pieces of my research topic to make my own connections. In the process of looking for literature, I began to search “sexual violence” and found articles that looked at types of sexual violence and the effects of these on young women, which included services and programs provided to women who have experienced sexual violence.

To create the link within my research topic, I then began to look for articles that spoke to Latin American women in the Canadian context. I used “Hispanic” and “Latin American” instead of “Latinx” to find articles pertaining to this community. The literature was limited; however, I was able to find some research on Latin American women’s experiences with trauma, conducted by Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013). In relation to Latin American identity, I looked for articles that reflect the intricacies of Latin American identity that inform a range of experiences of marginalization (Ali & Toner, 2005; Carranza 2007; 2008; 2013). From this work, I am able to gather insight on how Latin American women experience trauma, and tie that to trauma from sexual violence as well, which could lead to highlighting the importance of services for Latin American women who have experienced sexual violence. This could also result in highlighting the experiences of Latin American women working within the field, coming from a range of embodied experiences within the Latinx diaspora.

Further connecting my research topic to the literature, I looked at programs that centered specific ethnic communities as a platform to look at how it could benefit communities to have services that acknowledge their histories of oppression of specific groups (Fotheringham & Tomlinson, 2009; Matsuoka, 2015; McDowell, 2004). I will first discuss Latinx identity (Ali & Toner, 2005; Carranza, 2007; 2008; 2013; Poran, 2002). I will then look at sexual violence and survivors through a critical lens (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Barrick et al., 2012; Davidson et al., 2014; Garcia-Linares et al., 2005; Hossain et al. (2014). Finally, I will examine articles that suggest cultural competency in service delivery (Fotheringham & Tomlinson, 2009; Matsuoka, 2015; McDowell, 2004).

### **Latin American Identity**

To provide a historical background of identity within Latin America, the Latin diaspora is one that is quite diverse. Historically, the Americas were known as “Abya Yala”, the original name for the land, meaning “Continent of Life” in the Indigenous Kuna language (Becker, 2008). The Spanish colonized Abya Yala, and then the slave trade was brought to Latin America shortly after (Williams, 1999). This created a multitude of layers of oppression within the Latin American context, which has also become a transnational issue within this community as people have left Latin America. Cultural practices and values are linked to the historical implications throughout the findings. Culture is influenced by this history, and is captured in the experiences of the Latinx women working with survivors of sexual violence. The findings and research articles found speak to the range of skin colours and identities within the Latin American community however, they provide no historical context (Ali & Toner, 2005; Carranza, 2007; 2008; 2013). The term “Hispanic”, as previously mentioned, was used in my

searches to find relevant information. “Hispanic” is a whitewashed term, imposed by the Spanish colonizers (Maldonado, 2016). The term “Hispanic” historically does not include Indigenous and African identities in Latin America, which make up most of the Latin American identity. The term is only inclusive to the white Spanish colonizers. I have used Latinx, or Latin American throughout this paper to identify the community and distance it from the term “Hispanic”.

Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) and Ali and Toner (2005) look at research relevancy to cultures specific to from the Caribbean, including Latin American countries. The themes connecting this article are cultural values, and how those inform beliefs, values, and how services are accessed by different communities. The perception, and understanding, of concepts such as abuse and trauma were key components of the research. An interpretive paradigm came more about within the qualitative research studies, where the understanding of phenomenon was the purpose of the research. Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) used interpretive paradigms through her qualitative research to center experiences. The interpretive paradigm within her qualitative research was necessary to grasp the way participants understood their experiences, in using meaning over measurement. Poran (2002) addresses women’s relationships with their bodies under the white gaze. Identity is a fluid and complex concept where participants chose how they identify in relation to cultural values, history, and their experiences with trauma shared through a qualitative approach. Culture impacts the way in which the white gaze is portrayed as Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) has touched upon “machismo”, stemming from patriarchy, and a white gaze rooted in colonialism.

In Carranza's (2007; 2008; 2013) studies, the common perceptions that came out of these groups were that structural issues such as abuse and trauma, were internalized, and individualized. The structural issues that contribute to abuse, trauma and victim blaming are rooted in power and patriarchy, stemming from colonization. The participants in both researchers' studies saw abuse as their fault.. Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) found that in the Latin American community, female chastity was a core value that participants wanted to maintain. Self-blame and chastity are both concepts that were internalized in these instances. The participants were mothers and their daughters. Most mothers reported that respect, obedience, and virginity were important values to maintain in Canada. The results revealed a significant congruency between mothers' and daughters' perceptions about the values that are being maintained and those that are going through transformation (Carranza, 2013). These concepts are relevant in relation to transnational identities, and how there is an expectation to maintain certain values when leaving their place of origin as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter.

Relating identity, culture, and perceptions of structural issues to coping mechanisms is also a point that arose within the articles and the findings. Processes of healing and coping can vary among different communities. Within Latin America there is diversity of identities, which also reflects the diversity of cultures within the community and their traditions in relation to healing practices. There is not one way to cope with feelings arising from traumatic incidents. Carranza's (2008) findings supported the notion that strategies used by Latin American women to cope with their experiences of trauma and loss were often at odds with North American conceptualizations of trauma and recovery. This is an important piece in social work practice, and acknowledges the need

for services that have the abilities to create spaces for diverse communities to receive services. Carranza (2008) writes that “the coping mechanisms used by the women in this study reflect their resilience and the centrality of memory and history in experiences and expressions of trauma, which social workers may need to consider interventions aiming at the collective healing of an entire community” (p. 35). The findings support that practices where histories of trauma are acknowledged is necessary. This differs from cultural competency as cultural competency argues that we can all have the tools to work with all communities when in fact we cannot. .

Within the findings, Carranza (2008) concluded that changes at the collective level may facilitate individual and interpersonal changes in the Latin American community. It is important to note that, as workers, we must work in solidarity with the service users, and their processes of healing, and coping through trauma. Service providers could support service users in their process in way that promote autonomy, wherein identity is acknowledged by supporting cultural values such as the importance of both individual and collective healing for Latinx women. This is where a cultural piece may come into play attaching it to identity to acknowledge the vast approaches communities use in their journeys.

Carranza’s (2007; 2008; 2013) research centers trauma and women from the Latin American community, specifically women who come from El Salvador. Carranza (2007) acknowledges through her research and findings the importance of staying connected to roots, culture and ancestry. Staying connected to these aspects creates a stronger sense of belonging with relation to Latin American identity in North America. An important finding was the importance in passing on the pride of knowing their racial ancestry as

“mestizos” (Indigenous and Spanish mix) (Carranza, 2007). The pride of keeping culture and language alive was also important. Knowing this reinforces the need for services that represent these values, and funding for programs in the Latin American community in Canada. The feeling of belonging to community was noted within Carranza’s (2007) findings as a way to resist negative stereotypes, and anti-immigrant sentiment in Canada.

In Carranza’s (2007; 2008; 2013) research articles, there are concerns surrounding essentialism of Salvadorian culture as well as essentializing Latin American culture, based on the analysis of this group given the diversity of identities. Within the articles there is no mention as to whether the women interviewed identified with Indigenous descent or if they were Afro-Latina identifying. This is problematic as it repeats erasure in history, and leaves out marginalized voices that need to be heard to promote reconciliation.

Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) demonstrated resistance within her writing by not translating concepts of healing identified by women. Certain concepts are not meant to be translated; their meanings and symbols are not existent in an English-speaking society and are not intended for western culture to understand. Using Latinx concepts in Spanish is a practice of resistance that Latinx women scholars and feminists use within their writings. Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) lacked acknowledgement of Indigenous roots within the Latin American diaspora in her writing which exemplifies erasure of Indigenous roots and communities along with the history of violence perpetuated onto Indigenous communities. Carranza (2007; 2008; 2013) provides ways in which social workers can decolonize their practice, however, I believe that there is risk of essentialism and interpretation of cultural competency, as discussed further in the cultural competency

section later in this chapter. Carranza was used throughout this literature review as her work is the most relevant to my research topic. Carranza speaks to trauma within the Latina American community in the Canadian context.

Poran (2002), found that there is a significant difference in Latina, Black and white women's relationships with their bodies, and their relationships to dominant cultural standards of beauty. This ties into the piece regarding identity, as it is how women construe their identities while also resisting the imposed standards of beauty within their own complex identities. Participants in this study spoke about how their beauty was defined: physical beauty, or personality traits as beauty, among others (Poran, 2002). These responses were evenly distributed across the races of participants. This study suggested that racialized women and white women are more unaware of racism within the beauty realm specifically. I would look at it as perhaps women are more aware and are becoming resistant to Western standards of beauty. Women are able to see their physical beauty despite pressures of conforming to Eurocentric standards of beauty as discussed previously.

Poran's (2002) article does lack making the connection to the chosen theory of critical race feminism. The researchers spoke to aspects of this theoretical framework informing their work, however did not further connect this lens being the lens in which they conducted their work. The article was also missing a lack of connection with the perceptions of beauty and how these perceptions intersect with marginalization, and specifically speak to internalized oppression and racism through the white gaze. The article does not acknowledge that there is a white gaze that imposes eurocentric beauty

standards onto women of colour, which affects their perception of themselves, and in turn their identities.

### **Sexual Violence**

In my research, I have centered the themes of the topic in an interpretive paradigm to capture the experiences, and phenomenon of racialized women social workers providing services to survivors of sexual violence. As a critique to the articles written (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Barrick et al., 2012; Davidson et al., 2014; Garcia-Linares et al., 2005; Hossain et al. 2014), I found that the language was problematic throughout the articles. Instead of using the term “survivors” for those who have survived sexual violence, the word “victim” was used, whereas the term survivors can be a term of empowerment. I believe that the term survivor avoids re-victimizing, and places emphasis on survivorship acknowledging the resilience of survivors. Garcia-Linares et al. (2015) uses language such as "battered women" to refer to women who have experienced violence. This is problematic, and triggering language, that can cause an emotional reaction to some women as this language is violent. “Battered” implies physical violence, but cannot be an umbrella term for all forms of violence. The constant use of "battered" throughout the article dehumanizes women, and their diverse experiences with violence.

The articles based on research on sexual violence on campuses in the United States (Barrick et al., 2012; Hossain et al., 2014) did not speak to the fact that from their findings there was a higher reported rape of racialized women (Barrick et al., 2012; Hossain et al., 2014). The connection between the histories of colonization, slavery, racism and sexism and the findings that predominantly racialized women reported being survivors of sexual violence is not made in all of the articles. History is important when

analyzing issues where racialized women are overrepresented in countries that were founded on slave trade, and colonization (Barrick et al., 2012). The implication of historical trauma on marginalized communities has to be acknowledged within oppressive systems of whiteness.

The research based on experiences of survivors of sexual violence is research that does not take into account the cultural values, or variations of experiences due to values as mentioned above. Davidson et al. (2014) found that amongst the population of survivors, sexual violence is associated with higher levels of avoidance and revenge, and lower levels of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of uncontrollable situations. Cultural backgrounds were not acknowledged or addressed, which limits the depth of what we can know about these survivors. In this way, this study is essentializing women despite their culturally differently values on lack of forgiveness, and that women are motivated to retaliate. I do believe that this is a biased assumption based simply on the participants who were not of diverse cultural backgrounds who may perceive trauma and process trauma differently as noted in the study.

Garcia-Linares et al. (2015) continues the conversation on how sexual violence impacts women's health, however, concludes that it is necessary to obtain objective information about the types of violence experienced, and how relationships began with perpetrators. This is another form of essentializing experiences and understandings of violence and trauma. It is essentialized through a white gaze, and can be interpreted as "victim blaming". The white gaze perceives sexual violence through a Eurocentric lens, naming these experiences as an individual problem, instead of looking at how society and communities have created an environment in which individuals are blamed for

experiencing sexual violence. I see victim blaming happening by the way Garcia-Linares et al. (2015) write that it is a need to find out how women's relationships began with the perpetrator, which I argue is not necessary when centering survivors' experiences with the violence. Another critique to both of the studies conducted by Baird and Jenkins (2013) and Barrick et al. (2012) is that it does not mention that "risky behaviors" do not justify sexual violence, and it is deemed as a reason for sexual violence. The critiques of Garcia-Linares' (2015) study are that there is no diversity within the sample to differentiate between experiences of sexual violence influenced by socioeconomic status, race, or education. The research was centered around estimating forgiveness of survivors of sexual violence, however, there was a lack of clarity about whether the participants were referring to forgiveness of the perpetrators of violence or referring to forgiving themselves for previously blaming themselves for the violence they experienced. I would have liked to see information on how participants were taken care of in case of triggers, and what resources were provided if any.

Baird and Jenkins (2013), Barrick et al. (2012) and Hossain et al. (2014) focused on looking at sexual violence on college campuses. Their research provided statistics on the number of females that have experienced sexual violence on campuses, and categorized their findings based on ethnicities. Although the statistics were provided to demonstrate the relationship between ethnicity and rates of sexual violence, the findings did not state that racialized women identified experiencing sexual violence more than white women on college campuses. In Barrick et al.'s (2012) findings, they acknowledged that race and age were associated with sexual violence by outlining that young racialized women are at high risk of experiencing sexual violence. Hossain et al.

(2014) looked at the correlation between depression and experiences of sexual violence, which acknowledged the vulnerability of women who suffer from mental health challenges.

Baird and Jenkins (2013) and Barrick et al. (2012) named drugs, multiple partners, prior victimization, sexual orientation, alcohol, and mental health as measures of vulnerability to experiencing sexual violence. Baird and Jenkins (2013) did not associate race to any type of sexual assault, however, Barrick et al. (2012) focused on the historical, and racial factors of being Black and being more vulnerable to sexual assault. Baird and Jenkins' (2013) research leaves out part of the population of female college students by starting the age at 18 instead of age 17. Another critique to both of the studies conducted is they do not mention that "risky behaviors" do not justify sexual violence, and it is deemed as a reason for sexual violence.

### **Cultural Competency and Program Delivery**

The final theme in relation to the findings in the literature was looking into program delivery and cultural competency. When searching for articles and research on cultural-specific services, the theme of cultural competency kept coming up (Fotheringham & Tomlinson, 2009; Matsuoka, 2015; McDowell, 2004). Throughout the articles, there was no critique of "multiculturalism", and how that is a concept that masks the issues of racism in Canada, to portray unity. None of the empirical research articles that I found in my search surrounding cultural specific services mentioned the critique of cultural competency (Fotheringham & Tomlinson, 2009; Matsuoka, 2015; McDowell, 2004). With this comes the notion of cultural competency in our practice as social workers (Pon, 2009). Pon (2009) explains that cultural competency is a new form of

racism. There is no way that a worker can be equipped to work perfectly with all populations and communities, due to the ongoing histories of violence, and colonization, and the embodied experiences that come with certain identities.. This is can be considered racism if we assume that workers can be trained to understand and be “competent” in understanding issues faced by different cultures. This is problematic because it can be considered new racism under the assumptions that all workers can be trained to know how to work with all cultures.

In McDowell’s (2004) research about training workers, the findings validated that there was importance in engaging in racial dialogue in service delivery and programs. McDowell’s (2004) research was conducted with students going into the field. The discussions on race began in the classroom, which is reflective on how these interactions of addressing race continue once students have gone into the field. McDowell (2004) found that a number of participants believed their cultural experiences and worldviews were marginalized by an emphasis on European American norms. This was particularly true when “multiculturalism” seemed like an “add on” rather than integrated into the curriculum and class discussions (McDowell, 2004). The importance of having discussions around race and the implications of race are emphasized.

Looking at social workers, and their narratives within the field, Jenkins et al. (2011) discussed the reasons why service providers choose to work with traumatized individuals, and their levels of stress. This research is important in capturing the narratives of workers. Jenkins et al. (2011) found that individuals who chose to work with traumatized individuals because of their personal trauma reflected more distress, compared to those who did not identify trauma as their motivator and rather chose to go

into the field because of a need to seek personal meaning and higher purpose. Racialized women's experiences are embodied experiences that they carry every day. Their bodies hold trauma differently than white women workers due to histories of colonization, slavery, and intergenerational trauma stemming from other systemic issues as discussed in Barrick et al. (2012). I believe that the work has different meaning to those who have experiences of marginalization. The work is personal, and our personal experiences provide a variety of insights into the work. Racialized bodies have been in the forefront of liberation movements, fighting against systems that directly disadvantage them. Jenkins et al. (2011) did not provide any insight or focus on experiences of racialized women workers and does not address the importance of self-care.

It would have been a good addition to the study to focus on solely workers who have experienced trauma and how that motivated them to become workers. Quantitative measures were used to measure the levels of distress of workers in the study conducted by Jenkins et al. (2011). Qualitative study would be more appropriate for a question such as this one if the purpose was to capture the experiences. Capturing their stories would be more powerful to add to the numerical data gathered during this study to capture the piece of lived experiences and the stories of the workers in relation to their experiences in the field.

Fotheringham and Tomlinson (2009) speak to program delivery and found that collaboration in services for women who have experienced sexual assault is essential. Program delivery is tied to cultural competency, as cultural competency is a value that is upheld in agencies through their service deliveries with service users. Through this, Fotheringham and Tomlinson (2009) concluded that the participants in this study shared

similar thoughts, concluding that treatment models need to mirror women's realities. This is relevant as women's realities are informed by interlocking systems of oppression, and intersectional identities (Moore, 2012). Intersectional identities play a role in how society can disadvantage and advantage people based on their embodied identities and experiences. In relation to sexual violence, as Barrick et al. (2012) discussed, the way in which a woman who is also of colour is more likely to have experienced sexual violence than a white woman (Moore, 2012). This is where cultural competency becomes relevant in relation to service delivery of sexual violence- the intersection of survivor and race and gender among others. The cultural competency piece is put in place to address the racial identity within an experience of sexual violence specific to a cultural group.

Although this article (Fotheringham & Tomlinson, 2009) encouraged the collaboration of services, the findings concluded that the risk was a 'blurring' of services meaning that there may not be distinction between different services being delivered to service users. I disagree with this because identities are complex, and there are no rigid boundaries to our identities, so it is important to collaborate with services to assure that women are being serviced in a way that reflects their experiences and identities. The research did not include input from the service users who are directly affected by changes in service delivery when looking at collaborative service delivery. The research spoke to senior level management, and did not include input from front-line workers either who interact with service users, and deliver the services. This is an issue because those at senior level management are typically those who hold power and privilege. The research study has no mention of racialized and/or Indigenous women when referring to statistics on women who have survived sexual violence, and provides no further analysis of themes

addressing intersectional identities of women who experience sexual violence and accessing services differently. Lastly, the research does not mention trans women inclusivity with the suggestion of collaborating services, nor in the analysis section.

To continue on service delivery, Matsuoka (2015) conducted in a study on a program that was for Japanese-Canadian service users. The findings provided insight into the meaning of recovery for Japanese-Canadian older adults within the program. The findings centered the impact on how older adults reaffirmed their self-worth by confirming their identities. Through Matsuoka's (2015) findings, it is also reaffirmed that there is importance in service delivery geared for communities, facilitated by their own communities.

There is an assumption within Matsuoka's (2015) research that participants may identify as Japanese-Canadian. Participants should be asked what they identify as rather than assuming their identities. Looking at a person's specific ethnicity without taking into account how their time in Canada may influence a shift in values through adapting to Canadian context is also an important element of identity and, therefore, needs to be taken into consideration within culturally geared services. The author (Matsuoka, 2015) did not detail how they made a determination of participant identity. The article does speak about "cultural sensitivity" as mentioned before, but does not mention the critique of cultural competency despite identifying as "critical" social workers (Pon, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The articles I found pertaining to my topic was very diverse, addressing a variety of issues related to sexual violence. However, looking at such a diverse range of articles and research pertaining to the themes of my research topic was helpful in realizing that

there is not much available pertaining to my chosen topic of interest. My goal through my research is to provide work centering Latinx identities using inclusive language and acknowledging experiences of identities. I would like to find more information to continue to challenge the notion of cultural competency, and be able to create a space where identities are acknowledged within community. In conclusion, based on the literature review done thus far, experiences of sexual violence and race need a space to be heard, and service providers' need to engage in racial dialogues. There is a gap in the literature of the experiences of racialized women working within a field that requires emotional labour. The question guiding my research is: "How do racialized women workers experience working with survivors of sexual violence from the Latinx community?"

## Chapter 4: Methodology

As mentioned previously, my methodology is a narrative inquiry with an arts-based component and a thematic analysis. I used critical race feminism to inform my theoretical framework to address racial, sexual, and class subordinations and aim towards positive engagement with women of colour (Vakalahi & Starks, 2010). The methodology I have used is informed by this critical race feminism lens to recognize the experiential knowledge of people of colour, challenging traditional research paradigms (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This goes hand-in hand with my topic of choice as I aim to have positive engagement with women of colour in the process of centering their experiences. Using interviewing as a method to gather information honors oral story-telling traditions through my open-ended questions, and falls under a method of narrative methodology. To complement this, I asked the participants to incorporate an arts-based component by asking for a poem or written *testimonio* (testimony) that represents their feelings and experiences and to acknowledge their freedom of expression around working with survivors of sexual violence within the Latinx community. As a method to gather data, Knowles and Cole (2008) discuss how arts based research is an umbrella term for many methodologies, including narrative, which can include poems and other creative outlets. The use of the arts-based component validates traditional methods of knowledge sharing in the Latinx communities - drawing on lived experiences of women of colour (Anzaldúa, 1990). One participant in this study agreed to provide a poem after the interview.

Qualitative narrative research inquiry is rooted in different disciplines (Creswell, 2013). “Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals, about individuals’ lives and told experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 71). This is an important element to relate back

to what I aim to do within my research study as it demonstrates how this methodology works well with the topic of research and the theoretical framework, along with the arts-based piece.

I collected stories from two Latinx individuals who have shared their experiences with me orally, as well as through *testimonio*, honouring those told experiences as discussed through the key concepts of both Latinx feminism and critical race feminism. Creswell (2013) also mentions that there may be a strong collaborative feature of narrative research as the story emerges through the dialogue between the researcher and the participant. Elements of narrative inquiry mentioned above, such as a story emerging through dialogue between researcher and participant, and centering identities of individuals, line up with the praxis of critical race feminism and, Latinx feminism discussed in the theoretical framework chapter. The elements of narrative inquiry also provide the opportunity to project the embodied experiences of working with sexual violence in the Latinx community through allowing space to gather narrative stories in various forms such as interviews and art.

As previously mentioned, I have used a thematic analysis, where I have identified the themes expressed by the participants. Creswell (2013) cites Casey (1995/1996) in their concepts of types of narrative. These types of narrative include “oral history” which is explained in Creswell’s (2013) book as consisting of gathering personal reflections of events, and may include a specific contextual focus as the one in my research topic. Traditional ways of passing on history and stories orally within communities is thus honoured in my work as I seek stories from the participants about their past and current experiences in providing services. The contextual focus in this research study is the

experiences of racialized workers working with Latinx women who have experienced sexual violence. Creswell (2013) points out that “narrative can be guided by interpretive frameworks, and that it may advocate for Latin Americans through using *testimonios*, or report stories of women using feminist interpretations” (p. 73). Muncey (2010) points out that narrative in this form may be told to disrupt dominant discourses. These concepts hold a clear connection to my theoretical framework, my methods, as well as my chosen topic. *Testimonios* fit well with narrative inquiry; using oral history within the narrative is a way of acknowledging traditional forms of production of knowledge within the Latinx community. As part of the process of conducting narrative research, it is important to determine if the research topic fits narrative research, and its ability to capture life experiences (Creswell, 2013).

I have gathered data by conducting interviews with participants and then asking them to write poems, to reflect their narratives. Narrative focuses on telling the stories of individual experiences shedding light on the identities of individuals (Creswell, 2013). It is important to also note that narrative stories are gathered through many different forms of data, including interviews and expressions in various forms of art (Creswell, 2013). There are multiple ways to analyze narrative stories: thematic (analysis based on what was said), structural (the nature of telling the story), or dialogic/ performance (who the story is directed toward) (Creswell, 2013).

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) explain critical race methods centering experiential knowledge such as knowledge stemming from lived experiences. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) discuss legitimizing the experiential knowledge of people of colour, and drawing on the lived experiences by using methods such as narratives, *cuentos* (stories), and

*testimonios* (testimonies). This method of gathering data has been directly linked to critical race theories and is considered a critical race method as noted above. *Testimonios* and *cuentos* are the main use of expression within research and academia centering Chicana/Latinx feminism. These methods are also the dominant form of production of knowledge used by influential Latinx women who have been recognized for their work. “This Bridge Called My Back” (2015) is a book that was put together by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, two Chicana/Latinx feminists, that showcases the writings of radical women of colour. The book demonstrates a decolonizing, transformative approach to producing and sharing knowledge that not only dismantles and addresses sexism, gender, racism, sexuality, etc. but acknowledges the embodied experiences of women of colour through the collection of *testimonios*, *cuentos*, poems, open letters, and more in the book.

The purpose of using an arts-based component within my research study is to create a similar empowering, liberating, and decolonizing space within academia as radical women of colour have done before me in these collections of writings. Centering myself in my major research paper will be through this lens as well. I incorporated my own *testimonio* by writing about my connection with the chosen topic. Using this method is also a form of resistance to Eurocentric models of gathering data and producing knowledge as Chicana/Latinx feminists have done to continue to center experiential knowledge by centering voices and resisting “traditional” ways of data collection and validating lived experiences. The resistance of Eurocentric models of gathering data occurs through incorporating my own *testimonio* (testimony), having an arts-based piece and allowing for the participants to take the interview questions in the direction they

chose. It is evident how critical race feminism and Latinx feminism are linked to these methods through the way that Anzaldua's concepts of *conocimientos* (knowings) line up with the values of critical race methods.

In relation to recruitment, I have used purposive sampling, combined with snowball recruitment where I sought out participants through relevant agencies such as Rape Crisis Centres, and potential participants might have also passed on the recruitment information to others. The inclusion criteria for my study is that participants must have worked in the service delivery for survivors of sexual violence within the Latinx community in Ontario for at least five years, they must be female identified, and must be racialized women, preferably Latinx women. The first step of my recruitment strategy was to send out an e-mail providing information on the study I am conducting to agencies that provide services pertaining to sexual violence in the Latinx community, and asked for them to forward the e-mail to others as well. Through this, the e-mail was forwarded to the workers within the agency that provide this service. Programs and services provided by the agencies I looked into are public information, and had the e-mails of workers for certain programs on their websites.

An issue I encountered was potentially knowing workers that service this community, as the Latinx community in Toronto is small, especially being part of the activist community. However, in using this recruitment strategy, my information was provided to potential participants through the third party, and they contacted me directly if they were interested in participating. These points were important in the recruitment process in order to ensure that participants were voluntary, and did not feel a sense of obligation to participate due to prior relationships in community. At this point, they asked

me any questions that they had about the study. The recruitment e-mail included information on the arts-based component, and the interview. The participants were given the option to complete the arts-based piece prior to the interview, during, or after to allow an opportunity for participants the freedom of time for that component.

## Chapter 5: Findings

The recruitment process was done through e-mail. I gathered e-mails that were available publicly on websites of agencies and people who worked in programs that could meet the criteria. About four people expressed interest through e-mail. Out of the four participants, two were travelling for a period of time and, given the limitation for the major research paper timeline, I accepted that having two participants would be sufficient. After analyzing the findings with two participants, I feel that the purpose of the major research paper is fulfilled, as it is simply the beginning of providing knowledge to readers on this topic.

The following paragraphs will discuss the themes that arose from the interviews with the participants. The participants discussed similar themes in different ways, and at times with a similar perspective. The themes present in the findings are: bridging service gaps, cultural competency, the diversity of Latinx identities, oppressive systems, cultural and religious influences, trauma, work-life balance and self-care, supportive work environments, and connection to community. The two participants of this research study both worked in the counseling sector, servicing survivors of trauma including sexual violence. The participants both identified themselves as Latinx women who are both social workers who predominantly work with women in the Latinx community and chose to use pseudonyms for the purpose of this study to ensure their confidentiality. The study was open to any racialized workers during recruitment, however there were only Latinx participants. As part of the findings, Maia agreed to provide a poem to express her experiences.

## **Bridging Service Gaps**

Maia and Alicia both spoke about the importance of bridging service gaps in the Canadian context when providing services to service users. They spoke about bridging the gaps in relation to language, the precarious status of service users, and aiding service users in navigating a foreign system.

Alicia continuously mentioned the need to have Spanish-speaking services as she experiences working with service users that have recently arrived in Canada and do not speak English. Alicia said that service users express that it is difficult for them to receive services because of their precarious immigration status in Canada, and their inability to communicate in English. Alicia expressed:

I've always been interested in the topic [working with trauma and sexual violence within the Latinx community] and basically because of the need. The need to have Spanish-speaking services for people who speak Spanish because most of the clients that come here do not know how to speak English, sometimes do not have status and it is very difficult to receive services.

Alicia connected the need for Spanish-speaking services to her job security where she explained that being fluent in Spanish has helped her in attaining work in this field. Alicia stated that she became involved in working with the Latinx community because “there was a position opening in this organization and I speak Spanish”. Alicia’s job required her to speak Spanish. Under bridging gaps, Alicia discussed the need for advocacy. She stated:

You have to advocate more, because most of [the] clients do not have a voice, so I find myself uhm helping them connect to other services, or just communicating to

other workers the need to have people who are aware of the necessities and barriers that the clients have.

Alicia connected the need for advocating for service users as a large part of her role as a Spanish-speaking service provider. A way she actively bridges service gaps is through advocating for service users and connecting them to services. Alicia further described and stated the barriers that act as service gaps for Spanish-speaking service users:

Ah well lack of language, uh lack of Canadian status, lack of Canadian education, sometimes even education in general, uhm violence, lots of trauma, a lot of people come here as refugees or escaping a really bad situation back home so they come from experiences that are tough to being with...

Alicia spoke about the importance in providing a voice to service users who have survived something in their lives such as traumas in their home countries, and are now facing the issue of having a precarious status in Canada. Their ability to vocalize their needs are hindered due to language, and gaps in their education in relation to their traumas or inability to read for instance, when seeking services.

Maia identifies herself as a survivor of sexual violence. She speaks to bridging service gaps through a similar lens as Alicia noted. Maia acknowledges the importance of making service accessible through being able to provide services in different languages, such as Spanish in this case, and culturally connecting with service users within our own communities. Maia stated the following: “I understand having services that bridge gaps in relation to language, and certain cultural customs, however within the Latinx community there are so many languages and identities”. This led Maia to speak about how she

differentiates the notion of bridging service gaps and the notion of cultural competency. Her beliefs around cultural competency differentiate from the beliefs around cultural competency that Alicia had.

### **Cultural Competency**

Maia and Alicia both brought up the concept of cultural competency in their interviews. The way they spoke about cultural competency was quite different. Alicia addressed cultural competency as a tool that was necessary for agencies to adapt to make services accessible for service users. Maia approached the concept of cultural competency by critiquing how it has been implemented in various agencies. Maia speaks to her process of understanding cultural competency:

When I was young haha, and began working in the field I was a huge advocate of cultural competency, then I learnt a little thing or two. I feel that we are always learning and evolving. I understand having services that bridge gaps in relation to language and certain cultural customs, however within the Latinx community there are so many languages and identities, it is impossible to be “culturally competent” in Latinx identity. I learn more and more about my community every day.

Maia further connects her analysis of cultural competency addressing identity and the implication of history on current day issues. In the interview Maia said that she feels that through the notion of cultural competency often times her role is tokenized. The assumption of the agency she works with is that she is automatically competent to work with women that come from assumed Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. She spoke about how many agencies that claim to be culturally competent lack the

understanding or knowledge of historical implications. Maia stated the following: “I learn more about myself and my position as a worker when discussing traumatic incidents that have a huge historical connection”. Maia continues to share that she felt that approaching cultural competency in a way that assumed that all workers could be trained to be competent in working with all cultures would be a form of erasure of the histories of Black, Indigenous, and peoples of colour. Maia said: “Latinx identity is so complex. You have Afro-Latinos, and Indigenous folks, and a mix of the two along with the Spanish and more”. Maia said that this happens when agencies match workers with service users simply because of the language aspect: “Oh you speak Spanish, perfect it’s a match, they use cultural competency without looking into the history or the variety of bodies people are in that go hand in hand with their experiences”.

Alicia spoke about the agency that she currently works for and how cultural competency is embedded as a policy. Alicia described her duty to be a culturally competent worker as an expectation from the agency. She referred to it as part of her position to be culturally competent and provide culturally competent services. Her perception of cultural competency came from a place of respect for cultures:

I think that in this organizations, because it’s very culturally competent, we are able to be who we are. For example in other organizations maybe you cannot hug your clients, maybe you cannot kiss your clients, some organizations you can't even speak Spanish unless you are with your client. For example one day I went to a meeting and it was three Latina women, it was a manager and another worker who I was going to do a group with and me, and the manager says to me in my organization there is a policy that even if we are by ourselves we cannot speak

Spanish and have to speak English. So, I told her that here we could speak Spanish. I guess I'm very fortunate to be working in a place, that being from this cultural [sic], and respecting our cultural values, our cultural values are respected, and that's why people come here, because they feel that they can be themselves and there's a huge respect for their cultural [sic].

Alicia describes her workplace as culturally competent because it is a space that she feels people are respected for where they come from. She feels that practicing in a culturally competent space has not only facilitated her work with service users, but has also made her feel more comfortable as a Latinx woman in the field as her values are being respected as well. Alicia and Maia approached the notion of cultural competency differently. Alicia addressed it as a tool that was necessary for agencies to adapt to make services whereas Maia critiqued cultural competency and the way it has been implemented.

### **Diversity of Latinx Identities**

Alicia and Maia both identified as Latinx workers in the field, however, the experiences they described for themselves were different. Maia described herself as a brown Latinx woman that migrated to Canada as a young child with her parents where they struggled financially. Alicia is a white-passing Latinx woman that came from a high socioeconomic status and class to Canada with her husband. Alicia did not identify any difficulties in her migration process or upon her arrival to Canada as she spoke about being highly educated from Mexico, and already being fluent in English.

Maia discussed the complexity of identity within the Latinx community, and spoke about how acknowledging that there was such a large diversity was one of her forms of resistance as she tied this back to history. Maia explained the following:

As I mentioned before, the Latinx identity is so complex. You have Afro-Latinxs, and Indigenous folks. Latino is an ethnicity, not a race. I have light skinned privilege, but there are spaces in which I am either not ‘dark’ enough or not ‘white’ enough.

Maia discusses Latinx identities in relation to both herself and service users. She speaks about the diversity of the community to emphasize that these identities exist, and that there is not just one way to look or be Latinx and she does this within her work. Maia describes how she experiences this personally:

I don’t know if this is relevant to your research, but as a visibly brown Latina, with curly hair, I feel that I am approached or perceived differently depending on whether I choose to straighten my hair or not. It’s kinda as if my professionalism is being questioned by my work setting.

Maia made the connection between her embodied experiences and the work she does and how her experiences are also a reflection of the lived realities for the various bodies that she services as a social worker.

Alicia spoke about identity in relation to service users where she identified most of the women she has serviced as “not white”. Alicia ties together identity, the oppressive system, and service gaps with service users’ identities not being “white”. Alicia stated: “...they [clients] come here and they find a system that they don’t understand, and a

system that might be oppressing too because they are not white, they don't speak English, or have education from here.”

Both Alicia and Maia touch upon themes of whiteness and proximity to whiteness through their discussion of identity, and how those identities are perceived.

### **Oppressive Systems**

Alicia and Maia both discussed oppressive systems in a similar way and had their own examples of how they have seen service users and themselves experience the Canadian system. Alicia began to speak about oppressive systems when she spoke about how the Canadian system disadvantaged many service users she has encountered in accessing services. The women within the Latinx community have trouble accessing certain services and finding out what services are available to them if they do not have status. As previously discussed, Alicia connected oppressive systems to identity, where whiteness as a system works in favour of white folks and against marginalized communities.

Alicia also discussed oppressive systems in the countries these women are fleeing from that have also worked against them. Alicia states the following:

Also most of them come from countries where uh the system is oppressive and for example a lot of women are afraid of the police. Because for example, they worked there, and they were raped by the police, by the military, by politicians, so there is a lack of trust in the system, and actually a fear for the system.

Alicia spoke about systemic oppression that women face in Latin America, which portrays a narrative that is not as common here. Alicia continued on to discuss how she feels that she has a better understanding of what the service users have been through as

she is from Latin America and grew up there as well. Alicia explained that she would understand why women would come to Canada and not want to call the police, or experience panic attacks if they saw a policeman. Alicia said, “someone who grew up here might not get it, might be like but why do you feel like that? Why didn’t you call the police? Why didn’t you speak up?” From these examples Alicia speaks about the impact of transnationalism on the women she works with where their beliefs are projected on to the system in Canada that people typically believe in as a symbol of protection. Alicia expressed that there was a lack of trust and fear in the system in Latin America, which then the women carry when they come to Canada and do not seek out help when they have been victims of sexual violence.

Maia addressed systemic oppressions by connecting history to understand how marginalized communities and certain bodies have been inherently oppressed for many years through dominant discourses that inform systemic structures. Maia continues to discuss the connection of providing knowledge to the women she works with about how the system disadvantages them. Maia discusses the impacts of the history of colonialism in Abya Yala and slavery in Latin America and how she implements education within her sessions with women who have survived sexual violence and are experiencing trauma.

Maia stated the following:

I want to provide women with the knowledge of knowing that there is this system that works against us, and it manifests in many ways such.[as] Letting them know that there is a system in place that operates against us, where we start to internalize these thoughts and feelings and behaviours even. I guess this is how I try to resist. I try to resist within my interactions with service users and service

providers by bringing forth a lens that captures the whole picture about how someone may be experiencing being a survivor of sexual violence

Maia connects history with the present day and the impacts of history on women's present day perceptions surrounding their traumas.

### **Cultural and Religious Influences**

Cultural and religion influences are also directly connected to systemic oppressions, and historical impacts. Both Maia and Alicia discuss how cultures and religions play a role in the lives of survivors of sexual violence whether its fear to speak out, or even internalized feelings of shame and guilt that come from dominant discourses. Maia and Alicia bring forward an in depth look at the way patriarchy and sexism operate in the experiences of survivors of sexual violence in the Latinx community. Alicia discussed the impact being as a result of “a lot of cultural and religious beliefs”, especially around “their roles as women, as mothers, and even wives”. Alicia explained that the survivors she has serviced have experienced abuse from childhood, and grow up believing that abuse is normal, and that they deserve it. She identified husbands, fathers, and other males in the lives of these women as authority figures and that there is a continuous theme of fear surrounding authority figures as she spoke about men in power that represent the system taking advantage of the precarious position women have.

Maia provided an example about an experience she had working with survivors of sexual violence and called it an example of patriarchy:

Another common thing in the community I found when speaking to survivors was for women to think that in marital relationships the man was allowed to rape

them, like there was a sense of ownership over their bodies that they believed was true and out of their control

Maia connected patriarchy to the history of colonialism, brought upon the Latin American culture through religious beliefs of the Catholic church. She discussed that when the Spanish colonized Abya Yala, patriarchy and sexism became embedded in the culture, which is also known as “machismo”. Maia goes into further detail about the similarities between her experiences and those of the service users:

I typically hear women in situations of domestic violence, or who are survivors of sexual violence speak about the perpetrators being those in charge, and they [the women] blame themselves for a lot of the violence that has occurred in their life. A lot of patriarchy is present, and so is sexism. Another key thing with survivors that I hear over and over again is this narrative of shame and guilt as well as being unable to tell their family members what had happened to them because of their fear of being blamed for what happened

Maia further discusses and explains how having these internalized feelings are a product of the history, which includes sexism and patriarchy enforced through cultural and religious beliefs. Women are made to believe that it's their fault they experienced sexual violence. By discussing internalized shame and guilt and fear of telling the family, Maia connected these points to stigma within the community:

It happens often in the community. Women stay quiet about it because of the stigma. Women feel that they have to keep quiet about their struggles within the patriarchal system and it saddens me. It saddens me that we blame ourselves and fear others blaming us too.

Maia speaks about the silencing that occurs through the internalized beliefs, and fears women have once they have survived sexual violence and other forms of violence as well. Maia discusses that women begin to silence themselves as a result of imposed beliefs that stem from patriarchy, and sexism, also known as “machismo”. Maia connects the work she does to the topic of stigma and explains that she having discussions about history, patriarchy and sexism with service users will aid in generating awareness, which would, in turn, hopefully reduce, if not end, the stigma around sexual violence. Maia discussed this:

I think it’s important to start having the discussions, generate awareness, and reduce the stigma. We need to educate ourselves to help others understand their traumas, and their histories, because a lot of the embodied experiences stem from our histories. I think we have the responsibility to do this work in a responsible way I guess. Incorporating the education piece, and not individualizing the issues faced by women within the Latinx community.

## **Trauma**

Both Maia and Alicia brought up trauma throughout their interviews. Alicia spoke about women speaking about experiencing trauma stemming from childhood sexual abuse then having this repeated when they’re older. In relation to internalized beliefs, Alicia spoke about how she has often times seen women feel that the abuse is normal, especially when it occurred within their family. Alicia said: “... [Some women experience] a lot of abuse from childhood, so they grow up thinking that abuse is normal and that they deserve it. Also most of them come from countries where the system is oppressive and they fear the system”. Alicia discussed women being in fear of the police,

the military, and politicians, which are powerful agents in society: “I can understand why a woman would have a panic attack if they saw a policeman, but someone who grew up here might not get it, and might be like ‘why didn’t you call the police?’ Tying to trauma, Alicia brings up the fear of reporting as she has experienced survivors not wanting to come forward because authorities will not believe them: “I have had clients who also were abused by doctors, the military and politicians and they feel they do not have the right to say anything because they are not going to be believed”. Not only are they under the impression that authority figures would not believe them, but are also under the impression that families would not believe them.

Maia connected trauma with historical implications by speaking to intergenerational trauma. Maia spoke about how she initially began working with trauma in the Latinx community, and then sexual violence was something that kept coming up. Maia described her learning process and the way she connected history to trauma within the discussion: “As it kept coming up, I learnt more about the impacts of trauma, and then that turned into learning more about intergenerational trauma or historical trauma.”

As mentioned before, Maia identified herself as a survivor of sexual violence. She described her process of learning about the impact of sexual violence on service users, as well as on herself and the reasons why she is passionate about this work:

I think that most of us that do this work, well to speak for myself, most people within this field that I have encountered I think have either had an experience or have someone close to them that have and experience with sexual violence.

Personally, I did not recognize that what I had experienced in my teenage years and as a young adult was sexual violence. Through my learning as a practitioner, I

realized that my experiences were similar to those of service users. I remember reading about the impact of sexual violence, and the many ways it can manifest and learning about trauma then realizing that I too had experienced very real symptoms of trauma from surviving multiple counts of sexual violence.

Maia speaks about her experiences with sexual violence as a point of connection with her work and why she is passionate about what she does. She also spoke about feeling that she had a responsibility to go through her process of “healing” in order to understand her position when providing services to women that mirror her own experiences. Through her understanding of historical implications and intergenerational trauma, Maia discussed that it was important to work through a trauma-informed lens, but also informing that lens with the historical implications when working with the Latinx and other marginalized communities that have been impacted violently throughout history. Maia expressed that when you connect current issues to history, many of the issues within communities begin to make sense. Maia also spoke to her experience of working on her own trauma while actively working in the field with other survivors as her service recipients. Maia shared something that she had learnt in her process:

I had a therapist once that told me that it isn't always ‘vicarious trauma’ that us workers are triggered [by]. Often times [it is] from experiences that our bodies might have known before our minds may even be able to consciously uncover or understand. I want to build connections with the women I work with through my willingness to learn about the diversity of experiences within my own community.

Maia located herself within the discussions as a survivor. She shared her fears of being judged and blamed by her family, and how she still has not been able to share with

them what happened to her.

### **Work-life Balance and Self-care**

Alicia and Maia both spoke out about the importance of self-care. Both Alicia and Maia spoke to how a work life balance was very necessary in order to fulfill the emotional labour and requirements of the job. Alicia identified having a husband and children, and emphasized the importance of spending time with her loved ones. She expressed that knowing that there is another reality when she goes home that differentiates from the stories she hears all day give her hope. Alicia stated that her reality is not her “clients’ reality” and that this also gives her a reason to reassure the women she sees that “there are good people in the world, and that healthy relationships are achievable”. Alicia also spoke about needing to prioritize self-care which to her looks like seeking out balance, and taking care of herself emotionally because the job is “emotionally tough, and draining”. Alicia summarizes her experience with the job in the following statement: “I mean hearing all these stories day and night it is tough, it’s like ‘oh my God, what kind of world do we live in’, that’s why personally I like to have that balance”.

Maia expressed struggling to prioritize self-care throughout different points of her career. Maia discussed feeling burnt out at times and knowing that she needed a break, but she recognized the importance of taking a break before getting to that point. She explained that if she wanted to continue to do the work that she is passionate about, she has to make sure she self-cares. Maia spoke about spending time with her family and her loved ones like Alicia did as a priority to ensure her emotional health is being taken care of. She discussed her favorite methods of self-care and what that looks like for her:

My favorite way to self-care is the gym, and also spiritual practices. I find that my spirituality is very important to me. Moments in which I can spend time with those who care about me and vice versa are a humbling environment to be in. Laughter, and love and light, just need to soak it all up.

Maia also expressed that being on both sides as a survivor and as a worker required a strong commitment to checking in with herself, and following through with self-care.

### **Supportive Work Environments**

Maia and Alicia addressed the importance of having work environments that are supportive. Alicia spoke about her agency being very supportive, in relation to making cultural accommodations for service users as well as allowing her opportunities to create programs specifically for women from the Latinx community and provide opportunities for her self-care. Alicia also discussed how having a supportive work environment is also key to feeling emotionally well in the field. Alicia said the following: “As a worker I am very happy because I am allowed to grow, I am allowed to learn. Management is very respectful of our needs, when I express my needs I feel that they are careful that their staff are fine if we are feeling burnt out or something”.

Maia had similar things to say about work environments and how it is necessary to feel supported. However, Maia also described her experiences working with women service users at agencies that were not supportive:

Also I feel at times that when I prioritized their lived experience and knowledge I am not taken as seriously. Depending on the setting I feel that it depends I guess on the space and the workers you have around you. Some agencies are very linear

and I think that that does not align with my way of thinking, as I tend to resist the Eurocentric approaches and models. It all depends on the setting. In this work I also found that my lived experiences with a close connection to the work may not be seen as a strength, but as a flaw that I have as a person.

Maia discussed the way that certain agencies she has worked for may not perceive lived experiences as a strength when working with communities facing certain issues. She discusses how she feels that it is a strength because she is able to put herself in the shoes of her service users. Maia touched upon how this is one of the ways that she has resisted Eurocentric approaches within her work-by self-disclosing and acknowledging her survivorship. Maia discussed the following: “I worked at an agency that was triggering me, and I could not tell my supervisor that I was also a survivor, imagine [if] I told them that I disclose this to clients at times? I feel like I would be punished or something”. Maia was also able to speak to working for different agencies where the environments were both progressive and flexible versus working for agencies in which the Eurocentrism was embedded in their policies, and where even the workers in those agencies upheld values and beliefs that reflected oppressive systems and discourses. Maia stated: “I knew that when I started facilitating groups that required facilitators to be survivors that I was in the right place, where Eurocentricism and boundaries take a step back and I get to exist as a social worker and as a survivor”.

Maia and Alicia both spoke about how it is important to work for an agency that supports you and what you stand for in order to do the work in a compassionate, “client centered” or survivor centered approaches given the nature of the work that is being done.

## **Connection to Community**

Both Maia and Alicia spoke about the importance of their connection with the community with which they identify. Maia expressed that her work allows her to give back to her community, which is not only Latinx women, but a community of Latinx women who have survived sexual violence. Maia stated the following: “Being a Latina woman myself naturally I felt more of a connection working with women in my community”. Maia and Alicia spoke about doing the work they do to strengthen their relationship with community members. They discussed the way in which their existing connection to cultural ties, and even language facilitates the way women access services, as well as the quality of the work that they do with women. Alicia spoke to how growing up in Latin America also helps her understand the backgrounds the service users are coming from and that this also strengthens her connection to the service and the work she is doing. Alicia stated: “I have always been interested in the topic of working with Latin American women in this topic because of the need. I grew up back home so I understand more of what is going on with women from the community”.

## **Conclusion**

Maia and Alicia’s experiences differed at times despite working in the same field in the counseling sector working with survivors of sexual violence. The key themes touched upon in the findings were: bridging service gaps, cultural competency, the diversity of Latinx identities, oppressive systems, cultural and religious influences, trauma, work-life balance and self-care, supportive work environments, and connection to community. Maia and Alicia demonstrated how being part of the same community as those they service does not always come with the same experience. Their embodiment of

the work differs based on their identities. Alicia mentioned growing up privileged in her home country: “I think the difference with me and other workers is that I already came to this country highly educated, and my status in my country was already high, I was middle-high class, I spoke English very well, I did not have to start from zero here”. Maia identifies herself as a brown, Latinx, survivor woman: “I may experience things differently than others as a brown Latina”. Her poem (on the next page) makes visible her voice, expressing her experiences in the form of a *testimonio*.

*Maia's Testimonio*

Their strength

It amazes me.

They look up to me

But I am the one that admires them

My girls.

We are bound.

Our experiences connect us

Each story,

Each narrative.

My body,

Her body,

Their body,

Our bodies

Did not invite your touch

My body,

Her body,

Their body,

Our bodies,

Are not yours to claim.

I hope that they continue to have the strength that they have passed on to me.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have used a thematic analysis approach to the findings. I have analyzed the findings and connected them to the literature available on this topic. In the discussion, I have also touched on the limitations and strengths of this research paper.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

A thematic analysis of the findings was completed to explore the experiences of Latinx social workers working with sexual violence. The women interviewed discussed themes that represented resistance, self-care, and personal experiences, as well as common narratives when working in the area of sexual violence in the Latinx community among other topics discussed. In the findings, I addressed the way that Maia and Alicia spoke about bridging service gaps, cultural competency, the diversity of Latinx identities, oppressive systems, cultural and religious influences, trauma, work-life balance and self-care, supportive work environments, and connection to community.

The findings drew on the lived experiences of Latinx women and their work within the field of social work, working with sexual violence, which directly reflected the foundation of critical race feminism. Critical race feminism, as discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, stems from critical race theory, which recognizes experiential knowledge of people [women] of colour and challenges traditional research paradigms (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This major research paper honoured that at every step of the process. Throughout the findings, both Alicia and Maia spoke about their experiences or service users' experiences both in Canada and in their home countries, which acknowledges transnational experiences, in different contexts. Latinx feminism

provides that contextual background where the experiences of Latinx women need to be looked through a transnational lens (Reyes, 2014).

Carranza (2008) discusses transnationalism in her study where findings concluded that the notion that strategies used by Latin American women to cope with their experiences of trauma and loss are at odds with North American or Eurocentric conceptualizations of trauma and recovery. This work that Carranza (2008) has done is related to the way Alicia and Maia demonstrated multiple truths in their discussions about their experiences. This discussion aligns with the foundation of critical race feminism, Latinx feminism, and even Black feminism that inform us that ‘truth’ of experience is multiple (Few, 2007). The knowledge shared and discussed with Alicia and Maia that is now written on these pages is a form of demonstrating their *testimonios*.

In Maia’s interview, concrete examples of resistance in the work that she does were brought up. Carranza (2008) wrote about acknowledging the need for services that have the ability to create spaces for diverse communities and practitioners to receive and perform services. Maia spoke about using her lived experiences to connect with service users, and Alicia spoke about understanding the contexts of the countries that the women were coming from in order to create those spaces.

Another important point brought up throughout the findings is the way in which historical implications kept on coming up through the discussions of trauma and identity. Maia discussed the acknowledgement of history in order to understand the trauma being experienced as both a service provider and a service recipient. Carranza’s (2008) findings discuss centering memory and history in the experiences and expressions of trauma that social workers may need to consider in gearing towards collective healing of an entire

community. When speaking about the collective healing of a community, historical acknowledgement and reparations are necessary for healing.

A lot of the literature from my literature review was not directly related to the findings. I noted that most of the articles surrounding sexual violence did not further discuss their findings in relation to an overrepresentation of racialized women as survivors of sexual violence in a North American context (Barrick et al., 2012; Davidson et al., 2013; Hossain et al. 2014; Jenkins et al., 2011). There was no analysis of historical implications in the North American contexts or further questioning of why those were the results of the studies. Alicia and Maia made the connection of the historical implication in Latin America, which is similar to the one of North America, including colonialism and slavery when working with racialized bodies.

Identity was another key factor identified by both Maia and Alicia amongst the work that they do. In the literature, there was an article that spoke about identity, and the relationship racialized women have with their bodies vs. the relationship that white women have with their bodies (Poran, 2002). Connecting this literature to the discussion with Maia and Alicia was that Maia and Alicia took it upon themselves to bring up the way in which their proximity to whiteness, or their skin tone, worked as a mechanism of privilege in some spaces, or disadvantaged them in others. Maia spoke directly to internalizing certain perceptions because of what is imposed to be the “beauty standard” in the North American context, and attempting to obtain proximity to this standard in order to perform whiteness in certain work places. Poran’s (2002) study discusses pressures of conforming to Eurocentric standards of beauty, and how this results in women basing the of value their worth on their proximity to Eurocentric standards, and

will go lengths to achieve those standards.

Another topic that was discussed in the findings that came up continuously throughout both interviews was the topic of cultural and religious influences in the experiences of women who have experienced sexual violence. Alicia and Maia both addressed cultural competency and their thoughts around it. In the literature review, there were articles that spoke about cultural-specific services, and my critique of the studies was the lack of critique towards “culturally competent” services and programs (Fotheringham & Tomlinson, 2009; Matsuoka, 2015; McDowell, 2004). Alicia advocated for cultural competency in her agency and through her understanding she views it as a policy that facilitates engagement with diverse service users. Alicia defined cultural competency as an approach that allowed her to speak Spanish in her sessions, and greet clients with hugs or the cultural custom of one kiss on the cheek.

Maia on the other hand had critiqued cultural competency in the way that Pon (2009) explains as a new form of racism in Canada. There is an assumption that agencies that have adopted a “culturally competent” approach believe that all workers can be trained to work with and understand the experiences of diverse bodies. This includes white workers being supposedly equipped to understand the ongoing histories of violence, colonization, and again those embodied experiences that come with certain identities.

Maia and Alicia also discussed the ways in which the history of colonization brought forth a culture of “machismo” which is an image and a concept that is reflective of patriarchy, sexism, and a male ego that exists within the Latin American culture. This culture of patriarchy creates an environment where women are deemed as inferior, and

submissive to men. This is related to the common narratives of guilt and shame experienced by survivors (Davidson et al., 2014).

Maia spoke about her experience of being a survivor and a social worker, and how she fears disclosing being a survivor when she is seeking out supports in her work environments in the case of triggers. This narrative of guilt and shame also plays out in the Canadian context where patriarchy continues to be a dominant operating discourse. This operating discourse causes Maia to feel that her ability to do the work will be judged based on her personal experiences. Monture (2010) spoke about the way that marginalized bodies are silenced and rendered invisible through the failure to take issues of social oppression seriously, such as Maia's experience of sexual violence being silenced in spaces and feeling the need to hide a multi-layered lived experience in the Canadian context.

### **Limitations**

My research process went as planned for the most part. I recognized that my research question, and the topic that I was exploring were very specific which limited me right away. I was limited in what literature was made available to me, and I was limited in the Canadian context, as the community I focused on has been studied more in the United States. It was hard to find a starting point when looking for literature available that was relevant to the study that I was conducting. I found that in doing my literature review, I made a lot of assumptions of what was going to come up in the findings, by assuming what I would find in the literature that might be relevant.

Throughout the process, I also realized that most of the women that I would have liked to interview for this research study were women that I had worked with in

community organizing events, as there was not a large pool of women that were eligible and met my criteria to participate in the study in Toronto. I could have tentatively expanded my criteria and looked into phone interviews with women in different areas; however, I did want to keep it within the Canadian context given the lack of Canadian context available.

Initially, I struggled with recruiting participants as I faced some difficulties with receiving responses of people being interested in participating in the study, and coordinating with the availability of participants who demonstrated interest within the time line that this major research paper had to be completed in. The major research paper time-line served was a limitation in this process. As part of my data collection method, I asked for an arts-based component, however, only one participant agreed to provide an arts-based piece. Something I would go back and do differently now that the research is done is that I would make the arts-based piece a requirement for participation in the research study. Making it a requirement would have further enhanced the study in capturing traditional approaches of knowledge sharing.

The major research paper would have also been more impactful if I had more participants. For the research study, I was able to recruit two participants with similar work experience backgrounds who each had great insight based on their individual experiences. I also would have liked to have a diverse range of identities that exist in the Latinx diaspora represented in my research. I would have liked to have Afro-Latinx voices centered as well as Indigenous identifying Latinx women speaking about their experiences as social workers within the community that they are a part of. Gearing towards centering the voices of marginalized identities within an already marginalized

community would bring forward more of an in depth discussion about identities and how certain bodies are perceived in a transnational lens - in their home countries vs. here in Canada.

I would like to acknowledge that my research left out the voices and experiences of Queer and Trans folks within the Latinx community. Both research participants identified themselves as heterosexual cisgender women. When they spoke to the common narratives and stories they have heard throughout their experience working in the field with the Latinx community, they spoke about sexual violence through a binary lens, centering cisgender, heterosexual survivors. Expanding the research to include Queer and Trans Latinx folks would have made the research inclusive. The way to do that would be to adjust the research question and eligibility criteria; however, this would make the topic more specific and, in turn, would be challenging for a major research paper given the time line, and the smaller impact of the major research paper.

### **Implications to Anti-Oppressive Social Work Practice**

Throughout my research process, I used an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, decolonial approach by using a theoretical framework with a critical foundation. The theoretical frameworks used to guide my research were critical race feminism and Latinx Feminism. As discussed in the theoretical framework chapter, anti-oppressive approaches to social work view the issues faced by service users through a lens that dismantles dominant discourses operating structurally, further marginalizing already marginalized communities. Healy (2005) talks about anti-oppressive practice entailing analysis and transformation of power relations.

This research's strengths included making room for transformative approaches by

the use of qualitative research, where voices of racialized women were centered, and an arts-based approach was incorporated to honour traditional storytelling, and knowledge sharing methods. I found that having these approaches within the research process was a way to transform power, and share power with the participants. Not only was there sharing power with the participants, but also sharing the power with the community and the history tied with the Latinx community that is represented by myself, and the interview participants in this process.

Not only does the major research paper have implications for social work in a theoretical lens, but also in a practical sense. Healy (2005) noted that critical social work is an umbrella term that refers to a broad range of practice and theoretical approaches that include feminist social work, anti-racist social work, and anti-oppressive social work to name a few. This major research paper demonstrates the way in which the participants are involved in practicing through a feminist, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approach within their field of practice. This is relevant to anti-oppressive practice as participants spoke to transforming their practices, and the results provide other practitioners or readers an insight on experiences of social workers. Self-care, and critical self-reflection in relation to triggers came up in the findings, and critical self-reflection and consciousness are important aspects within critical anti-oppressive social work practice. This research study also contributes in providing social workers in a Canadian context with a historical and experiential background and knowledge base on working with the Latinx community.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I believe that this work is the beginning of centering Latinx

identities and experiences, and a beginning to provide literature under this topic. By being part of this community, I have realized that more and more Latinx peoples are accessing academia and are in the process of creating literature in the Canadian context that provides a critical perspective to the experiences of people who are part of the Latinx diaspora. Initially this work was important to me because of what I have experienced, and what I wanted to see in the literature that I found was missing. Literature in the Canadian context especially was missing - something that I could connect with as a survivor and as a social worker.

The guiding research question: “How do racialized women workers experience working with sexual violence in the Latinx community” was answered through my perspective as well as Maia’s and Alicia’s. They shared their narratives and provided insight into what common narratives they have heard among service users pertaining to the Latinx diaspora. Their experiences are personal, transnational, shaped by their beliefs, and influenced by the oppressive systems in Canada. Most importantly, I found that the participants’ dedication to the work within their communities demonstrates their commitment and love for the Latinx community.

The goal of the research was to centre Latinx voices, and to conduct research in a way that was not traditional to Eurocentric approaches, but in a way that honored the pre-colonial traditions of Abya Yala. I believe that this narrative study accomplished that by resisting a structured research approach, and I have faith that anyone who reads this will learn something about a community that has become more visibly present as service users, and as social workers.

## APPENDIX A



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

FACULTY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

*Accredited by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work*

### Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

Study: Experiences of racialized women workers working with survivors of sexual violence in the Latinx community.

#### **INVESTIGATORS:**

This research study is being conducted by Daniela Glaser, School of Social Work, Social Work student. The supervisor of this research study is Susan Preston, BSW, MSW, PhD at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact, Daniela Glaser, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B2K3, [dglaser@Ryerson.ca](mailto:dglaser@Ryerson.ca).

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:**

This study is designed to explore the experiences of racialized women workers in Canada, working with survivors of sexual violence in the Latinx community. The research question that guides my research: 1) How do Racialized women workers experience working with survivors of sexual violence from the Latinx community?

I am completing this research to complete my major research paper requirement of my Master of Social Work degree. The results will contribute to my major research paper.

There will be 2-3 research participants being recruited for this study. The eligibility requirements to identify prospective participants are: The research participants must have worked providing services pertaining to sexual violence to the Latinx community for at least 5 years (currently or previously), the research participants must be female identified and the research participants must be racialized women (preferably Latinx women).

### **WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO:**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

#### **ARRANGE A TIME TO MEET**

1) You and the researcher will arrange a time to meet for the interview. The interview can take place at Ryerson University in a private room that is secured with aural and visual privacy to ensure confidentiality. This is especially important due to the sensitivity of the information that may come up in the interview. You also have the option to choose a location that you would like to meet other than Ryerson University. The preferred location should be in a secured place with aural and visual privacy to ensure confidentiality. Public areas like coffee shops will not be used for interviews due to the sensitive nature of the research topic.

#### **REVIEW INTERVIEW GUIDE**

2) Review in interview guide prior to meeting the researcher for the interview. Take the time to read the interview guide to see what kinds of questions are going to be asked during the interview. If you have any concerns with the interview questions, this would be a good time to address them with the researcher.

Two sample research questions are: What are your experiences as a racialized women like working with the Latinx community? And why is this work important to you and why do you think it's important to community?

#### **MEET FOR THE INTERVIEW**

3) Meet with the researcher at the agreed interview time. Interviews will last between 1 to 2 hours in length. There will only be one interview for this research study.

#### **REVIEW TRANSCRIPTION**

4) Once the researcher transcribes the interview you will have an opportunity to read the transcription if you would like to. Once you approve the researcher to move forward the researcher will proceed to complete the research paper. This can be sent to you through email or mailed to your preferred address.

### **ARTS-BASED ELEMENT**

5) You will be asked to provide a short written testimony, or poem as an option during this study. You will be able to provide it during the time of the interview, prior to the interview, or after. You will be instructed to write something as a form of expression of your experiences as a racialized woman worker working with sexual violence in the Latinx community. This will be published as part of my major research paper to enhance the findings, as well as honour traditional forms of expression with your permission.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS:**

I cannot guarantee, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study. However, this study aims to highlight the experiences and feelings of racialized women workers, which can potentially give voice to the Latinx community that is not previously or commonly discussed in literature.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:**

#### Psychological risk (e.g. feeling anxious, upset or uncomfortable)

Questions and topics that come up during interviews about your experiences as racialized women workers may be triggering for you and make you feel anxious, upset or uncomfortable as sensitive topics are being discussed. The risk of this happening is low/minimal, and community resources will be provided before the interviews if you feel you would like some support after the interview. If any questions make you uncomfortable you can skip those questions and you can chose to stop participation in the interview at anytime.

#### Personal identity being revealed (e.g. participant being identified either directly or inadvertently)

The risk of this happening is Low/minimal due to potential of your identity being inadvertently revealed if someone who knows you very well recognizes you by piecing together your words and your information provided for the major research paper. Confidentiality will be kept and all transcriptions will be kept in a password-protected file. Your name will be a pseudonym. You will be reminded about confidentiality before and after interview and be reminded if you have any questions or concerns you can contact me at anytime. No personal information of identity will ever be included in the completed research publication. You will be given the option to review/edit your interview transcripts to ensure you are comfortable that the information does not identify you to potential readers.

Legal risk (e.g. duty to report abuse or illegal activity discovered during the research process)

In reflecting on your practice experiences there is a low risk of identification of events where child abuse was evident and not reported by the service provider. Ontario has mandatory requirements of reporting any knowledge of child abuse. If you disclose non-reporting of child abuse in reflections about your practice, I am obliged to report the abuse details to the appropriate child protection agency. You are trained service providers, and understand the duty to report. You will be reminded of the duty to report prior to the interview. However, based on the research topic I do not see this being an issue.

Dual-role risk (e.g. risk related to already-existing relationships between researcher and participants)

The Latinx community in Toronto is small. I have been involved in community work with women who provide services to survivors of sexual violence in the past, and I am part of the Latinx community. This is a risk in terms of voluntary participation, as those of you I may know may feel obliged to participate because of your prior relationship with me. In order to avoid you feeling obligated to participate, I will reach out to the agencies that provide these services, and allow for your management to do outreach. The recruitment script will remind previous co-workers of these facts as well as include clarification of non-obligation to participate specifically as relates to pre-existing relationships, and my information will be provided for those who chose to participate can contact me. There will be a third party who will pass on the information to potential participants, and you will contact me if you chose to consent.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Everything pertaining to the study will be kept confidential and all transcriptions will be kept in a password-protected file. Your name will be a pseudonym unless you request to use your real name. You will be reminded about confidentiality before and after interviews to ensure that you understand that your name will not be used in the study. You will be advised that if you have any questions or concerns that you can contact the researcher at anytime. No personal information of identity will ever be included in the completed research publication. You will be given the option to review/edit your interview transcripts to ensure you are comfortable that the information does not identify you to potential readers.

Information in this study will not be released to any other party for any reason. The audio recordings and interview transcriptions will be kept in secured file on a computer that only the researcher has access to. These files will be password protected in addition to the password needed to be able to log onto the computer. Once the final draft is submitted to

school of social work all files and transcriptions will be deleted from the computer and deleted a second time if they are put in the recycling bin. The audio files will be deleted once the transcriptions have been complete. I anticipate completing the transcriptions within two weeks of each interview. The transcriptions / data need to be kept until the final paper is submitted for me to go back and make necessary changes with the information. It also gives research participants the opportunity to listen to review their transcription during the study. As a research participant, you have the right to review the transcriptions of interviews anytime that you would like up until April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The transcriptions are only kept until the final publication for my being able to review them and write my paper. Estimated completion date is August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017.

**PARTICIPATION:**

As a research participant you will not be paid to participate in this study

**COSTS TO PARTICIPATION:**

If interviews are held at Ryerson University, there may be transportation or parking costs.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:**

As a research participant, your participation is entirely voluntary. As a research participant, you have the right to remove yourself from the study up to April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and you have no obligation to complete it. Withdrawal from the study will not influence future relations with the researcher Daniela Glaser or Ryerson University. You have the right to remove yourself from the research before April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and you have the right to request that your interview be destroyed and not used in the study. During the interview, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to discuss or make you uncomfortable.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:**

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact Daniela Glaser, BSW, MSW candidate, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, Ontario M5B 2K3, [dglaser@ryerson.ca](mailto:dglaser@ryerson.ca), or Susan Preston, research supervisor BSW, MSW, PhD, [susan.preston@ryerson.ca](mailto:susan.preston@ryerson.ca), 416-979-5000, ext. 6216.

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042  
rebchair@ryerson.ca

**CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate up until April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. You have been given a copy of this agreement. By signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

If you wish to review the transcript please check off this box:

**AUDIO-RECORDED**

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed and only the researcher will have access to them.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## APPENDIX B



### Experiences of Racialized Women Workers Working with Survivors of Sexual Violence in the Latinx Community

#### Interview Guide

- 1) What made you get involved with this work?
  - **Probing question:** did anything influence you in working with the Latinx community, and sexual violence?
- 2) What are your experiences as a racialized women worker like working with the Latinx community?
  - What are the common narratives within the Latinx community that you have heard throughout your time providing services pertaining to sexual violence to the Latinx community?
- 3) Why is this work important to you and why do you think it's important to community?
- 4) Are there any challenges being a racialized woman in this work?
- 5) How do you, or do you perform acts of resistance within the services you provide?
- 6) How do you self-care?

#### **Closing questions**

- 7) Is there anything else that you would like to discuss?
- 8) Would you be willing to provide a poem, or a written testimony of your experiences as a racialized woman worker, highlighting your daily feelings and experiences within this work?

## APPENDIX C



### Resource List

#### **Mental health support in case of emotional triggers**

- 1) Mental health helpline: 1-866-531-2600 – toll free (Ontario)
- 2) Distress Lines: 1-800-567-9699 – toll free (Ontario)
- 3) Assaulted Women’s Help line: 1-866-863-0511
- 4) COSTI immigrant services Family and Mental Health Centre: 416-244-7714
- 5) Toronto Rape Crisis Centre Multicultural Women Against Rape: 416-597-8808
- 6) Polycultural immigrant and community services: 416-233-0055
- 7) Barbra Schlifer Clinic: 416-323-9149
- 8) Family Services Toronto: 416-595-0307
- 9) Catholic Family Services Toronto: 416-921-1163

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