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## The Victimization Experiences of Transgender Adult Females of Color in the State of Florida

Andrew Ryan Vaz  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Andrew Ryan Vaz

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
and that any and all revisions required by  
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

The Victimization Experiences of Transgender Adult Females of Color in the State  
of Florida

by

Andrew Ryan Vaz

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MPA, Florida International University, 2011

MSCJ, Florida International University, 2011

BS, Central State University, 2023

AAS, Eastern Gateway Community College, 2021

BA, York University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2023

## Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the state of Florida. The intent of this research was to provide a better understanding of how transgender women of color make meaning of their lived experiences of being victims of crime in the state of Florida. This study's central concept was how victimization experiences among trans women of color in the state of Florida differ from the rest of the population, especially with violent offenses. There were two theoretical frameworks used to guide this study: womanist theory and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. This study used a qualitative, narrative inquiry research design, and purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental sampling. In addition to purposive sampling, this study also employed the snowball sampling technique. The data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. All participants seem to agree that without effective hate-crime legislation to include protections for gender identity in the state of Florida, their lives will continue to be in danger from violent offenses. The findings of this study were significant because they could help to inform policies regarding reporting victimization of trans women. Future research should examine the perspectives of police departments who investigate hate crimes against the trans community and the policymakers who govern the state of Florida and create legislation. The positive social change implications from this study could have positive impacts for both community leaders and transgender citizens of the state of Florida.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family: my brother Richard and my sister Annette Vaz. I couldn't have asked for more amazing siblings who provided me the moral support and encouragement throughout this process. Of course, none of this would be possible without two very special individuals: Avis and Carlton Vaz. It has always been my hope to make the both of you proud, Mom and Dad. You all are and forever will be my "day-ones."

I also would like to dedicate this research to anyone in our society who has ever been dismissed, ignored, and/or targeted for who they are. Regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, I believe it is our duty as citizens of the free world to ensure a brighter future for our children and children's children that free from hate and discrimination. As such, this dissertation is also dedicated to all of my future children. May this work of mine inspire you to follow in your dreams and pursue the work that advances the common good.

Finally, I dedicate this research to the memory of the countless transgender, gender non-conforming, men and women of color in our society who were victims of violent crimes. May your memory live on through the lives that you have touched and the generations that will follow – through your sacrifice, there will be a greater glory!

## Acknowledgments

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I would also wish to acknowledge of the educators taught me throughout my life: from elementary school to today – these men and women are the true heroes of our world, and I am grateful for all of the time and attention they gave me. A very special acknowledgement must go to the faculty of the Public Policy and Administration PhD program at Walden University.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

It is estimated that 44 transgender or gender nonconforming citizens were murdered across the United States in 2020 alone (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2020). In 2019, at least 27 transgender or gender nonconforming people were fatally shot or killed by other violent means. HRC also reports that since it has been collecting data on victimization since 2013, victimization accounts for 10% of the violent offenses against transgender citizens occurring in Florida. Most of these data are based on eyewitness accounts, missing person reports, and limited news coverage on the subject (HRC, 2020).

The rate of violence against transgender persons far surpasses that of the general population (Talusán, 2016a). With the rapid increase in interpersonal violence against the transgender population in the United States (James et al., 2016), it has been classified as an epidemic by the American Medical Association (Momen & Dilks, 2021). Most of the victimization of the transgendered community have targeted transgendered women.

When it comes to victimization, transgender women have encountered a different experience than the rest of the U.S. population as whole, as well as the transgendered population. Transgendered women experience high rates of gender-based violence (GBV)—a risk factor for adverse health outcomes (Gyamerah et al., 2021). Transphobic hate crimes are one such form of GBV that affects transgendered women (Gyamerah et al., 2021). What is apparent about most of the gender-based violent crimes committed against transgender citizens is that it is against transgendered women of color.

Transgendered women of color are females who identify as African American, Hispanic American, Native American, Asian-American, or multi-race.

While there have been some studies that have looked at the experiences of transgender women, there are a limited number of studies that focus on transgendered women's experiences with regards to victimization. Very little is known about the victimization experiences of transgender women of color.

Studies have been published on the lived experiences of transgender women of color who are involved in the sex trade. Because of relatively high rates of unemployment, lack of career training and education, and discrimination in employment, many transgender women engage in sex work for survival (Nemoto et al., 2011).

Transgender women of color in the sex trade have been victims of physical assault and battery, kidnapping, and murder or manslaughter (James et al., 2016). This can happen with sex workers who meet with their clients who discover that a transgender woman services them (James et al., 2016). In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, police frequently assumed that respondents—particularly transgender women of color—were sex workers. One-third (33%) of Black transgender women and 30% of multiracial women said that an officer assumed they were sex workers. Of respondents who interacted with police or law enforcement officers who thought or knew they were transgender, more than half (58%) experienced some form of mistreatment (James et al., 2016). Conversely, only 11% of White transgender women were thought of as transgender by law enforcement officers (James et al., 2016).



In addition, studies have confirmed previous findings that transgender women have been exposed to transphobia, physical and sexual violence, and daily harassment because of their gender identity or appearance (Nemoto et al., 2011). Mistreatment by law enforcement officers included being verbally harassed, repeatedly referred to as the wrong gender, physically assaulted, or sexually assaulted, including being forced by officers to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest. All respondents who had a negative interaction with law enforcement officers were transgender women of color (African American, multiracial, Latina, American Indian, and Asian; James et al., 2016). Each of the different racial groups had responses of over 20%, with African American respondents having the highest at 33% (James et al., 2016). White transgender women had the lowest percentage at 11% (James et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the state of Florida. The rest of this chapter covers the background of the study, the problem statement that describes the reasons behind and the goals of the research study, the nature of the study, the research design and methodology, theoretical framework, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

An estimated 0.6% of adults, approximately 1.4 million, identify as transgender in the United States (Flores, Herman, et al., 2016). States such as Hawaii, California, Georgia, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida, have the highest percentages of adults who identify as transgender (Flores, Herman, et al., 2016). In the state of Florida, an estimated

0.66%, approximately 100,300 citizens, have identified themselves as transgender (Flores, Herman, et al., 2016). From this population, it is estimated that 0.86% of transgender adults in Florida, about 18,650, are African American. As well, approximately 0.78%, 26,250 transgender adults, are Hispanic or Latin American. Finally, approximately 0.68%, or 4,300 transgender adults, identify as a race other than white, African American, and Latin American (Flores, Brown, et al., 2016).

What has been published about the treatment of trans communities have largely focused on issues pertaining to mental health and access to health care. There are limited studies that have been published that deal with victimization and the rate that it occurs. Nearly one in 10 (9%) were physically attacked in the past year because of being transgender (James et al., 2016). Black transgender women (14%) were more likely to be physically attacked in the previous year because of being transgender, compared to Black non-binary people (8%) and transgender men (7%; James et al., 2016). For Hispanic Americans, nearly one in 10 (9%) was physically attacked in the previous year because of being transgender (James et al., 2016). Latina transgender women (12%) and non-binary people (10%) were more likely to be physically attacked in the past year because of being transgender, compared to Latino transgender men (7%; James et al., 2016). Obtained from the Human Rights Campaign website (HRC.org), the following transgender women of color have been killed in the state of Florida since 2015:

- India Clarke, 25, was found deceased after suffering blunt force trauma to the upper body in Tampa, Hillsborough County, in July 2015. Misgendered by Tampa police, India's death was described as a “brutal murder.”

- Erika “Celine” Walker, 36, a black transgender woman, was shot several times and killed at the Extended Stay America hotel in Jacksonville on February 4, 2018. Police misgendered Erika in their report as “Cedric Walker,” her assigned name at birth.
- Cathalina Christina James, 24, was shot dead at the Quality Inn and Suites Hotel in Jacksonville in 2018.
- Antash’a English, 38, was fatally shot on June 1, 2018, in Jacksonville, during a drive-by shooting.
- Sasha Garden, 27, a Black transgender woman, was found dead with signs of trauma in Orlando, Florida, in the early morning hours of July 19, 2018.
- Kiki Fantroy, a Black transgender woman, was fatally shot to death in Miami-Dade County on July 31, 2019. A 17-year-old requested sexual favors from Fantroy, who denied those requests and was chased down by her killer, who shot and killed Fantroy. Miami-Dade Police did not rule this as a hate crime.
- Bee Love Slater, 23, discovered in Clewiston, Hendry County, on September 4, 2019, was a Black transgender woman found dead in her burning car, which was ruled a homicide. The sheriff’s office told reporters they could not say whether the grisly homicide was a hate crime.
- Bree Black, 27, a Black transgender woman, was killed in Pompano Beach, Broward County, on July 3, 2020, of an apparent gunshot wound. According to the Broward Sheriff’s Office, Bree was gunned down in the street. The

Sheriff's Office identified her by the name she was assigned at birth in their news release.

It is not known what the lived experiences of trans women of color are when it comes to victimization, including how frequently the victimization occurs, how trans women of color cope with being victims of crime, and to what extent trans women of color report these crimes. While trans women of color share experiences of transphobia and cisnormativity with other transgender people, experiences of sexism with other women, and experiences of racism with other people of color, these experiences interact and cannot be separated. Trans women of color experience discrimination uniquely as trans women of color (Jefferson et al., 2013).

The following section covers the statement of the problem, which leads directly to the research question and the purpose of the study.

### **Problem Statement**

Little was known regarding the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the United States. When any society does not attend to a person's or community's victimization, the victims are forgotten and are subject to more crimes. Potentially other members of society could become victims of crime as long as victimization is not addressed with urgency. With transgender women of color, this community has largely been ignored in the gender violence literature and in public policy (Jauk, 2013). This research is critically needed, as it will build on previous studies to inform interventions and to address inequities in the epidemic of violence towards trans women, especially trans women of color (Gyamerah et al., 2021).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the state of Florida. More specifically, this research explored how frequently victimization occurs, how trans women of color cope with being victims of crime, and to what extent trans women of color report these crimes. The intent of this research was to provide a better understanding of how transgender women of color make meaning of their lived experiences of being victims of crime in the state of Florida. This study's central concept was how victimization experiences among trans women of color in the state of Florida differ from the rest of the population, especially with violent offenses.

### **Research Questions**

For this qualitative research study, the following questions were addressed:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of transgender women of color in the state of Florida who are victims of violent crimes?

RQ2: How do transgender women of color in the state of Florida make meaning of their victimization experiences?

The narratives of the participants provided insight into the lived experiences of transgender women of color who are victims of crime in the state of Florida.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study resided within the realm of intersectional criminology, observing victimization in terms of gender and racial identity. At the core of intersectionality research is the belief that for researchers to understand human behavior, they must

acknowledge and account for socially constructed, oppressed, and oppressive forces which contribute to one's identity (Brown, 2015; Potter & Brown, 2014). The theoretical frameworks used to guide this study are the womanist and Crenshaw's intersectionality theories.

Womanist theory is a social theory developed by novelist Alice Walker in 1983 and describes Black women who are deeply committed to the wholeness and well-being of all of humanity, male and female. Walker (1983) in her acclaimed volume of essays, *In Search of our Mother's Garden*, though using the term "womanism" interchangeably, argues that a "womanist" was "a Black feminist or feminist of color." According to Walker, womanist unites women of color with the feminist movement at the intersection of race, class, and gender oppression. Womanism is regarded as a branch of feminism (Maxwell, 2017). This theory was used to inform the types of interview questions that was asked of the study participants.

Crenshaw's intersectionality theory was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1994 as a means to name overlapping forms of discrimination otherwise overlooked when only accounting for one vector of identity (Fenner, 2020). Transgender women of color possess several intersecting identities as they live their lives in the United States (Griffin, 2016). These include that they are (a) people of color, (b) women, and (c) transgender (Griffin, 2016). To properly understand the complex and vulnerable position of transgender women of color in the United States today, it was imperative to consider each of these three identities (Griffin, 2016). Looking at the way these three identities intersect is a key in gaining a clearer understanding of what must be done to combat the

varying discriminations each of them bring upon transgender women of color, and helping them attain equality (Griffin, 2016). As with womanist theory, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory was used to inform the interview questions concerning racial identity.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth with data collection often occurring through open-ended questions, permitting "one to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Butina, 2015, p. 180). Qualitative research focuses on the events that transpire and on outcomes of those events from the perspectives of those involved. The specific qualitative approach used was a narrative inquiry design. A qualitative narrative design allowed participants to express their own lived experiences in the form of storytelling.

### **Methodology**

The primary research design used in this study was narrative inquiry. The sampling strategy consisted of purposive sampling, also referred to as judgmental sampling, and the snowball sampling technique. The participants selected for this study are transgender women of color, 18 years and older, and only experienced victimization as an adult while residing within the state of Florida. The study included trans women who identify as African American, Latin American, Asian American, or multiracial. The sample size consisted of 10 participants, which is when the study reached saturation, who

met the inclusion criteria. The participants were active on social media, as they were selected from social media websites including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter (now known as X), and Instagram. In addition, community organizations also assisted in selecting participants with the distribution of a flyer (see Appendix B). The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed by me. The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and the review of the literature.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is a “process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Hilal & Alabri, 2013, p. 181). Qualitative data analysis is defined as pursuing the relationship between categories and themes of data seeking to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, rather than being strict and procedures-based, the researcher is required to be alert, flexible, and positively interact with data collected (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). Coding involves pursuing related words or phrases mentioned by the interviewees or in the documents (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). These words or phrases are then combined to realize the connection between them.

The data were analyzed following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis: Step 1—becoming familiar with the data, Step 2— generating initial codes, Step 3— searching for themes, Step 4—reviewing themes, Step 5—defining themes, and Step 6— write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The first step in any qualitative analysis is reading and re-reading the transcripts. Then, researchers organize their data in a meaningful and systematic way (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The



researchers search for themes and then review, modify, and develop the preliminary themes that were identified in Step 3 (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researchers will then define the themes and write up their findings in the dissertation.

### **Operational Definitions of Terms**

*Cisgender/cis*: term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth. It replaces the terms “nontransgender” or “bio man/bio woman” to refer to individuals who have a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their gender identity (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009).

*Gender*: defined as being the socially constructed processes and differences, often aligned with being feminine, masculine, blended elements of both, or neither (Rushton et al., 2019).

*Gender dysphoria*: discomfort or distress related to incongruence between a person’s gender identity, sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics (Knudson et al., 2010).

*Gender expression/presentation*: the presentation of an individual, including physical appearance, clothing choice and accessories, and behaviors that express aspects of gender identity or role. Gender expression may or may not conform to a person’s gender identity (American Psychological Association, 2015).

*Gender fluid*: refers to change over time in a person’s gender expression or gender identity, or both. That change might be in expression, but not identity, or in identity, but not expression. Or both expression and identity might change together (Katz-Wise, 2020).

*Gender identity:* a person's deeply felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender neutral) that may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth or to a person's primary or secondary sex characteristics. Because gender identity is internal, a person's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others. "Affirmed gender identity" refers to a person's gender identity after coming out as transgender or gender nonconforming or undergoing a social and/or medical transition process (American Psychological Association , 2015).

*Gender nonconforming:* an adjective used as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender expression or gender identity differs from gender norms associated with their assigned birth sex (American Psychological Association , 2015).

*Queer:* an umbrella term that individuals may use to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. Historically, it has been considered a derogatory or pejorative term and the term may continue to be used by some individuals with negative intentions. Still, many LGBT individuals today embrace the label in a neutral or positive manner (Russell et al., 2010)

*Sex:* typically assigned at birth (or before during ultrasound) based on the appearance of external genitalia. When the external genitalia are ambiguous, other indicators (e.g., internal genitalia, chromosomal and hormonal sex) are considered to assign a sex, with the aim of assigning a sex that is most likely to be congruent with the child's gender identity (MacLaughlin & Donahoe, 2004).

*Sex assigned at birth:* sex is typically assigned at birth (or before during ultrasound) based on the appearance of external genitalia. When the external genitalia are ambiguous, other indicators (e.g., internal genitalia, chromosomal and hormonal sex) are considered to assign a sex, with the aim of assigning a sex that is most likely to be congruent with the child's gender identity (MacLaughlin & Donahoe, 2004).

*Sexual orientation:* a component of identity that includes a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction. A person may be attracted to men, women, both, neither, or to people who are genderqueer, androgynous, or have other gender identities. Individuals may identify as lesbian, gay, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual, among others (American Psychological Association, 2015).

*Transgender/Trans:* an umbrella term that incorporates differences in gender identity wherein one's assigned biological sex does not match their felt identity. This umbrella term includes persons who do not feel they fit into a dichotomous sex structure through which they are identified as male or female. Individuals in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this perception may or may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment (Meier & Labuski, 2013).

*Transmisogyny:* Originally coined by the author Julia Serano, the abjection of femininity in conjunction with transgenderism constitutes a particular form of oppression that trans women face (Krell, 2017).

*Transphobia*: the disgust toward individuals not conforming to society's gender expectations. It is expressed through prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and violence against transgenders (Bandini & Maggi, 2014)

*Trans woman*: a person whose sex assigned at birth was male, but who identifies as a woman (see Male To Female; APA, 2015).

### **Assumptions**

There are two assumptions associated with this qualitative study. The first assumption is that the researcher was able to recruit transgender women of color from the state of Florida who have been victimized, to participate in this study. Transgender citizens may or may not be willing to come forward and discuss their experiences as it may ignite trauma that they may not want to recall. Transgender and non-gender conforming women of color participation was critical to the success of this study as they are the focused population. I worked with transgender-friendly community organizations in the state of Florida to help with the distribution of the flyer to select participants, and I informed each participant that the study results would be made available to them. There was full transparency throughout the research.

The second assumption for this research study was that trans women will share their experiences of being victimized and not withhold information or provide socially desirable responses. The sensitivity of the subject matter, combined with the fact that I am not a member of the LGBTQIA community, may have made the participant hesitant to divulge pertinent information for the study. Aside from the careful selection of participants, I transcribed the data from the interviews to find data that yielded a clear

pattern. All interview questions were open ended and done via the Zoom Virtual Video platform, which allowed the participants to speak in their own comfort zones.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

There are parts of this study that were difficult to observe due to the boundaries imposed by researchers to study a particular scope of information for a specific purpose are referred to as delimitations (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). This study was delimited to trans women of color who reside in the state of Florida and have been victimized. Trans women of color is defined as non-cisgender citizens who identify as both female and non-Caucasian. For the purposes of this study, trans women of color would be considered African American, Hispanic American, Asian-American, etc. Based on available data from the Williams Institute and associated literature, trans women of color are victimized at a higher rate than their Caucasian counterparts (Flores, Brown, et al., 2016). Based upon the current literature, there is a gap in the research around transgender women of color and their lived experiences concerning victimization.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to qualitative research include the following: (a) since the approach omits contextual sensitivities by focusing more on meanings and experiences, policymakers may give low credibility to results from qualitative approach; (b) smaller sample sizes raise the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research; and (c) data analysis takes a considerable amount of time (Eddings, 2020; Rahman, 2017).

Limitation of this study include: (a) a small sample size of trans women of color was used, which limits statistical power and generalizability of results; (b) effects over time were not assessed, so those causal inferences could not be made; and (c) omitted variables could not be ruled out as influencing the mediated outcome of transgender identity (Jefferson et al., 2013). Although this was not a longitudinal study, further research can incorporate different time periods to determine if incidents involving transgender women of color fluctuate or change.

In addition, the non-probability sampling approach that was used also limited the generalizability of the findings. This limitation created the potential for selection bias, as it was difficult to determine how well-represented the sample is to the target population. Selection bias occurs when the selection of participants is not at random, and each participant has different attributes from each other. Generalization rests on the premise that samples are randomly drawn from the population under study (Andringa & Godfroid, 2020). If the selection of participants is biased, then the reliability of researchers' statements about the behavior under investigation is compromised (Andringa & Godfroid, 2020; Henrich et al., 2010). However, I limited selection bias by ensuring that the selected participants all shared the same characteristics as described in the inclusion criteria for the study.

There were other methods for data collection that I could have considered, such as focus groups and surveys. However, given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual one-on-one interviews via the Zoom Video platform were the most viable option to keep the participants and me safe. Although the pandemic represented a unique opportunity to

study the crisis itself, social distancing mandates had restricted traditional face-to-face investigations of all kinds (Lobe et al., 2020). As a rule, computer-mediated communication offers greater flexibility in time and location of data collection (Cater, 2011; Jankowski & Selm, 2005; Lobe et al., 2020), and can be described as a highly socialized form of interaction (Joinson, 2005; Lobe et al., 2020), which can also conform to health and safety restrictions.

Another limitation of this study was the research design. Other research designs could have been incorporated such as phenomenological, multiple case study, historical, ethnographical, and grounded theory. However, the narrative inquiry approach was the best for this study, as it allowed the participants to explore and explain their lived experience. Narrative inquiry, across various disciplines and multiple professional fields, aims at understanding and making meaning of experience through conversations, dialogue, and participation in the ongoing lives of research participants (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study were significant because they can help to inform policies regarding reporting victimization of trans women. Furthermore, they may help with programming for trans women of color who have been victimized. As a benefit, participants were offered professional services in their community after the completion of the interview.

From a public policy perspective, these findings can enable a focus on an effective public policy review to protect transgender citizens, especially trans women of

color, from further violent crimes. While non-transgender identified individuals are sometimes subjected to similar treatment, and while it is epidemiologically not possible to prove that the trans rates are significantly higher than the non-trans rates, due to the general invisibility of the trans-identified population and the lack of reporting of transgender-related hate crimes (Lombardi et al., 2001; Witten, 2003, 2004; Witten & Eyler, 1997), it is generally understood within the trans population that transgender individuals can enrage others by their mere existence.

This study was also significant because the findings contribute to filling a gap in the literature related to the lived experiences of trans women of color who have been victimized. There was a limited amount of literature related to transgender women of color and their lived experiences concerning victimization in the state of Florida.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced this qualitative study that will attempt to explore the lived experiences of transgender women of color who were victims of violent crime in the state of Florida using the theoretical frameworks of womanism and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory.

Violence against individuals with non-normative gender presentation is an alarming public health problem in the United States (Jauk, 2013). Violence against trans people is often triggered by gender non-conformity, and violence is a form of gender policing (Jauk, 2013). Minter (2007) concluded that transgender citizens are targeted not only for their violation of the social norm of gender dualism but because they are stereotypically perceived as easy targets, much in the same way older adults may be



singled out for muggings or home invasions. With the assistance of transgender rights groups on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, this study brought awareness to the lived experiences of communities that do not have visibility and access to stringent protections based on their gender identity: transgender women of color who have been victims of violent offenses. Each participant was able to share their story through this study's narrative research design.

In addition, this research will serve as the basis of a white paper presented to the Florida state legislature to make crucial changes to Florida's hate crime statutes to include gender identity. Chapter 2 will detail the extensive literature review of the research study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

In this chapter, the literature review compiled encompasses the theoretical foundation of this qualitative study. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the state of Florida. More specifically, this research explored how frequently victimization occurs, how trans women of color cope with being victims of crime, and to what extent trans women of color report these crimes. The intent of this research is to provide a better understanding of how transgender women of color make meaning of their lived experiences of being victims of crime in the state of Florida. This study's central concept was how victimization experiences among trans women of color in the state of Florida differ from the rest of the population, especially with violent offenses.

As stated in Chapter 1, there was a gap in the literature for population-based studies on hate crimes against trans women and their intersection with race. Not much was known with respect to the lived encounters of victimization among transgender women of color within the United States. When a person's or community's victimization is not understood by society, they are overlooked and are subject to more violations. Possibly, other individuals of society seem to end up casualties of wrongdoing as long as victimization is not tended to with criticalness.

The rest of this chapter consists of the literature search strategy, the theoretical foundation, trans women and victimization, victimization and incident reporting, a comprehensive look at LGBTQIA history in the United States, the stigma against

non-heteronormative lifestyles, the Trans Panic Defense, and the other studies related to this research.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy was conducted using Walden University's library databases including ProQuest Criminal Justice, Political Science Complete, and Google Scholar. Information was also compiled from non-profit agencies such as Equality Florida and the Human Rights Commission. The terms and phrases that were used in to locate the proper literature for this review included the following: *transgender*, *cisgender*, *queer*, *gender*, *gender expression*, *gender identity*, *hate crimes*, *communities of color*, *African American*, *Latin American*, *Asian-American*, *sex assigned at birth*, *sexual orientation*, *gender dysphoria*, *gender fluid*, *transmisogyny*, *transphobia*, and *trans woman*. Most of the keywords used generated literature from the ProQuest and Google Scholar databases, specifically, the ProQuest Criminal Justice database.

For the purposes of this study, transgender women are individuals who have made a male-to-female transition and are identified as female or trans woman. Transgender women of color are trans women who identify with the racial identities other than Caucasian. Every year in recent history has seen the murder of scores of transgender women of color, most notably Black transgender women (Carpenter, 2017). In this decade alone, Florida has seen a rapid increase of news coverage concerning crimes committed against transgender women of color (HRC, 2019). Despite this rapid increase in news coverage, there is not a substantial increase of attention of Florida police departments to the problem. It should be noted that transgender citizens are four times

more likely than the general population to report living in extreme poverty, which is defined as earning less than \$10,000 per year. This is why many transgender citizens are pushed into sex work, a trade that exposes anyone to violence and harassment. The situation is exacerbated with regards to transgender women of color who deal with the intersectionality of transphobia, sexism, homophobia, and racial discrimination.

Many non-governmental agencies including Equality Florida and the Human Rights Commission have acknowledged the rise in hate crimes against the transgender community in Florida, as currently 21 trans women of color and gender non-conforming citizens have been murdered in 2019 alone in the United States (HRC, 2020). Florida has had its share of the murders and other violent offenses. It could be the fact that violence that disproportionately affects transgender women of color, mixed between the intersections of racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia.

### **Themes Associated With the Literature**

The following section identifies themes that were recurrent throughout the literature review. Identified themes were addressed in detail below and were written to add clarity to their usefulness regarding the research.

### **Assessing the Needs of Trans Women Through the Intersectionality of Race and Gender**

Trans women face the challenges of weathering experiences related to their gender and transition at many levels: individually, interpersonally, and societally (Arayasirikul, 2016). Trans women face stigma, discrimination and systemic oppression directed toward transgender people, known as transphobia, which leads to unequal access

to education, employment, and other economic resources (Arayasirikul, 2016). Results of research studies have found that race is especially salient in the health of trans women, finding that trans women of color experience numerous structural inequalities that drive disparities in health (Arayasirikul, 2016). Also, recent research suggests trans people do not experience or enact gender separately from other social positions such as race, class, and sexuality (de Vries, 2015). This research suggests trans people's experiences of shifting inequality are varied and influenced by other intersecting social positions (de Vries, 2015).

The term *intersectionality*, coined by Crenshaw (1989), is rooted in Black feminist activism and scholarship in the United States (de Vries, 2015). The experiences of trans people of color in the United States explicate the institutional meanings attached to social positions, their interconnection, and the ways they are rooted in hegemonic narratives and normative expectations (de Vries, 2015). When it comes to hate crime legislation, intersectionality challenges the way legislators create effective hate crime policy. The current approach to hate crime distorts perceptions of lived experiences of hate and of those who experience it and creates a system whereby “the interests of more privileged individuals” (McBride & James, 2022; Meyer, 2012) and specifically, those who lack the social capital required to garner political support, have their personal and social identities disregarded and their experiences of hate erased from view ((McBride & James, 2022).

## **Negative Impact of Social Constructions in Policy Towards Transgender Citizens in Florida**

The role of caricature in policy, for example, heroes, victims, and villains, influence policy and determine which individual(s) belongs to a certain group. The language and content of policy can assign a social or political standing to the targeted population, whether intentionally or not (Mettler & Soss, 2004). Social identities via policy embed themselves into the public psyche and conscience (Giroux, 2004; Grady et al., 2012; Hill, 2009). This embedding of attributes and behaviors of target populations influence microlevel interactions. Consequently, symbolism in public policy, e.g., Welfare Queen, presents enormous obstacles for subgroups to overcome at the microlevel.

### **Interpretive Effects of Policy on Target Communities**

The nature of public policy to solve problems and allocate resources is essential to its functions and, thus, policies will impact attitudinal responses by target populations to government. Therefore, policies which are designed to allocate resources to a specific population based on shared characteristics will also run the risk of singling out others. Previous work has identified the role of good and bad on the allocation of resources through policy (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). More current research has also shown the framing of public policy around caricatures and symbolisms which include associations of bad and good (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Liu et al., 2016). For that reason, withholding protections such as discrimination protections and restroom access will impact the way minority members view themselves. Hence, attributing resources and

protections to particular populations and withholding resources from others will impact target communities.

### **Poor Communication Between Law Enforcement and the Transgender Community**

Law enforcement in Florida does not properly disclose hate crime statistics pertaining to gender identity. As such, there is miscommunication between law enforcement and transgender community. Past research has identified that many African American transgender individuals find it hard to maintain relationships with extended families (Miller & Stack, 2014; Ward, 2005) and to adapt to socially accepted gender roles (Burkitt, 1991; Miller, 2007; Lasala & Frienson, 2012; Norwood, 2012).

Transgender women and gender non-conforming citizens of color will likely encounter negative interactions with law enforcement. For that reason, trouble communicating with family and individuals who form dyadic relationships with the individual at the microlevel is likely to harm the developing human organism in numerous ways.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

There were two theoretical frameworks that guided this study: womanist theory and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory.

#### **Womanist Theory**

Womanist theory is a social theory developed by novelist Alice Walker in her 1983 book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: Womanist Prose*. Womanism describes Black women who are deeply committed to the wholeness and well-being of all of humanity, male and female (Brewer, 2020). Womanism, just as Black Feminism, is often viewed in a historical context. It should be noted that Womanism is not black feminism;

womanism is located in the lived experiences of Black women, Black culture, and self-determination (Brewer, 2020). This is its major theoretical proposition: Feminism does not fully observe the true lived experience of women of color.

This theory was chosen since it is specific to Black women's and other women of color's involvement over each other's lived experiences and offers a fitting focal point through which to study the target population being investigated (Bauman, 2021).

Womanist theory was used in this study to guide and develop the interview questions. It is argued that qualitative research grounded in womanist theory embodies the art of participatory witnessing (Black women telling their stories; Heath, 2006; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Qualitative techniques like semi-structured interviewing present the opportunity to gather wealthy information finished by the respondents' possess translations of their encounters and the social circumstances in which their story has unfurled (Sosulski et al., 2010, p. 37; Woodley & Lockard, 2016, p. 324). Semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to listen to the stories of these women and, thus, "learn new ways of being moral and political in the social world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 20; Woodley & Lockard, 2016, p. 324).

Studies have been undertaken that have used womanist theory in recent years. Richardson (2019) conducted a case study on the lived experiences and communication styles of five Black women founders of three leading organizations that comprised the early Black Lives Matter movement of 2014: Brittany Ferrell of Millennial Activists United; Ieshia Evans, an anti-police brutality activist; Alicia Garza and Marissa Johnson of Black Lives Matter; and Brittany Packnett of We the Protestors/Campaign Zero.



Richardson (2019) argues that respectability politics hindered Black feminist activist leadership during the 20th century, that there is a set of rules for engagement for Black women who become leaders that was detrimental to their growth. Richardson (2019) conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the participants through the concept of embodied discourse, which refers to a form of Black female textual activism wherein race women assertively demand the inclusion of their bodies and, in particular, working-class bodies and Black female bodies, by placing them in the texts they write and speak. In this manner, embodied discourse disrupts the “politics of respectability as the paradigmatic frames through which to engage Black women’s ideas and their politics,” since respectability as a communication method sought to make Black women’s bodies “as inconspicuous and as sexually innocuous as possible” (Cooper, 2017, p. 3; Richardson, 2019, p. 7). Embodied discourse instead invites observers to regard the full corporeality of a womanist protestor, to consider how her race, class, and even sexuality might converge to shape her activism (Cooper, 2017; Richardson, 2019).

Another study incorporating womanist theology was authored by Bauman in 2021, entitled *Womanism & Wellbeing: A Manuscript Dissertation Exploring the Effects of Shame, Loss, and Gender Issues*. Bauman used a case study approach to create manuscripts that are examined through the lens of womanist theology to explore gender issues that impact mental health. Womanist theology advocates for justice towards sexual and gender identity, to be understood as an identity, not an act (Bauman, 2021). Thus, discrimination of sexual identity and gender inequality negatively affect women’s well-being (Bauman, 2021; Lightsey, 2015). Positive body image, acceptance, and advocacy

are foundational desires for all people, especially for those with bodies and sexualities that are different than the stereotypical (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Bauman, 2021; Edwards & Bauman, 2015; McKenzie et al., 2018). The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) communities have long experienced societal bullying and stigmatization (American Psychological Association, 2014; Kelleher, 2009); while women have incurred societal objectification (Fredrickson & Harrison, 2005; Grippo, 2011; McKenzie et al., 2018). This leads into the theory of intersectionality, which is the second theory of this study.

### **Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality is the idea that the convergence of oppressed identities, such as race or sexuality, creates unique experiences that traditional theories of identity fail to accurately explain (Page, 2017). In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to allude to the crossing point of numerous minority characters in frameworks of segregation (e.g., race discrimination—the seen predominance of one race over another) and mastery (e.g., sex inequality—men over ladies; Page, 2017). As such, trans people of color's stories and counter-narratives offer rich analysis (de Vries, 2015). Centering trans people's experiences illuminates ways individuals draw upon hegemonic and cultural constructions about social positions and the significance of these intersections to understand themselves (de Vries, 2015). The theoretical proposition of Crenshaw's intersectionality theory is on the effects of people's specific positioning on multiple axes of inequality, as well as having potential effects on people being doubly or triply discriminated (Verloo, 2015). Furthermore, their experiences reveal how people

incorporate perceptions of others' attributions of multiple social positions (de Vries, 2015).

Crenshaw's intersectionality theory was developed to name overlapping forms of discrimination otherwise overlooked when only accounting for one vector of identity (Fenner, 2020). Transgender women of color possess several intersecting identities as they live their lives in the United States (Griffin, 2016). These include that they are people of color, women, and transgender (Griffin, 2016). To properly understand the complex and vulnerable position of transgender women of color in the United States today, it is imperative to consider each of these three identities (Griffin, 2016). Looking at the way these three identities intersect is a key in gaining a clearer understanding of what must be done to combat the varying discriminations each of them bring upon transgender women of color, and helping them attain equality (Griffin, 2016). As with womanist theory, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory was used to inform the interview questions concerning racial identity. Both womanist and intersectionality theories connect to both research questions by building upon the life experiences of trans women, who are also a person of color and a victim of crime.

Two articles pertain to trans women of color that use Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. Lacombe-Duncan (2016) applies Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory to understand access to HIV-related healthcare for Transgender Women. An intersectional perspective has the potential to enhance the understanding of processes of social exclusion operating across several intersecting oppressions, ultimately informing how HIV-related healthcare access disparities for transgender women is understood

(Lacombe-Duncan, 2016). Studies employing an intersectional approach to understanding HIV-related healthcare access for transgender women living with HIV (WLWH) engage with themes related to macrolevel oppression (e.g., HIV-related stigma and cisnormativity), how these concepts relate to the organization of care (e.g., exclusion of transgender WLWH's needs from healthcare research), and how this translates into the everyday experience of transgender WLWH in healthcare settings (Lacombe-Duncan, 2016). Transmisogyny has been underexplored in the academic literature to date and has predominantly been applied in the field of feminist studies to explain the exclusion of transgender women from women's spaces or to describe interlocking forms of gender oppression (Lacombe-Duncan, 2016).

In addition, Momen and Dilks (2021) argue that much of the violence against trans individuals is impacted by society's rigid adherence to a gender binary (woman/man) and to the notion that there exists a linear relationship between natal sex, gender, and sexuality. According to Collins and Bilge (2016), "using intersectionality as an analytic lens highlights the multiple nature of individual identities and how varying combinations of class, gender, race, sexuality, and citizenship categories differentially position each individual" (p. 2). For example, explorations of gender identity are incomplete without taking into account how a person is raced (Momen & Dilks, 2021, Salamon, 2018). Momen and Dilks (2021) argue that this intersectional approach should be extended to studies of trans victimization as well. Compared to the U.S. population, trans Americans are more diverse racially and ethnically (Flores, Brown, & Herman, 2016; Momen & Dilks, 2021), and this diversity of demographic characteristics has been

shown to impact trans victimization. Data on trans homicide victims point to the necessity of study through an intersectional framework as well (Momen & Dilks, 2021). Howard and Renfrow (2015) posit four key tenets of intersectionality. First, intersectional frameworks assume that the perspectives of people are shaped by the multiple categories to which they belong, some of which are socially marginalized while others may be socially privileged (Momen & Dilks, 2021). Second, when differing systems of inequality come together, they are transformed in their intersections (Momen & Dilks, 2021), thus, structures of inequality are not just the sum of their parts. Third, intersectionality is context dependent (Momen & Dilks, 2021). It requires attention not only to the multiple categories individuals belong to, but also the structural, institutional, and organizational contexts in which individuals live (Momen & Dilks, 2021). Fourth, intersectional analyses are complicated by the simultaneous experiences of oppression and privilege (Momen & Dilks, 2021). Potter (2015) contends that intersectionality can enhance criminological inquiry. For example, given that women of color experience life differently from men and White women, male- and White-oriented criminological theories may be inadequate for explaining criminal behavior by and victimization against women of color (Joseph, 2006; Momen & Dilks, 2021; Potter, 2008; Russell-Brown, 2004).

### **Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming History and the United States**

There are several key events that are significant to transgender, intersexual, and gender non-conforming community across the United States:

### **Thomas(ine) Hall**

In 1629, Thomas(ine) Hall, a person in colonial Virginia who self-identified as both a man and a woman, was ordered to declare this identity in public and dress in both male and female attires (Du, 2020). Within Thomas/ine's trial in the colonies, for an unknown offense, s/he apparently explicitly identified her/himself as an anatomical "hermaphrodite" (Hudson, 2019). Thomas(ine) Hall constantly shifted between male and female identities and declined to choose either male or female identity before the General Court of the Colony of Virginia (Du, 2020). The punishment given to Hall for daring to live as a gender fluid person was to ensure that their clothing did highlight their anatomical variation (Frisby, 2017). This ruling was no doubt made to humiliate Hall and prevent them from forming intimate relations with males or females (Frisby, 2017).

In the colonies, citizens were subjected to the binary system. The binary system was the basis for the idea in which women were regarded as imperfect forms of men (Du, 2020). This system "justified" situations in which men—compared to women—enjoyed social, economic, and political privileges (Du, 2020). In colonial Virginia, openly presenting such gender identity would lead to severe discrimination and social condemnation (Du, 2020). In the Hall case, being declared as both a man as well as a woman, and coerced to dress in both male and female attire, was intended and perceived to be a punishment (Du, 2020).

### **Mary Jones**

Peter Sewally, aka Mary Jones, aka The Man Monster, who was sentenced to prison in 1836 for grand larceny, was noted for less noble causes (Block, 2017). Sewally

was known as a pickpocket, a prostitute, and a person assigned male at birth (AMAB) (Block, 2017). In 1836, Mary Jones, a Black trans woman sex worker, was arrested and put on trial for stealing money from a client. Jones was sensationalized in a lithograph that depicted her well-dressed with the caption “the Man-Monster” (Timmons, 2020). It is argued, “Sewallly’s [*sic*] monstrosity lay both in his [*sic*] evident race and in the shocking conflation of the gender binary around which the dynamics of middle-class propriety pivoted” (Timmons, 2020, p. 52). Additionally, her monstrosity to white middle-class society could be located in the fact that Jones had sexual relations with white men, thus upsetting gender, racial, and sexual norms of the time (Timmons, 2020). The case of Mary Jones’ life reveals that “monster” is a subjective category. It also reveals the ambiguous and multiplicities of the construction of Black trans women as monstrous (Timmons, 2020). While her being a prostitute may not have brought on a hailstorm from the media, the discovery of her being a cisgender male sought to ensure that her labor and gender identity were made to be criminalized and scorned (Mulholland, 2020).

### **Frances Thompson**

Frances Thompson, a disabled Black trans woman, was arrested for cross-dressing in Memphis (Timmons, 2020). For three days in May 1866, white mobs attacked and brutalized the African American residents of Memphis, Tennessee, forever called the Memphis Riots. Following the Memphis Riots of 1866, where Thompson and four other known Black women were raped by a white mob, she testified before a Congressional committee about her experience and the riots (Timmons, 2020). Her testimony, along

with the four other Black women, pointed to the racialized and gendered violence that had happened in Memphis. After confirming being in Memphis during the riots, she recounted what happened in her home. On the first night of the riots, seven men, two of whom were Irish policemen, entered the home she shared with Lucy Smith, a 16-year-old girl (Mulholland, 2020). Both Smith and Thompson fed the seven men, who then proceeded to sexually assault both women after they refused the males' sexual advances (Mulholland, 2020).

Thompson's arrest for cross-dressing in 1876 was used by white conservatives to undermine her testimony because of her transgender status (Timmons, 2020). For white conservatives and racists, Thompson's monstrosity was intrinsically tied not only to her race and gender identity but also her testimony about the violence she experienced. It is critical to understand that Thompson's gender identity, which was also deeply connected to her as a Black woman, was used to justify racial and gendered violence against all Black people (Timmons, 2020).

### **Female Impersonators and the Ku Klux Klan**

During the night of November 15, 1937, nearly 200 men and women in white hooded robes stormed into the Miami-area nightclub, La Paloma (Capo, 2017; Shammass, 2019). Located in an unincorporated part of Miami-Dade County, La Paloma billed itself as a Miami hot spot, and it attracted the white supremacist group known as the Ku Klux Klan that evening (Shammass, 2019)

At first, the party continued at the raucous establishment—the customers and staff believed the sudden disruption was part of an act—but soon the Klanspeople began



smashing furniture, roughing up workers, and ordering everyone to leave, while threatening to burn the whole place down (Shammas, 2019). The Klan became a visible and influential source of power in Miami during the 1920s when its members employed violence and fear—including lynchings, bombings, and parades—to silence and purge challenges to white supremacy and urban authority (Capo, 2017). La Paloma nightclub became a symbol of LGBT resistance in the city. From that point in time, the LGBT communities of Florida would begin its struggle to find acceptance and often it included violence and hate (Shammas, 2019).

### **Charlotte McLeod**

A trans woman named Charlotte McLeod was the second American citizen to receive gender reassignment surgery after Christine Jorgensen. While living in Miami after serving in the United States military, McLeod spent the first 28 years of her life struggling to fit in as male (Shammas, 2019). Born Charles McLeod, Charlotte sought out a doctor in Denmark who nearly killed her while performing the procedure on his kitchen table; however, emergency surgery corrected the botched operation. In 1954, she returned to the United States as Charlotte (Shammas, 2019). In the United States she faced an onslaught of unwanted media attention but managed to quietly relocate to Miami and fade into obscurity—until her wedding became national news (Shammas, 2019). Nonetheless, McLeod married, and she eventually faded into the background (Shammas, 2019).

Charlotte McLeod was a pivotal part of the development of LBGTQIA representation in Florida. McLeod's inability to access middle-class decorum through her

questionable morals (abandoning military duties, belligerent behavior, working at nightclubs) led media who focused on her to constantly remind the public of her lack of middle-class respectability (Glover, 2016). However, McLeod was able to articulate transsexuality as an acceptable subject position through an embodiment of the norms of white womanhood, most notably domesticity, respectability, and heterosexuality (Skidmore, 2011). However, this maneuver was only possible through the subjugation of other gender variant bodies. As the subject position of the transsexual was sanitized in the mainstream press and rendered visible through whiteness, other forms of gender variance were increasingly made visible through nonwhiteness (Skidmore, 2011). Trans women of color from that era and after still did not have equal treatment that other communities were able to obtain.

Two major tragedies in 1998 would bring LGBTQIA and race issues to the forefront of the national conscious.

### **The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act**

In 2009, the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act was signed into law by President Barack Obama. The Shepard-Byrd Act seeks to deter hate crimes by enhancing the punishment of criminal conduct motivated by animus (Boram, 2016; Hall, 2020). The law created a substantive offense for crimes committed because of animus, including LGBT animus (Boram, 2016). A hate crime is a crime in which the defendant intentionally selects a victim or, in the case of a property crime, the property that is the object of the crime, because of the actual or perceived *race, color,*

*religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation* of any person (Title 18 U.S.C Section 245).

The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act allows the federal government to prosecute hate crimes, including those based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Hall, 2020). The Act is named after two victims of horrific hate crimes: Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Matthew Shepard was a gay student who was beaten to death in Wyoming in 1998. James Byrd Jr. was a Black man who was murdered by white supremacists in Texas, also in 1998. In both cases, both victims were targeted for who they were, and they were violently tortured and murdered. On June 7, 1998, James Byrd, Jr., a 49-year-old Black man, accepted a ride from three white men who, instead of taking him home, beat him, took off his clothes, chained him naked to the back of their truck, and dragged him to his death (Hall, 2020). On October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old gay college student, also accepted a ride and was not taken home. Instead, he was driven to a remote area, tied to a fence, beaten within an inch of his life, and left to die (Hall, 2020).

While each of these cases did not deal directly with gender identity, this was a landmark piece of legislation that laid the framework on how to classify acts committed against citizens as hate crimes. The only problem with the legislation is that as a federal act, violent crimes, such as murder, or rape/sexual assault, are prosecuted at the state level. As such, the State of Florida does not recognize the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr, Anti-Hate Crimes act under state law, which means crimes committed against a

person's gender identity is not required to be reported by police departments as hate crimes.

### **Transgender Women and Victimization/Incident Reporting**

Violence against transgender women is widespread and systemic in the United States. Transgender citizens are not a protected class under the Constitution and trans rights often hinge on case law interpretations or individual state laws (Gyamerah et al., 2021). In the United States, the criminal justice system is multi-layered as the federal, state, and local governments have their own court systems (Mayer & Malin, 2018). Local governments should follow the rulings made by federal and state courts, but the federal and state courts have equal power. Crimes against persons are rarely prosecuted at the local level but are handled by both the federal and state courts. Depending on the nature of the crime, offenses may be prosecuted as a federal crime. Each state court follows the statutes that their state government has made into law through its executive and legislative branches. Unless a state government has a hate crime statute that incorporates gender identity on the books, crimes against a person's gender identity often go underreported.

However, the self-reporting of crimes against trans women yields a different result when it comes hate crimes, especially for Black and Latina trans women, who are at a higher risk for hate crimes compared to their White counterparts due to the intersectional effects of racism and transphobia (Gyamerah et al., 2021). For example, between 2012–2015, trans women made up 47 of the 88 anti-LGBTQ homicides recorded in 12 states; of these, 39 (44%) were Black trans women, underscoring a significant racial

disparity in homicide rates (Gyamerah et al., 2021). Another study found that from 2010–2014, young Black and Latina trans women had higher homicide rates than their cisgender woman counterparts (Gyamerah et al., 2021). These disparities suggest that racism and its sociocultural effects may place trans women of color at higher risk of violence.

### **Transgender Women and Victimization**

As noted in Chapter 1, trans women experience high rates of GBV (Gyamerah et al., 2021). Transphobic hate crimes are one such form of violence that affect trans women of color. However, little is understood about factors that shape transphobic hate crimes and racial/ethnic variation in these experiences (Gyamerah et al., 2021). A study was conducted involving transgender women in the San Francisco area where the participants self-reported incidents of transphobic hate crimes. About half (45.8%) of the participants in the study reported experiencing a transphobic hate crime; only 51.1% of these were reported to the police (Gyamerah et al., 2021). Among those who reported a hate crime experience, Black (47.9%) and Latina (49.0%) trans women reported a higher prevalence of battery with a weapon (Gyamerah et al., 2021). What should be noted about this study is that trans women who felt their gender identity questioned had lower odds of reporting a hate crime to the police compared to those did not feel questioned. As well, policies that address structural factors, especially among trans women of color, can yield violence prevention benefits (Gyamerah et al., 2021).

Research has been conducted on transgender women who have been victims of violent crimes on college campuses. According to a study focusing on college students,

46% of college students said their classmates, professors, or staff at college or vocational school thought or knew they were transgender (S. E. James et al., 2016). Nearly one-quarter (24%) of respondents who indicated that classmates, professors, or staff at college or vocational school thought or knew they were transgender were verbally, physically, or sexually harassed (S. E. James et al., 2016). Native American (37%), Black (28%), and Middle Eastern (27%) respondents were more likely to have had these experiences, while white (23%), Latino/a (23%), and Asian (22%) respondents were less than likely (S. E. James et al., 2016). Transgender women in college who have experienced victimization were more likely to report suicide attempts and alcohol abuse than those who had not been victimized (Coulter et al., 2015; Testa et al., 2012).

In addition, victimization has been associated with illicit drug use among transgender women (Griner et al., 2020). Those involved in illicit drug use may also be involved in the sex industry. Transgender sex workers also report harassment and physical violence by the police due to their gender identity, including extortion (sexual favors to avoid arrest), being raped and enduring beatings (Infante et al., 2009; Sausa et al., 2007). Transgender women also reported that sometimes customers reacted violently upon discovery that the female worker was biologically male (Elifson et al., 1993; Sausa et al., 2007). Such violent reactions include murder, physical beating, and the use of weapons (knives and razors; Sausa et al., 2007).

### **FBI Uniform Crime Reports and the State of Florida**

The Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program generates reliable statistics for use in law enforcement. It also provides information for students of criminal justice,

researchers, the media, and the public. The program has been providing crime statistics since 1930. The reporting of crime data by law enforcement agencies to the FBI and its Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) is completely voluntary. The State of Florida does not acknowledge crimes against transgender and gender non-conforming citizens as a hate crime. along with the issue of the hate crime statute not being extended to include gender identity.

On April 23, 1990, Congress passed the Hate Crime Statistics Act, 28 U.S.C. § 534, which required the U.S. Attorney General to collect data about crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. The Attorney General delegated the responsibilities of developing the procedures for implementing, collecting, and managing hate crime data to the Director of the FBI, who in turn, assigned the tasks to the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. Under the direction of the Attorney General and with the cooperation and assistance of many local and state law enforcement agencies, the UCR Program created a hate crime data collection to comply with the congressional mandate.

Thousands of cities, county, college and university, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies have voluntarily submitted data to the UCR Hate Crime Statistics Program on crimes motivated by prejudice based on race, gender and gender identity, religion, disability, sexual orientations, or ethnicity (FBI, 2021). However, in the data on the 2019 hate crimes report, gender identity data is not recorded. This report lists all major cities in Florida, with the common outcome of no reporting of a hate crime based on gender and gender identity. Despite the lack of data concerning violent offenses

against transgender women in Florida, data reported to the FBI is available from other states that looks at certain violent offenses, including rape and sexual assault, against the lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender community.

### **The Definition of a Hate Crime**

The FBI (2021) under the Department of Justice (DOJ) defines a hate crime as a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism, with an added element of bias. Typically, hate crimes are offenses that are motivated by a negative bias: a lack of understanding of another person identity, culture, religion, or customs along with the group that targeted person shares. In the United States, many different communities outside of the dominant Caucasian population have experienced violence towards them based on preconceived negative perceptions. That is why in 2014, former President Barack Obama declared gender identity to be a part of the Federal Hate Crime Statute along with race, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, and religion. On July 24, 2014, President Obama signed an executive order to place gender identity under Title IX which prohibits discrimination in educational programs and those programs that receive financial assistance from the federal government. At the federal level, transgender citizens can receive full benefits and protection; however, this created a problem with regards to states' rights. Unless incidents such as murder or terrorism occur involving a federal official, all crimes are prosecuted at the state level. This means each of the 50 states have their own laws and statutes; thus, states will handle criminal cases involving potential hate crimes differently despite targeted populations such as the transgender community having federal protection.



In addition, federal protection does not extend to law enforcement officials who also reportedly harass transgender women of color. Across the United States, transgender citizens experience violence and abuse from the very authorities who are entrusted to protect them. Police frequently harass and profile transgender people of color, sowing distrust among the very communities they have sworn to serve. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, a majority (57%) of transgender people are afraid to go to the police when they need them. This failure of trust adds to the dearth of crime reporting concerning transgender women of color.

### **The Willing Misidentification of Victims**

Transgender women of color who have been victims of murder have often been misidentified by law enforcement agencies through their gender identity. According to the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies (2008): Transgender people may self-distinguish as transgender, female, male, trans-woman or man, transsexual, crossdresser, bi-gender, sexual orientation eccentric, sex addressing, male-to-female, female-to-male or one of numerous other transgender personalities, and may express their sexual orientations in an assortment of manly, ladylike, and hermaphroditic ways (Glynn et al., 2016). As many transition from the gender assigned to them at birth, it is difficult to update their driver's license and state identification documents to reflect the gender change. Thus, transgender women of color who are victims of homicide are often misidentified by police as they identify the victims' remains based on their driver's license or other state identification documents that they manage to obtain which show the gender before the transition

(Wood et al., 2019). While this may seem like oversight on the part of law enforcement, this is the agency's willingness to behave in such a manner.

Such is the case in the city of Jacksonville, Florida. The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office, often referred to as the "JSO," has ongoing tensions with the Black transgender community over its handling of the outbreak of murders. Jacksonville leads the United States with highest rate of murders involving transgender women of color (HRC, 2018). In 2018, there were at least 22 reported killings of transgender people in the United States, with three that took place in Jacksonville, more than in any other U.S. city (Allen, 2018). All three of those homicide victims were Black transgender women. Celine Walker was shot in a motel on February 4; Antash'a English was gunned down in a June 1 drive-by shooting; and Cathalina Christina James was killed in a motel on June 24 (Allen, 2018). Despite the outcry from the local LGBT community, the JSO maintained that they were in the right to refer to transgender victims using their legal names and by the sex listed on their government documentation (Allen, 2018). Such policies can impede investigations into transgender homicides, LGBT anti-violence advocates say, because many in the transgender community won't recognize a deceased friend by their legal name and therefore can't provide information to police until it is too late (Allen, 2018).

### **The Impact of Race on Gender Identity and Crime**

Each of the victims of violent offenses in the state of Florida was transgender and also non-Caucasian (HRC, 2021). Many victims, disproportionately, were identified as African American. African Americans have a long history in the United

States of America of experiencing violence and many upsetting atrocities including, police brutality, rape/sexual assault, and systemic oppression. According to the Human Rights Commission Report of 2021, when we speak of “African American” as a racial identity in this study, it is referring to those whose origins, directly or indirectly, are connected to the continent of Africa. African Americans in the United States are descendants of African slaves who were brought in ships by white colonists to the shores of this country as early as 1619. The lived experiences of the slaves, documented by historians, consisted of forced labor in cotton fields, brutal discipline rituals including whipping and torture, rape/sexual assaults, and murder. African slaves were freed with the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation under President Abraham Lincoln after the American Civil War, where the Northern states who wanted to abolish slavery defeated the Southern states who were in favor of it. While African slaves and their descendants were freed, the pro-slavery states in the south worked tirelessly to keep their freedoms limited through Jim Crow laws, the Ku-Klux-Klan, and the destruction of Tulsa, Oklahoma, otherwise known as “Black Wall Street.” In the 400 years since the first slaves arrived on boats and in the 200-plus years since the founding of this nation, African Americans were unable to generate generational wealth to escape the chronic poverty that the majority of the community has been forced to live in. Already disadvantaged groups including women, and the LGBT community, have had their conditions worsen when identified as also African American.

A similar study on the lived experiences of Black transgender women was conducted in the city of Detroit. The study on trans women and sexual practices found that lack of social support was an independent predictor of unsafe sexual practices among transgender women (Graham et al., 2014). Social control mechanisms such as the church, schools, and the criminal justice system have had a negative impact on these participants of this study. Individuals paradoxically found faith to be both an internal source of strength or resilience, as well as others' moral rationale for transphobia and discrimination (Graham et al., 2014). The researchers of that study have pointed out that more research is needed to better understand how the benefits of religiosity or spirituality and the oppressive forces of some religious institutions interact, especially among black gender and sexually marginalized groups, given the unique significance of the church in some black communities (Graham et al., 2014). Crenshaw (1991) argues that race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourses as indications of bias or domination.

In addition to Black transgender women, Latin American transgender women have also experienced violent crimes based on their gender identity in the state of Florida. For the purposes of this study, "Latin-American" as an identity refers to any citizen of the United States who has a direct or indirect origin to nations apart of Central and South America including Argentina, Costa Rica, and Colombia. This also includes the nation of Mexico, which is a part of North America. Stereotypes of Latinas as hypersexual have been propagated throughout U.S. history via popular discourses claiming that Latinxs, and especially Latina women, are sexually

promiscuous, or caliente, and therefore out of control of their bodies and emotions (Bolivar, 2021). These beliefs about Latinas were solidified into numerous policies aimed at controlling and suppressing their reproduction (Bolivar, 2021).

Approximately 21% of the transgender population in the United States is comprised of Latinx transgender people (Abreu et al., 2020; Hwahng et al., 2019). Latina transgender women who are also immigrants living in the United States are unique with respect to language diversity, immigration status, and socioeconomic status (Abreu et al., 2020; Hwahng, 2018; Hwahng et al., 2019). Their positionality and experiences of marginalization across ethnicity, gender identity, and immigration status, render Latina transgender women particularly vulnerable to economic stress that impacts their quality of life (Abreu et al., 2020; Cerezo et al., 2014).

Between 2010 and 2014, estimates of the Latina transfeminine aged 15–34 years homicide rate per 100 000 during this period, assuming their deaths were recorded as male, ranged from 16.1, when assuming no undercount and a large transgender population, to 484, when assuming 4 of 5 transgender deaths went unreported and a smaller transgender population (Dinno, 2017). For Latina transfeminine residents aged 15–34 years, assuming their deaths were recorded as female, no estimate gives a homicide rate for all Latina female residents aged 15–34 years, and six of 12 estimates give a lower homicide rate than that for all Latino male residents aged 15–34 years (Dinno, 2017).

Trans Latina epistemologies of the body emerge in a historical, political, and economic context where their bodies are objectified, exploited, and abused (Bolivar,

2021). While trans Latina sexual economies of labor have long been spaces for trans Latina creativity where resistant epistemologies emerge, they are also the result of powerful dehumanizing ideologies about trans Latinas and their bodies and extreme economic exclusion (Bolívar, 2021). The transgender Latina women's understandings of their bodies and their gender reflect theories within transgender studies that challenge cisnormative assumptions about the relationship between genitals and gender (Bolívar, 2021). State-sanctioned and socially acceptable forms of racism, classism, and cisgenderism work against trans Latina women in the United States in ways that only reinforce their racial, sexual, political, social, and economic marginalization (Bolívar, 2021). Given these intersectional experiences, more research about the experiences of Latina transgender women is needed (Abreu et al., 2020; Hwahng et al., 2019).

The current study also observed transgender women who identify as Asian American, who have been victims of crime in the state of Florida. For this study, "Asian American" refers to those individuals who have origins within the continent of Asia and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. The results from the 2015 National Transgender Discrimination Survey highlighted that transgender respondents who also identified as Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, or Pacific Islander, had higher suicidal attempt (56%), compared to other transgender respondents (41%) and the general U.S. population (4%; Becerra et al., 2021). Despite this data, there is a dearth of research that examines the specific intersectional experience of Asian American women (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). This lack of attention to Asian

American women has contributed to an oversimplification of their experience as targets of racism and sexism by assuming that they share the experiences of Asian American men and white women (respectively) and or failing to investigate additional experiences that may not be central to these larger groups (Mukkamala, & Suyemoto, 2018).

In addition, the representations of women from Southeast and East Asian backgrounds cast them as sexualized, but also hyperfeminine (Haritaworn 2007; Noack-Lundberg et al., 2020). There were debates about whether Asian trans women could pass more easily, arguing that Asian trans women were more feminine (Noack-Lundberg et al., 2020). This rhetoric would then allow Asian trans women to be invisible, much akin to the “model minority,” where minorities succeed by studying hard, getting married, and becoming good consumers and producers in the national economy, while queer configurations of intimacy and gender are necessarily erased (Hsu, 2018).

In the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, more than half (51%) of American Indian and Alaska Native transgender people indicated that they identify as Two-Spirit (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). Each of these Native American nations is different from the next, with unique histories, cultural practices, and languages (Movement Advancement Project, 2019). In some, though not all indigenous communities, “Two-Spirit” is another term used to describe individuals or genders that fall outside binary or stereotypical understandings of male and female (Movement Advancement Project, 2019).

This research observed transgender women who identify themselves as “multiracial,” where subjects identify as more than one racial identity. In the report by the Williams Institute published in 2016, they found that the population of adults who identify as transgender is more racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. general population. Flores, Herman, et al., (2016) estimates that there is a total of 285,000 LGBT American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) adults, including 56.5% that are AIAN-only and 43.5% that are AIAN in combination with at least one other race.

As proposed by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality theory proposes that experiences such as discrimination that relate to particular constellations of identities (e.g., race and gender) contain not only shared discrimination with those who share some but not all aspects of these identities but also unique experiences of discrimination particular to that identity constellation (Mukkamala, & Suyemoto, 2018; Steinbugler et al., 2006). This research aimed to provide much needed clarity to the experience of intersectional discrimination between the socially constructed identities of race and gender identity (Mukkamala, & Suyemoto, 2018).

### **The Intersectionality Between Race and Gender Identity**

Covering both the racial and gender identity components of the lived experience of transgender women of color, it is important to address intersectionality. Young transgender women are significantly negatively impacted by suicidality, HIV, difficult gender and sexual identity development in unaccepting environments, residential instability, joblessness, survival sex work, and a host of other challenges (Graham et al., 2014). These inequities are intensified for young transgender women



of color (Graham et al., 2014). Unfortunately, few studies have specifically examined the structural issues contributing to vulnerabilities among black transgender women (Graham et al., 2014).

In our American culture, coming out as a transwoman, is not considered a declaration of being a female, which in turn complicates their status as a woman of color. Teal (2015) suggests that the experience of being a transwoman of color is impacted by the structural positions of being a woman and being perceived at times as a man of color. Crenshaw (1989) argued that theorists must take both gender and race into account to show how they interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's lives. All of the deceased victims of crimes in Florida are all under the age of 40; thus, making young transgender women of color the primary target group.

### **The Sex Work Industry and Trans Women of Color**

Black transgender women are often involved in sex work - that is as an occupation, involves a worker being paid money in exchange for a sex act performed on a client (Hwahng, 2018). One correlation that exists between the primary target group and the heightened rate of murders is criminalized sex work. The most common profession that trans women of color end up working in is prostitution - the act that could involve sexual contact or sexual intercourse in exchange for money or other forms of transaction (Platt, 2018). In the United States, prostitution is considered illegal in all 50 states. According to the Red Umbrella project, Black and Latino respondents to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) in 2015 had the overall highest participation in illegal sex trade occupations. They found that 694

NTDS respondents—10.8% of the overall survey—reported having participated in sex work and 135 NTDS respondents (an additional 2.3%) indicated that they had traded sex for rent or a place to stay. When examined for racial disparity, Black and Black Multiracial NTDS respondents had the highest rate of sex trade participation overall (39.9%), followed by those who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a (33.2%). Those who identified as “White only” had the lowest rate of participation at 6.3%. The NTDS survey found that transgender people overall experience high levels of discrimination in every area of life, as well as high levels of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, negative interactions with police, incarceration, and violent victimization (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). This leads into the criminal justice system and its indifference towards transgender women of color.

### **The Indifference of the U.S. Criminal Justice System**

The criminalizing and stigmatizing of sex work in the United States can worsen the discrimination and marginalization that transgender people already face in society. Trans sex laborers encounter badgering and savagery, frequently at the hands of police, and these encounters are increased for transgender individuals of color, particularly females (Fitzgerald et al., 2015; Matsuzaka & Koch, 2019). Transgender youth of color are harassed at school, forcing many of them to drop out early, face homelessness, and try to find income to survive (Page, 2017). As a result, many transgender citizens participate in the sex trade in order to earn income or as an alternative to relying on homeless shelters and food banks (Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

It should be noted that Black and Black Multiracial respondents had the highest rates of both arrest due to their transgender status (65.3%) and being sent to jail or prison for any reason (69.6%; Fitzgerald et al., 2015). According to the NTDS (2015), for those who have appeared in court, transgender people engaged in the sex trade were also more likely to report biased treatment by judges and court staff (39.6% vs. 15.5% of non-sex workers).

Trans women of color in the sex work industry operate in a criminalized environment; they are subject to repeated assault and harassment from criminals and law enforcement. Police rarely face consequences for harassment partly because sex workers fear being arrested if they come forward to report abuse (Holston-Zannell, 2020). Police also take advantage of criminalization by extorting sex workers or coercing them into sexual acts, threatening arrest if they don't comply with their threats. In addition, the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) legislations banned many online platforms for sex workers, including client screening services like Redbook, which allowed sex workers to share information about abusive and dangerous customers and build communities to protect themselves (Holston-Zannell, 2020). The law also pushed more sex workers offline and into the streets, where they must work in isolated areas to avoid arrest, and deal with clients without background checks (Holston-Zannell, 2020). In interviews conducted by the Center for Constitutional Rights, young women described being targeted by police for their gender and sexuality, including appearing too masculine in their presentation (Holston-Zannell, 2020). Police mistreatment

manifested in a variety of ways, from being groped in order to ‘determine their gender,’ to being accused of having ‘fake’ identity documents when the gender marker did not match the person’s gender presentation, to being extorted for sex under threat of arrest (Holston-Zannell, 2020). Other studies reported that police have publicly removed wigs from transgender women and stomped on them (Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

Investigations by the U.S. Department of Justice of the New Orleans Police Department and the Puerto Rico Police Department found biased policing of transgender communities—specifically targeting transgender women of color as suspected sex workers, as well as hostility to transgender victims of violence (Rodríguez-Madera et al., 2017). In addition, people of color were more than twice as likely than their white counterparts (18.3%) to report being “arrested for being trans” (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). Similarly, 58.8% of people of color and 35.2% of respondents reported being sent to jail/prison “for any reason” (Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

It should be noted that legal employment in the sex industry may not be correlated with the same vulnerabilities of criminalized work but is not without risk and possesses a comparable set of challenges (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). In addition, trans women of color who participated in the sex trade were also more likely to report being denied access to hormones (29.4%) and medical care (17.1%) than those who have not (11.3% and 10.3%, respectively; Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

### **The Trans Panic Defense**

Violence committed against trans women of color is often triggered by gender non-conformity and violence as a form of gender policing (Jauk, 2013; Yarborough, 2021). This would suggest that being transgender or identified as transgender by a heteronormative lens increases the likelihood of violence. When a man is charged with murdering a transgender woman, a common defense strategy is to assert what is called the trans panic defense, a defense strategy associated with the provocation or heat of passion defense (Lee, 2020). Several states also recognize the trans panic defense, a claim that a defendant was driven to violence due to their volatile emotional state after discovering that someone is transgender, as a valid legal defense for violence against Black trans women (Forestiere, 2020). For example, a murder defendant asserting trans panic claimed that the discovery that the victim was a transgender female—an individual who identifies as a woman but was thought to be male when born—provoked him into a heat of passion, causing him to lose his self-control (Lee, 2020). If the jury finds that the defendant was provoked into a heat of passion and that the ordinary man in the defendant's shoes would have been so provoked, it can acquit him of murder and find him guilty of a lesser offense (Lee, 2020).

This claim is made because trans people, thus perceived, have the obligation to be completely open about their transgender status, and the failure to do so is considered a wrong (Rome, 2018). While the reactive cisgender person is not concerned with the state of the trans person's honesty with themselves, rather being concerned with how they, the other, have been lied to, the cisgender person in this scenario does still claim that the

transgender person is acting inauthentically (Rome, 2018). Using a womanist perspective, female gender presentation is taken to communicate sexual availability for men, where sexual availability for men includes female genitalia and a heterosexual interest in sex with men (Kirkland, 2019). A heterosexual man is expected to become outraged if another man attempts to make a sexual advance upon him (Lee, 2020). This behavior could be indicative of the persistence of a stigma against nonheteronormative lifestyles.

### **The Stigma Against Nonheteronormative Lifestyles**

Importantly, trans women of color grapple with different forms of gender discrimination than cis women, sometimes playing a role of educators about trans gender and transsexuality with others (Orchard et al., 2021). American culture allows for discrimination against lifestyles that are perceived to be along the lines of non-heteronormativity. Since societal norms, values, and constructs determine how biological sex and gender are viewed, understood, and accepted, transgender individuals may encounter social stigma, institutional discrimination, and violence due to their gender presentation which is incongruent with their biological sex (Budhwani et al., 2017). Societal-level stigma not only increases likelihood of being victimized but also increases the likelihood that transgender persons will engage in high risk-behaviors (Budhwani et al., 2017).

The Black transgender female experience likely reflects, in part, the dense structural effects of high levels of economic deprivation, violence, and substandard schooling in majority-black communities (Ezell et al., 2018). These could explain the rise of ballroom cultures in major cities as ballrooms were often used by LGBT

communities of color to congregate and celebrate their sexual and gender identities. The television series *Pose*, which aired on the FX network, highlights the ballroom scene of New York City of the late 1980s and early 1990s where members of the Black and Latino LGBT community congregate together to music and dancing. This was to be seen as “counter-culture” to the heteronormative world the LGBT community had to reside in daily. Ballroom events were held at night and under secrecy, perhaps to avoid the threat of violence and stigmatization if these events were held during the daylight hours. This left the LGBT community alienated from the rest of society and created another problem: the rise of HIV and sub-standard health conditions. Formal and informal modes of sex work have been found to be especially pronounced among transgender women of color, thereby greatly amplifying their risk for acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (Ezell et al., 2018).

Jauk (2013) compares victimization patterns of the general population and finds that violence against transgender people can be particularly brutal. The violence is twice as likely to cause injury and four times as likely to cause hospitalization (Jauk, 2013). Even during hospitalization, transgender women of color also experience abuse at the hands of health care workers. Among the most famous healthcare abuse stories is that of Tyra Hunter, a Washington, D.C., hit-and-run victim, who was allowed to bleed to death by an EMT team in 1995 when they discovered that she was a pre-operative male-to- female transsexual who was believed to be gay and had AIDS (Kidd & Witten, 2007).

Transgendered victims appeared to have been targeted because of their gender differences, but the perpetrators were not necessarily able to label their actions anti-transgender as they themselves did not possess the vocabulary and knowledge to do so (Kidd & Witten, 2007). This, of course, complicates the perceived mutual exclusivity of the categories "gender identity" and "sexual orientation" in many hate crimes statutes (Kidd & Witten, 2007). For our purposes, “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” was mutually exclusive in terms of crime reporting. However, when “gender identity” is not included in such statutes, it leaves open the reality of crimes committed against the transgender community was not prosecuted to their full extent: classifying these incidents as hate crimes. Florida is such a state where these crimes are not fully examined and prosecuted to be hate crimes.

### **The State of Florida Hate Crime Statute Ignores Gender Identity**

The hate crime statute in Florida protects citizens from discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, color, ancestry, sexual orientation, or national origin (Fla. Stat. § 775.085(1)(a), 1991 & Fla. Stat. § 877.19, 1991). “Gender” or “Gender identity” is not listed in the statutes as a protected group, which would pertain to transgender, transexual, gender fluid, and gender non-conforming citizens. Jauk (2013) conducted a study that determine the factors about gender violence that constitutes a hate crime. The study found that violence impedes the quality of transgender lives on a daily basis. Furthermore, violent harassment occurs most if individuals visibly transgress gender norms. Jauk also found that transgender individuals respond to violence in diverse ways. Coping strategies range from resignation, depression, as well as constraints in mobility and gender



presentation on one side of the spectrum to active resistance through community building, self-policing, and creative arts on the other (Jauk, 2013).

This willful dismissal of a gender identity protections in the State of Florida can be described as state-sponsored discrimination. As the Hate Crimes Reporting Act (Florida Statute 877.19.2; 2021) states:

The Governor, through the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, shall collect and disseminate data on incidents of criminal acts that evidence prejudice based on race, religion, ethnicity, color, ancestry, sexual orientation, or national origin. All law enforcement agencies shall report monthly to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement concerning such offenses in such form and in such manner as prescribed by rules adopted by the department. Such information shall be compiled by the department and disseminated upon request to any local law enforcement agency, unit of local government, or state agency (FL Stat 877.19.2)

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) is the only organization that has monitored hate crimes against transgender citizens since 2013. According to HRC (2021), the highest known number of fatal deaths of transgender and gender non-conforming people over a 12-month period was in 2017, when we reported 31 people violently killed. This was reported at the time of murder of Skylar Heath in Miami, Florida. HRC is committed to changing the state statute to include gender identity; despite efforts at the federal level, the HRC acknowledges the prosecution of most crimes is done at the state level.

### **Sexual Assault/Rape of Transgender Women**

As recently as 2012, the FBI defined *forcible rape* in gendered terms, specifically as the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will. However, in March 2012, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III approved a new, more inclusive definition (FBI, 2012). The term forcible was dropped and now the FBI defines rape as “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with anybody part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim” (FBI, n.d., para. 3). Thus, rape, sodomy, and sexual assault with an object are all considered rape for the purposes of the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reports and excludes statutory rape (FBI, 2013).

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS; 2014) holds a similar definition of rape, indicating that force can include both psychological and physical force resulting in vaginal, anal, or oral penetration as well as attempted rape (including verbal threats). The BJS (2014) differentiates rape from sexual assault, which is defined as attacks, either completed or attempted, involving unwanted sexual contact between a victim and perpetrator, excluding rape or attempted rape; this includes verbal threats. What is very concerning about the statistics is the rate rape and sexual assault is occurring with transgender and gender non-conforming citizens compared to cisgender persons.

For this study, rape is defined as completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration, or alcohol/drug-facilitated forced penetration. "Sexual violence other than rape" means unwanted sexual contact short of penetration and unwanted, coerced penetration. According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS ; Black et al., 2011), 1,266,000 women in Florida have been raped at some point

in their lives which is 17% or one in six women in Florida. In addition, 41.8% of women, or 3,111,000, in Florida have been victimized by sexual violence other than rape (Black et al., 2011). As well, 79.6% of female victims who have experienced one or more completed rape experienced the first rape before the age of 25; 42.2% were under 18 at the time of the first completed rape (Black et al., 2011). According to Griner et al. (2020), other sexual violence measures included (a) sexual touching without consent (Were you sexually touched without your permission?); (b) attempted sexual penetration (Was sexual penetration attempted [vaginal, anal, oral] without your permission?); and sexual penetration (Were you sexually penetrated [vaginal, anal, oral] without your permission)? (pg. 5711).

Although prevalence of sexual assault/rape among all cisgender LGB individuals is high, females appear to be at particularly high risk for victimization, with data from the NISVS indicating that 46.4% of lesbian women and 74.9% of bisexual women experience sexual assault (excluding rape) in their lifetimes (Walters et al., 2013), compared to 44.6% of women generally (i.e., regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity; Black et al., 2011). Although lower than the prevalence of sexual assault, prevalence of rape is still high at 13.1% for lesbian women and 46.1% for bisexual women (Walters et al., 2013); prevalence for women generally falls at 18.3% (Black et al., 2011). According to the NISVS data, nearly 100% of perpetrators in both sexual assault and rape against lesbian and bisexual females are male (Walters et al., 2013).

Authors of a systematic review on sexual assaults against gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals found lifetime sexual assault estimates to be even higher among

lesbian and bisexual women, as high as 85% (Rothman et al., 2011). In looking at adulthood sexual assault, Hequembourg et al. (2013) found that since the age of 14 years, 71% of lesbian and bisexual women had experienced at least one incident of sexual aggression, including unwanted sexual contact (65%), sexual coercion (39%), attempted rape (32%), and rape (43%).

In a study using data from the Virginia Transgender Health Initiative Study, 26.6% of transgender participants reported a history of sexual assault since age 13 years, with 89.2% of those stating their gender identity or expression was the primary motivator for the assault. Researchers found no differences in rates of sexual violence between transgender men and transgender women (Testa et al., 2012). Although estimates of victimization among transgender individuals are lacking in comparison to estimates for their LGB peers, according to a review by Stotzer (2009), sexual violence against transgender individuals is more well documented than other forms of violence in this community, in part because of departments of Public Health and their investment in sexual health research. In Stotzer's (2009) systematic review, prevalence of sexual assault/rape motivated by gender identity or gender expression among transgender persons ranged from 10%–86%. In a small retrospective study of sexual violence among transgender adults aged 50 years and older (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010), of the 44 respondents who provided data on sexual assault experiences, 64% had experienced “unwanted sexual touch” (p. 145), most often before age 19 years. In as many as 74% of sexual assaults against transgender persons, the victim knows the perpetrator (Cook-Daniels & Munson, 2010; Testa et al., 2012). In Testa and colleagues' (2012)

study of sexual violence against transgender individuals, only 25.8% of perpetrators were strangers, whereas 48.4% were acquaintances, 33.3% were family members, and 24.7% were partners.

### **Systemic Challenges Facing Trans Women of Color**

A recent systematic review concluded that transgender individuals face myriad issues in their interactions with police officers, particularly when it comes to seeking assistance after victimization: specifically, many transgender individuals do not report their victimization to law enforcement and those who do often experience mishandled cases (Stotzer, 2014). In a national examination of reporting victimization to the police between 2006–2011, researchers estimated that 211,200 rape/sexual assault victimizations (65%) went unreported (Langton et al., 2012); however, these data are not broken down by sexual orientation or gender identity. Some scholars have argued that rates of reporting victimization, such as intimate partner violence, may be lower among LGBTQ individuals than for heterosexual individuals because of issues of heterosexism and homophobia (Brown, 2008).

Among transgender individuals, issues around transphobia may only serve to decrease rates of reporting even further. Indeed, Testa and colleagues (2012) found that transgender victims reported only 9.1% of sexual violence acts to police. According to data from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, the most comprehensive U.S. survey of transgender/gender nonconforming individuals, only 35% of respondents said they felt comfortable seeking police assistance, whereas 46% reported being uncomfortable, and 19% reported neutral feelings (Grant et al., 2011). This is perhaps

unsurprising given that some transgender individuals report negative interactions with police officers themselves; 2% reported being sexually assaulted by a police officer for being transgender or gender nonconforming, and 30% reported that officers typically treated them disrespectfully in their interactions (Grant et al., 2011). These numbers are even higher for transgender women. In their recent study of Latina transgender women's experiences with law enforcement in Los Angeles, California, Woods et al. (2013) found that approximately 65% of respondents reported being treated "unfairly" or "very unfairly" by law enforcement officers (p. 385). Los Angeles is very similar to Miami, the most populous city in Florida. These cities also have similar demographics and without a hate crimes statute in Florida, it can be inferred that transgender women's experiences can be similar or worse to that of Southern California. Moreover, 22% of the participants in the Woods et al. (2012) study reported sexual assault by a law enforcement officer, including 15% by an officer in uniform, 11% by an undercover officer, and 4% by sheriffs. Ramos (2016) found that transgender individuals report having experienced sexual assault/rape more than twice as frequently as cisgender LGBTQ individuals. Ramos also found no statistically significant difference in reporting sexual violence to police. Despite statistical insignificance, when examining prevalence, only 15% of transgender individuals reported their sexual assault/rape to the police compared to 23% of cisgender individuals suggesting the need for further investigation with larger sample sizes. For transgender individuals, followed by cisgender females, experiences of sexual assault/rape are more prevalent than they are for cisgender males (Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). Despite statistical insignificance, when examining

prevalence, only 15% of transgender individuals reported their sexual assault/rape to the police compared to 23% of cisgender individuals suggesting the need for further investigation with larger sample sizes (Langenderfer-Magruder et al. 2016).

For this current qualitative study, it is important that the methodology aids in interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants. Previous research has identified many real-life examples are from stories (Giacomini et al., 2014). Participants of interviews was likely use stories to communicate their rationalizations and perceptions. Accordingly, the interview questions for this study allowed for the participants to express their experiences in a way that was comfortable for them and allowed for elaboration. Thus, a better understanding of the participants' lived experiences was gathered in order to comprehend more regarding the effects of public policies on certain members of society.

### **Related Studies to This Project**

Prior research seeking to better understand the lived experiences of a particular group has made use of narrative inquiry. Clements (2019) conducted a study to understand the impact of substantive public policy such as HB2 on the lived experiences of AA (African American) LGBT community members at the microlevel in North Carolina in order to provide positive social change via public policy and administration. The overarching research question for this study inquired as to the lived experiences of 10 African American LGBT community members ages 18–30 in North Carolina post-HB2 to better understand the effects of public policy on certain members within society. There have been vast amounts of narrative theory studies seeking to understand

the lived experiences of societal minority communities regarding microlevel interactions, relationship dynamics, and encountering negative stereotypes (Clements, 2019).

Graham (2014) conducted a similar study using an oral narrative approach to collect life histories of 10 young black trans women between 18–24 years of age residing in Detroit, Michigan. Graham used grounded theory analysis to explore institutional violence, discrimination, and harassment. Participants described their experiences navigating three community institutions (schools, the criminal justice system, and churches) and broader society (Graham, 2014). Graham also referenced Crenshaw's Intersectionality theory in his work and suggests that there is a scarcity of research on the lived experience of black transgender women that is needs to be corrected to address the true cause of their vulnerabilities.

Francis (2018) looked the lived experiences of victims of gun violence through a narrative inquiry. Sixteen victims of gun violence were interviewed. The interview format comprised open-ended interview questions that encouraged participants to tell their stories (Francis, 2018). The participants described the violent encounters they had witnessed in a clear, descriptive manner, and the result of the study included the 10 participants disclosing a feeling of being abandoned by the institutions of society (Francis, 2018).

As a result, narrative inquiries have been used as an approach to access the essence of the lived experience on behalf of the human organism such as targeted populations like transgender women of color.



### **Summary of Literature Review**

Transgender women of color who struggle to support themselves and their families are placed in an extremely challenging situation due to the stigma, violence, and discrimination they face, which is often compounded by racism, poverty, and other factors (Fitzgerald et al., 2015; Jefferson et al., 2013). Transphobic violence is clearly perceived as a hate crime and gender bashing exists in the lives of trans individuals as both a daily potentiality and a vivid memory (Jauk, 2013). The current study understands gender violence not only as violence against women, but as violence that targets victims because of their real or perceived gender, gender identity, or gender expression (Hill, 2003). Transgender individuals are indeed killed as it is not possible for them to live and express their gender identity in all contexts (Jauk, 2013). They are killed slowly as most of them live in poverty, without steady income and without health care (Jauk, 2013). Male privilege is at work, as individuals get victimized as trans, but also as women. They are less often victimized as men. This finding is important because it suggests first that gender violence is ubiquitous, but it also suggests that gender violence is patterned by patriarchal structures (Jauk, 2013).

Many turn to sex work to sustain themselves, and become vulnerable to harassment, assault, and arrest (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). The experiences that transgender people have in the sex trade are extremely diverse and multifaceted (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). Many regard this involvement as work, which they may prefer to other forms of work, or which may be their best or only economic option (Fitzgerald et al., 2015). Others regard it as an informal means of making money, sometimes supplementing other

income. In some instances, trans people become involved in the sex trade because of coercion, such as due to domestic violence perpetrated by a partner or family member (Seelman, 2015). Some people have participated in the sex trade for different reasons at different times in their life and had very different experiences. Federal, state, and local governments should repeal criminal laws for prostitution and related offenses. Leading human rights and public health experts agree that decriminalization is essential to protect the safety of people in the sex trade (Fitzgerald et al., 2015).

It could be determined that trans individuals have given up on the justice system in Florida. Violence against trans people is often triggered by gender non-conformity and violence is a form of gender policing (Jauk, 2013; Yarborough, 2021). Although transgender individuals are frequently targeted for genderism and gender bashing (Hill, 2003; Namaste, 1996) because they transgress gender norms (Lucal, 1999; Tomsen & Mason, 2001), many people experience violence because they pass as their desired gender perfectly. Trans women are at higher risk for verbal, physical, and sexual harassment in this context (Jauk, 2013).

Trans women of color in America are far more likely than most other people to experience serious roadblocks and harms, in the form of extreme poverty to violent murder. There is much further research needed to understand the experience of intersectional discrimination across multiple identities, including gender identity and race (Mukkamala, & Suyemoto, 2018). From both a womanist and intersectional perspective, this study expands on this research area by exploring the victimization experiences of

transgender women of color who reside within the state of Florida. In the next chapter, the research method is introduced and reviewed.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the true nature of the lived experiences concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in Florida. This research was created to provide essential data to prompt significant changes in policy regarding hate crimes (Stotzer, 2009). To fully understand the lived experiences of transgender women of color regarding violent offenses, this research examined the lived experiences of transgender women of color who have been victims of violent crimes. The intent of this research was to provide a better understanding of how transgender women of color make meaning of their lived experiences of being victims of crime in the state of Florida.

Chapter 3 presents the research design and rationale, the research questions, researcher's role, methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. Also, this chapter attends to the issues of trustworthiness and ethical guidelines.

### **Research Design**

#### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to determine the lived experiences of transgender women of color who are victims of violent offenses in the state of Florida. The following questions were the focus of this study:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of transgender women of color in the state of Florida who are victims of violent crimes?

RQ2: How do transgender women of color in the state of Florida make meaning of their victimization experiences?

### **Central Concept(s)/Phenomenon(a) of the Study**

This study's central concept is the victimization experiences of trans women of color in the state of Florida, especially concerning violent offenses. Little was understood about factors that shape transphobic hate crimes and racial/ethnic variation in these experiences (Gyamerah et al., 2021). Central to this study is the concept of intersectionality. Very few studies are published that deal with intersectional criminology and the transgender population. The intersectionality in this study is between gender identity and racial identity.

### **Research Approach and Design (Research Tradition)**

This study used a qualitative, narrative inquiry research design. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth with data collection often occurring through open-ended questions (Butina, 2015). Qualitative approach captures the points of view of a person or groups of people which permit a greater understanding of their experiences and perception (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This means that qualitative researchers study people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research focuses on the events that transpire and on outcomes of those events from the perspectives of those involved (Butina, 2015).

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials, including case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts, that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This study used a qualitative narrative design. The narrative design involves inquiry directed at narratives of human experience or inquiry that produces data in narrative form (Butina, 2015). Defining features of the narrative approach include the collection of narrative (stories) from individuals or small groups (Butina, 2015), which tell of individual experiences that often exposes the researcher to the identities of that individual. A qualitative narrative design allows participants to express their own lived experiences in the form of storytelling.

A narrative inquiry is one traditional approach of qualitative research. Other types of qualitative research approaches include grounded theory, ethnographical, and historical design. A grounded theory design asks if a researcher's results will contribute to the creation of a theoretical model to better understand the area of study (Teherani et al., 2015). An ethnographical design requires an extended amount of time trying to understand the culture and process of a particular group of learners in their natural context (Teherani et al., 2015). A historical design looks at a particular issue through a historical context. These approaches would not work with this study, as there was a particular phenomenon that is being described; thus, a narrative inquiry design worked best. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a phenomenological study describes the

everyday lived experiences of multiple individuals focusing on what everyone has in common related to a phenomenon. This design would not be useful in explaining the lived experiences of transgender women of color who are victims of violent crime. Phenomenology is less about the participants' experiences and how they make meaning of that phenomenon and more about the essence of the phenomenon. This type of study links directly to the research question that focus on the intersectionality of gender identity and race; thus, a narrative inquiry was used for this study. The next section will describe the role of the researcher.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My essential role for this study was that of a researcher-observer of the lived experiences of transgender women of color in Florida. In this study, my role as the researcher-observer was to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I conducted the interviews in a manner that made the study participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

While I am not a member of the LGBTQIA community and do not have personal or professional relationships with members of the LGBTQIA community, I was interested in observing the lived experience of trans women of color. My interest in this study came from my experiences of living in Florida since late 2009. Originally from Canada, I relocated to Miami to study at Florida International University (FIU), graduating with a Master of Science in Criminal Justice and a Master of Public Administration in 2011. During my time at FIU, I associated with students from all walks of life and was fortunate enough to meet with members of the LGBTQIA community and

learn about their lived experiences. Initially, research on the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals revealed the lack of published literature.

Not being a member of the LGBTQIA community allows me to avoid a group identity bias. This study can be seen as objective since I am not a part of the target population. The study has not confirmed the bias that citizens of the LGBTQIA community have towards law enforcement. In turn, no confirmation bias allowed the study to be credible and trustworthy.

The next section will cover the methodology of this study, beginning with the participation selection logic and transitioning into the implemented sampling strategy and instrumentation.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants Selection Logic**

The participants selected for this study are transgender women of color who reside within the state of Florida and who have been victims of violent crime. The study included transgender women who identify as African American, Latin American, Asian American, or multiracial. The study did include members of the transgender community who identify as Caucasian, as the focus of the study was on transgender women of color. All participants were adults, 18 years and older, and only experienced victimization as an adult.



## **Population**

The target population for this study were transgender women of color, which includes African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American women whose gender expression and identity differ from the sex that they were assigned at birth. The Williams Institute of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) estimates that, as of 2016, the population of adult citizens in the United States who are transgender is around 1,397,150 (Flores, Herman, et al., 2016). Estimates of the number of transgender adults significantly increased over the past decade, with a current best estimate of 390 per 100,000 adults (Meerwijk & Sevelius, 2017). In the state of Florida, the estimated population of transgender citizens is approximately 100,300 (Flores, Herman, et al., 2016). The estimated number of adults who identify as transgender by race in the state of Florida are as follows: 18,650 are African American, 26,250 are Latin-American, and 4,300 are listed as other race, non-White (Flores, Brown, & Herman, 2016). There are currently no statistics of the number of transgender men or women in the state of Florida.

## **Sampling Strategy**

This study also used purposive sampling, referred to as judgmental sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Benoot et al., 2016). The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses (Tongco, 2007). Alexander (2021) suggests that purposive sampling can be used to obtain data in this study because the characteristics of the selected population are

known (i.e., trans women of color who are victims of hate crimes in Florida). It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling does not focus on developing the fixed and immutable rules or generalizing the results but try to better understand the phenomenon in special field (Ranjbar et al., 2012).

In addition to purposive sampling, this study employed the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a recruitment technique in which a researcher asks their study participants to assist them in identifying other potential subjects (Heckathorn, 2011). Recruiting research participants can be problematic when research focuses upon specific individuals, groups, or experiences that are not validated by society (Browne, 2005), like transgendered persons. Therefore, snowball sampling is often used in this case because the population under investigation is hidden, either due to low numbers of potential participants or the sensitivity of the topic, for example, research with women who do not fit within the hegemonic heterosexual norm (Browne, 2005). Snowball sampling can enable researchers to gain access to individuals who live outside the boundaries of normative heterosexuality (Browne, 2005). Therefore, for this study, transgender women of color who agreed to participate were asked to assist with recommending other potential study participants.

### **Selection and Matching of Participants With Criterion**

The setting for this study is Florida, a state where the hate crimes statute does not include gender identity. Study participants were selected using a set of inclusion criteria (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Inclusion Criteria*

Inclusion criteria	Rationale for criteria
Transgender woman	Target population of the study; trans women are victimized more than trans men
Person(s) of color	Target population of the study; dealing with the intersectionality between race and gender identity.
Experienced victimization	Basis of research: determine lived experiences of transgender women of color based on victimization
At least 18 years old	Previous transgender women of color victims of crime in Florida were over the age of 18
Live/reside in the state of Florida	State of Florida is the location of the study

**Number of Participants and the Rationale**

The participants in this study were 10 transgender or gender non-binary women of color that reside within the state of Florida. Qualitative studies generally use small sample sizes (Vasileiou et al., 2018). A small sample size should not be seen as a limitation, in and of itself, when evaluating the rigor and findings of qualitative research (Young & Casey, 2018). The participants were over the age of 18 and had lived in the State of Florida at the time of their victimization. All participants were a member of ethnic minorities groups, including African American, Latin-American, Asian-American, and those who identify as multi-racial. Participants did not include white or Caucasian

transgender citizens of the Florida region, nor other members of the LGBTQIA community of Florida. Transgender women of color, who are victims of crime in the state of Florida, are a hard-to-reach population, and have been difficult to engage in research (Jefferson et al., 2013).

## **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

### ***Recruitment***

The participants were active on social media, as they were selected on the different social media websites including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. In addition, community organizations also assisted in selecting participants with the distribution of a flyer (see Appendix B).

### ***Instrumentation***

The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide, which I developed. See Appendix A for a copy of the semi-structured interview guide. The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and the review of the literature. A semi-structured interview is a meeting in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions (Jamshed, 2014). The questions were open-ended, allowing for the participants to share their perspectives and experiences about their victimization. The initial interview questions were as follows:

- How often do you speak to others in your community about your life experiences? How often do others in the trans community speak to you about their life experiences?

- How often do you use social media websites? Which platforms do you like to use?

Why do you use these social media websites?

- How do you feel about law enforcement in the state of Florida? How do you feel about crime in the state of Florida?
- As there is no expansion of transgender rights at the state level in Florida, how has this affected your well-being as a resident of Florida?
- What kind of hardships do the members of the trans community in Florida face? Why does society give people who don't follow gender norms such a hard time?
- As a person of color who resides in Florida, what kind of discrimination/microaggressions have you encountered in your day-to-day life?
- What types of violent crime do you believe people of color often experience in your area?
- Would you tell me what you are able to remember about your experience, where would you like to start?
- If there was someone you trusted to talk about the incident after it occurred, when you told them, what were you thinking and feeling?

The developed questions were subject to the review of the researcher's dissertation committee members, including the chair. The researcher followed the recommendations of the committee members to refine the interview questions, if

necessary. The chair and committee members agreed to the interview questions used in the study. The next section will discuss content validity.

### ***Content Validity***

Content validity is the measurement property that assesses whether items are comprehensive and adequately reflect the patient perspective for the population of interest (Brod et al., 2009). The validity of the interview responses increases by allowing participants to review and confirm their responses. Validity is also improved by selecting a varied pool of interview participants. Individual interviews provide a more private environment for patients to discuss and explore their own perspective without input from others (Brod et al., 2009). Individuals may also share more information about their experiences and perspectives in private interviews than they would in a focus group (Brod et al., 2009). For this study, individual interviews were used. Participants may also feel more comfortable discussing potentially sensitive or embarrassing subjects in an individual interview rather than in a group (Brod et al., 2009).

### ***Sufficiency of the Data Collection Instrument***

Using a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to probe and ask questions of the study participants to have context and details regarding their experiences. Semi structured interviews are an effective method for data collection when the researcher wants to: (a) collect qualitative, open-ended data; (b) explore participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic; and (c) delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues. The researcher believes that interviews are the best method to collect data on hidden populations. Interviews allow researchers to gather key

information from knowledgeable individuals involved in the specific phenomenon studied (Patton, 2014). What will made the data collection of the instrument sufficient is the relatively small sampling size and data saturation. In a study by Francis and colleagues (2010), they considered data saturation to be achieved when no new ideas emerged. The accumulating evidence across studies therefore suggests that rigorously collected qualitative data from small samples can substantially represent the full dimensionality of people's experiences (Young et al., 2019).

### ***Participation Exit***

When all the interviews were completed, the researcher provided the participants a detailed and complete transcript to confirm that everything stated in the interview was correct to the best of their recollection. It is essential for researchers to include participants in this process in the event additional information is needed (Patton, 2014). In addition, the researcher intends to give the final copy of the completed dissertation to the participants.

Some participants had negative emotional experience for discussing their victimization. However, benefits to conducting interviews on sensitive topics may outweigh risks of harm and there are strategies for researchers to mitigate potential harm (Muraglia et al., 2020). The researcher had a list of mental health services to provide to the participants.

### ***Data Collection***

The data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A). Study participant was asked to

participate in the interview in a private setting of their choosing. Each interview lasted for no more than one hour. Interviews were conducted using Zoom. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the study participants. All the recorded interviews were transcribed for data analysis. The duration of each interview was one hour, with this information communicated to the participant before the interview began. Once the interview concluded, every participant was granted the opportunity to request more information about the session and the study. The next section outlines the data analysis plan.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The researcher transcribed all interviews that also were audio recorded via the Zoom tool. The transcripts were compiled after the researcher reviewed the recordings which were saved on the researcher's computer with password encryption. The researcher also provided a summary to the participants to review the accuracy of the interview.

The data was analyzed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis: Step 1—becoming familiar with the data, Step 2—generating initial codes, Step 3—searching for themes, Step 4—reviewing themes, Step 5—defining themes, and Step 6: write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The first step in any qualitative analysis is reading and re-reading the transcripts. Then, researchers organize their data in a meaningful and systematic way (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researcher searched for themes and then, review, modify and develop the preliminary themes that were identified in Step 3 (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researcher then defined the themes and wrote up their findings. The data analysis for this study relied on



analyzing the transcripts of each interview. The data was coded and analyzed thematically by the researcher.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is an apt qualitative method that can be used when working in research teams and analyzing large qualitative data sets (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis provides a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). As thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches, it offers a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in their research career (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The researcher obtained the responses from the participants of the virtual face-to-face interviews, so that the researcher could develop an appropriate response to the research question that is a part of this study. A rigorous process of coding the interview documents was applied across all the transcribed documents (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). Broad categories of responses were developed according to the responses to the questions posed to the participants and the same coding process was used for all interviews (Van den Berg, & Struwig, 2017). Special care was taken by the researcher to code and verify the interpretation of the coding procedure (Van den Berg, & Struwig, 2017).

Coding in qualitative research is comprised of processes that enable collected data to be assembled, categorized, and thematically sorted, providing an organized platform

for the construction of meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). Coding methods employ processes that reveal themes embedded in the data, in turn suggesting thematic directionality toward categorizing data through which meaning can be negotiated, codified, and presented (Williams & Moser, 2019). Coding is a key structural operation in qualitative research, enabling data analysis and successive steps to serve the purpose of the study (Williams & Moser, 2019).

The researcher developed a meta-narrative of the data. One of the keys in coding data, and in conducting a qualitative analysis more generally, is developing a storyline (Stuckley, 2015). Coding is an important step in moving from the raw data to the findings, as well as being a means to maintain coherence between the objective and the results (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Coding is a way to ensure that the questions asked are the questions that have been answered (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

Other studies also stress the importance of coding and analyzing qualitative data in eight stages, first, by preparing the data collected, followed by defining the coping unit to be analyzed and developing categories and coding scheme or conceptual framework (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). The researcher then tests the coding schemes on sample data and follows with coding all the data (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). The data is then assessed, and conclusions are drawn from the coded data (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017). Finally, the researcher reports on the methods and findings (Van den Berg & Struwig, 2017).

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

The trustworthiness of qualitative research generally is often questioned by positivists, perhaps because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work (Shenton, 2004). Reliability in narrative inquiry research refers to dependability of the data and validity to the strength of the analysis of the data (Francis, 2018). In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher considered the four criteria developed by qualitative researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985): (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Through successfully meeting these four criteria, the researcher can more fully understand the lived experiences of all the participants' perspectives, which is driving this research.

#### **Credibility**

A qualitative study is considered credible if the descriptions of human experience are immediately recognized by individuals that share the same experience (Cope, 2014; Sandelowski, 1986). To ensure the credibility of the study, the researcher used triangulation. Triangulation may involve the use of different methods, especially observation, focus groups and individual interviews, which form the major data collection strategies for much qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). In addition, the researcher employed measures to ensure that the participants were being honest in their responses. Participants should be encouraged by a researcher to be frank from the outset of each session, with the researcher aiming to establish a rapport in the opening moments and indicating that there are no right answers to the questions that were asked (Shenton,

2004). There were frequent debriefings between the researcher and the committee chair to discuss the results. Such collaborative sessions can be used by researchers to discuss alternative approaches, and others who are responsible for the work in a more supervisory capacity may draw attention to flaws in the proposed course of action (Shenton, 2004). The meetings also provide a sounding board for the investigator to test their developing ideas and interpretations and probing from others may help the researcher to recognize his or her own biases and preferences (Shenton, 2004).

At completion of data analysis, the researcher compiled a summary of the themes that emerged and requested feedback or member check from the participants. Through this process, the informants were able to validate the conclusion that the researcher had accurately interpreted the data.

### **Transferability**

Since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004). When dealing with external validity, a study must be transferable or able to be recited in another similar study. A qualitative study has met this criterion if the results have meaning to individuals not involved in the study and readers can associate the results with their own experiences (Cope, 2014).

Transferability in a qualitative study refers to the competence of the researcher to provide robust and detailed descriptions so the audience can compare the study to other applicable situations (Patton, 2014). To ensure the transferability of this study, the

information on the following issues were given at the outset: (a) the number of organizations taking part in the study and where they were based; (b) any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data; (c) the number of participants involved in the fieldwork; (d) the data collection methods that were employed; (e) the number and length of the data collection sessions; and (f) the time period over which the data was collected (Shenton, 2004).

### **Dependability**

When it comes to the reliability of a study, the researcher employed techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). To ensure and enhance reliability, the researcher audio-recorded all the interviews in the Zoom application. In the event of technology failure, the researcher had the use of backup devices and applications, including Skype and WhatsApp.

### **Confirmability**

The confirmability of a study refers to the study's objectivity; the study is not subjective in nature. The researcher can demonstrate confirmability by describing how conclusions and interpretations were established and exemplifying that the findings were derived directly from the data (Cope, 2014). The role of triangulation in promoting confirmability must again be emphasized here, in this context, to reduce the effect of investigator bias (Shenton, 2004). The researcher did confirm the study's objectivity through the responses of the interview. The study's interview questions (Appendix A) guided the research question, so the completed data collection served as the foundation

for data analysis. Confirmability is grounded in the researcher's ability to link a study's interpretation and findings to data collection (Patton, 2014). The researcher reviewed all the responses to the semi-structured, open-ended interview questions and provided rich quotes from the participants that depict each emerging theme (Cope, 2014; see Chapter 4).

### **Ethical Procedures**

As per Walden University's policy on conducting research, all participation was strictly voluntary. The participants were sent informed consent fact sheets via email to help them understand their rights as participants in this completed study. The researcher granted all participants the highest degree of respect and took care of their well-being throughout the study.

### **Access**

The researcher submitted the proposal to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to receive official approval to conduct research with the desired participants. In addition, the researcher included detailed instructions and information that explain each of the participants was treated during the duration of the study. The aim of the researcher was to treat each participant with respect and dignity.

### **Consent**

None of the participants were coerced for participation in this study. All participation was voluntary, and deception was by no means used in this research. Each participant was emailed informed consent fact sheets to reinforce understanding of their

rights regarding their participation in the study. During each phase of the process, participants were treated with the highest degree of dignity, fairness, and respect.

### **Confidentiality**

Names were concealed as well other identifying information kept to a minimum via data-cleaning, and by using pseudonyms in the place of names. However, contextual information such as age, race, and gender identity were kept in as it is important when analyzing the data for this study. All interviews were conducted within a one-on-one setting via the Zoom platform. The researcher performed the interviews in the privacy of their home office and the information from the interviews was kept within a code-protected, fireproof safe located in the researcher's home. The definition of confidentiality was explained to each of the participants. The nature of qualitative studies is to be rich with description and therefore, likelihood of deductive disclosure was a concern. To limit this occurrence, the participants knew the information being sought before signing the confidentiality agreement by the researcher thoroughly explaining the information that would be gained and its use. The researcher also alerted the participants to deductive disclosure by explaining the concept and providing a handout of the meaning of deductive disclosure. This ensured that the participants were fully aware of what information would be used for the purposes of the research.

### **Lack of Participation**

The researcher overcame the potential of finding no willing participants for this study. The request for participants flyer was distributed online with the assistance of community organizations to a wide audience. The researcher also provided incentives for

participation to include the distribution of a \$25 Amazon gift card to all participants. The researcher also took suggestions from their committee chair and community organizations on recruitment strategies.

### **Data Storage**

All collected information was reviewed by the researcher and their committee chair. The researcher also stored all data in this study in a security folder in their personal computer that was password-encrypted, where the data will remain for three years.

### **Summary**

This study's primary focus was to report on the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming women of color who were victims of violent crime in Florida. The research method selected for this study was a narrative inquiry theory, which consisted of purposive and snowball sampling within the setting of Florida.

The data analysis explained the reason for selecting specific analytic methods to explore an in-depth explanation of the two research questions. The protection of participants' rights during this study and how the researcher protected any information gathered from these interviews was reviewed in the current chapter. All ethical issues found in this research was discussed to receive full approval from the Committee on Ethical Standards in Research for Walden University's IRB. The study results and conclusion are published in chapters 4 and 5, respectively.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the true nature of the lived experiences concerning the victimization of transgender women of color in Florida. The intent of this research was to provide a better understanding of how transgender women of color make meaning of their lived experiences of being victims of crime in the state of Florida. This research provides essential data to prompt significant changes in policy regarding hate crimes against transgender women of color (Stotzer, 2009).

Chapter 3 provided the rationale for the research design and the research tools that were used and explained the procedure of the study, followed by an explanation of the validity of the study results and issues of trustworthiness. This chapter provides results from several semi structured open-ended interviews that were conducted via Zoom. The 10 research participant interviews were composed of adult transgender women of color who reside in the state of Florida and who had experienced victimization. Data saturation was accomplished when the transcripts began to offer no new information in the responses. Next, an in-depth review of the transcripts was conducted where each participant was given a copy of their responses to determine accurateness. As such, the process only developed the codes and themes after the data was corroborated and validated by each participant. This process involved collecting data via 10 Zoom virtual interviews, which established a compilation of data codes via the use of open coding methodology by identifying themes, developing codes, assessing the data collected, and generation of conclusions. Each participant's responses were isolated and placed into

categories with the data being analyzed to discover themes that were then linked to each other by using named relationships. A pedantic dissecting of the data allowed for the identification of themes and an apparent link between the theoretical framework and the literature review that can be located in Chapters 1 and 2 of the study. This chapter continues the data analysis in relation to the research questions, followed by a summary and interpretation of the outcomes.

This chapter presents an analysis of the data that was coded followed by the proof of trustworthiness of the study. The results of the study were coded and produced emergent themes in answer to the research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary statement. The central questions of the study were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of transgender women of color in the state of Florida who are victims of violent crimes?

RQ2: How do transgender women of color in the state of Florida make meaning of their victimization experiences?

### **Setting**

The interviews were conducted through the internet using the Zoom application. This was done so that the natural environment was not disturbed, and so that each participant felt comfortable during the interview. The 10 participants in this study identified themselves as transgender adult females who reside in the state of Florida and have been victims of violent offenses. All participants were over the age of 18 when interviewed. All participants also identified themselves to be persons of color. In order to obtain the 10 participants for the study, a flyer was developed and distributed via social

media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. The flyer was posted in forums devoted to LGBTQ research and community involvement. Members of these forums on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram then contacted me via email to express their willingness to participate in the study. After communicating with the potential participants, I determined the 10 participants who met the criteria for the study. A letter of invitation and consent form was emailed to those select individuals. All 10 individuals gave consent and were able to schedule a Zoom conference call for the interview. As soon as the contributor had set an agreeable date and time for the Zoom virtual conference call, the interviews were conducted; these interviews lasted from 45–90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in the privacy of my home via Zoom, and each participant had arranged to be in a private setting at their location during the duration of their interviews.

### **Demographics**

This study selected participants who identified as a transgender adult female of color all resided in the state of Florida at the time of their victimization. All 10 participants who responded were contacted both by email and phone. I thanked each of the participants for their eagerness to participate in this important study. The demographics for each participant were obtained from the participants' responses during their interview. During each interview, participants were asked about their age, gender identity, racial identity, where in the state of Florida they were located, and if they experienced victimization. I informed each participant that there was no incentive to participate in the study and that each participant was able to make their own decisions.

See Appendix A for a detailed overview of the questions used to identify specific demographics.

Each participant received an informed consent form explaining the study title, purpose, procedures, benefits, confidentiality, and potential risks, to ensure the ethical protection of the participant. Each participant was informed of their right to choose whether to participate in the interview and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time without adverse consequences. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study so that they could understand how their information might be used in the future. They were also informed of their right to receive a copy of the study, to ask questions, and to have their privacy protected. To ensure confidentiality, an alias was provided to each participant according to the disclosure statement guidelines located in Appendix A. To verify accuracy, transcribed copies of the interviews were emailed to participants who were given the opportunity to correct the wording of the transcripts prior to encoding. The data were then secured within my personal computer with a password encryption that was only accessible to me. The participants, who responded to the request for verification, approved of the accuracy of each corresponding transcription. See Table 2 for participant demographics.

**Table 2***Participant Demographics*

Participant number	Age	Racial identity	Gender identity	Location in Florida	Victimization experience
1	23	African American	Transwoman	Miami	Y
2	24	African American	Transwoman	Orlando	Y
3	24	African American	Transwoman	Miami	Y
4	28	African American	Transwoman	Wilton Manors	Y
5	57	African American	Transwoman	St. Petersburg	N
6	29	African American	Transwoman	Panama City	Y
7	26	African American	Transwoman	Weston	Y
8	22	African American	Transwoman	Miami	Y
9	22	African American	Transwoman	Miami	Y
10	28	African American	Transwoman	Miami	Y

Participant 1 (P1) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Miami who was 23 years old at the time of the interview. This participant experienced

verbal harassment and was threatened out of their residential neighborhood by their fellow neighbors. Participant 2 (P2) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Orlando who was 24 years old when I conducted the interview. This participant was raped, sexually assaulted, and sexually harassed. Participant 3 (P3) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Miami who was 24 years old during the interview. P3 was verbally and physically assaulted by coworkers in a health care practice, where coworker purposely used the wrong pronouns. This participant was also abandoned by their family during their transition. In the previous year, this participant experienced an attempted burglary and possible sexual assault attempt during the overnight hours.

Participant 4 (P4) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Wilton Manors who was 28 years old at the time of the interview. This participant was physically assaulted in the neighborhood they resided in. Also, this participant was raped and sexually assaulted by a coworker who threatened to assault the participant if they did not consent to sexual intercourse. Participant 5 (P5) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in St. Petersburg who was 57 years old when during the interview. This participant did not experienced victimization. Participant 6 (P6) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Panama City who was 29 years old when the interview was conducted. This participant was verbally harassed and threatened by hospital staff while trying to receive care at a hospital. Participant 7 (P7) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Weston who was 26 years old when the researcher conducted the interview. This participant was brutally assaulted by a group of

individuals, along with a friend identified as a trans woman of color. The friend of P7 was murdered, while the participant suffered a broken arm. Participant 8 (P8) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Miami who was 22 years old at the time of the interview. P8 was physically assaulted by a man after being outed as a trans woman in public. Participant 9 (P9) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Miami who was 22 years old at the time of the interview. This participant was verbally and physically assaulted by a man on a bus after being accused of being a hooker by the way the participant dressed. P9 now carries pepper spray in their purse because of the incident. Participant 10 (P10) identifies as an African American transwoman residing in Miami who was 28 years old at the time of the interview. This participant was physically assaulted in public and mocked for the assault. P10 was also verbally harassed and threatened for their gender identity and considered suicide.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process was conducted after Walden University's IRB granted research approval for the study. Walden University's approval number for the study is 05-09-22-0447170. In order to be in compliance with the university's ethical procedures guidelines, I followed Walden University's policies. The researcher informed by email all 10 participants who were invited to participate in the study of the university's ethical procedures. I followed all Walden University protocols for conducting interviews and questionnaires that involved human subjects, specifically protecting the confidentiality of the participants. All participants were given the screening criteria to determine if they met the criteria for participating in the study. Once approval

was given by Walden University's IRB, each participant was made aware of the interviews via social media, and each participant requested to participate in the study via email.

Once interested participants contacted me, the potential participants were contacted via email. An email was sent to each participant explaining the purpose of the study and the requirements for participation. After each member read the requirements and agreed to participate in the study, a date and time was set to conduct each virtual interview via Zoom. The interview consisted of semi structured and open-ended questions that were intended to assist in answering the main research questions that drove the study. The questions were carefully formulated to allow each participant to share a wide range of lived experiences of transgender women of color who were victims of violent offenses in the state of Florida.

At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself as the researcher and reminded each participant of their rights and their ability to withdraw from the interview at any time. I thanked each participant for their time and told them of the recording procedures and how the recording would be protected. I also explained to each participant the next steps following the conclusion of the interview including deductive disclosure, the assignment of aliases, the transcription of data, the transmission of data to each individual for their review, and finally, the complete data analysis of the study. Each participant indicated that each step was acceptable, and all interviews were conducted without problems. All files were easily recorded and there were no technological issues requiring deletions or additions of any kind.



Data collection initiated with virtual interviews via Zoom that were heralded by each participant signing the consent form. Each interview consisted of me providing the participant the opportunity to ask any question that they had before the interview started. After the participant indicated that no questions remained, the interview commenced. The researcher used the digital recorder on Zoom to record each session to ensure that data were precisely taken, and that each participant's responses could be revisited to ensure that their lived experiences were captured.

Participant answers and details flowed freely with little prompting from me. I paid close attention to each participant describing their own real-life experience. Any time I asked a probing question to the participant, it immediately was followed the main question to be answered. After each interview was completed, the files were uploaded to an encrypted PC and each interview was transcribed. I saved the file on the same encrypted computer. In the analysis, I carefully considered key points that emerged during the interviews. I also developed a list of commonly used words and these words served as a primary source of coding. These codes are presented in the Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Themes, Codes Contributing to Themes, and Quotations Related to Themes*

Theme	Codes contributing to theme
Theme 1: Violence towards trans women of color leads to discrimination.	Harassment; Rape; Sexual Assault; Physical Assault

Theme 2: Trans women of color receive little support, leads to isolation and self-harm

Coping; Family; Not sharing life experiences;  
Friends; Support; Not report to law enforcement;  
Survival

Theme 3: The state of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity

Florida; Housing Discrimination; Crowds

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### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed by using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis to code and determine which elements emerged as themes from the interview transcripts of the 10 participants in the study: Step 1—becoming familiar with the data, Step 2—generating initial codes, Step 3— searching for themes, Step 4—reviewing themes, Step 5—defining themes, and Step 6: write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The initial step in the data analysis was to review the transcripts to ensure that each participant's responses were transcribed in a way that reflected their lived experiences. After participants verified the transcripts, the researcher coded the transcripts. A list of codes was created that ultimately helped develop the theme. Data were then multi-checked and coded using codes and themes identified by the researcher. A list of descriptive codes was created, such as family, gender, abandonment, discrimination, government, and vulnerability. Building a list of descriptive codes was important because understanding the lived experience of this population is important. Once the codes were established, the researcher defined the identified context by

grouping the paragraphs containing the interrelationships between the identified codes. This action helped identify how the categories influence each other and work together. By researching and reviewing the interview responses, the researcher was able to glean a wealth of data from the perceptions of transgender women of color who were victims of violent crime in Florida.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To ensure that the study was trustworthy, no alterations or changes were made to the credibility or dependability of the confirmability strategies discussed in Chapter 3. The researcher ensured that confidentiality on behalf of the participants was enforced at all times. Each participant was also reminded that they had the ability to withdraw from the interview at any time.

To further establish the trustworthiness of each participant's response, said responses were read back to them before the researcher moved on to further questioning during the interview. To aid in receiving rich and descriptive responses, each participant was asked if they had any other information they wanted to share, even if it was not formally a question posed by the researcher. Participants were notified during the interview that they would receive the findings of the study to check accuracy. Each participant was reassured that the researcher would modify information to appropriately represent their position.

## **Results**

The purpose of this study was to understand the victimization experiences of adult transgender females of color who reside in the state of Florida. The research questions directing the study was as follows:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of transgender women of color in the state of Florida who are victims of violent crimes?

RQ2: How do transgender women of color in the state of Florida make meaning of their victimization experiences?

The data analysis for this study involved transcribed audio recordings that were analyzed using Zoom. Through the analysis a list of frequently repeated terms which were revealed in the interview responses of the participants was developed. The data used during the analysis consisted of the responses that each participant gave the researcher during the interview. The researcher's analysis discovered common themes and connections to results which were presented in the literature review regarding feelings of isolation, abandonment, being misunderstood, and increased vulnerability. The data analysis and coding recognized three themes that consistently emerged in the data: (a) violence towards trans women of color leads to discrimination; (b) trans women of color receive little support, leads to isolation and self-harm; and (c) the state of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity.

### **Theme #1: Violence Towards Trans Women of Color Leads to Discrimination**

The first theme that was identified was "Violence Towards Trans Women of Color Leads to Discrimination." The majority of the research participants experienced

violence as adults living in the state of Florida. Incidents included verbal harassment, rape/sexual assault, physical assault, and threats of murder/manslaughter. When each participant was asked to explain their victimization experience, nine out of 10 of the participants were able to identify an experience where they were victimized as an adult living in the state of Florida. The most common type of victimization experienced by the participants was physical assault.

When each participant went into the detail of their incident, they indicated that discrimination played a role. Several participants pointed out that their gender identity was the impetus for their attack. For example, P1 lived in a community that openly discriminated against her based on her gender identity to point that she was threatened by the community to leave her residence. P1 explained:

There's a time when my parents told me that their tenants wanted to ask us to move out of a residential place because of me. The neighbors felt that they are not comfortable having us around because of me, and I made their children uncomfortable. I made them uncomfortable. I even felt going outside because I don't know if my neighbors were uncomfortable. (P1)

P1 would go on to suggest that the neighborhood residents would continue to verbally harass her and her family, based on her gender identity:

It's traumatizing. I wish it's something that you change about yourself. And when I walk outside tomorrow, my neighbors are so uncomfortable. It's something I'm stuck with. This is who I am. Do they want me to never go outside ever again? Or how am I supposed to go about this? It's very traumatizing. (P1)

Along with verbal harassment, there were participants who had indicated that they were raped or sexually assaulted because of their gender identity. Participant 2 (P2) described a horrific incident where they were sexually harassed and then raped:

I've been sexually harassed before I was raped, which is something that I don't like talking about because it brings a lot of anxiety. But I was raped and even physically assaulted. (P2)

Another participant also described an incident where they were raped and sexually assaulted. Participant 4 (P4) was assaulted by coworker at their former place of employment:

At my previous place of work, I actually had a colleague who was okay with me and was kind of into me in a way. Most of the time, I was being led to a hideout, and I was put in a position on a situation where I had to choose whether to consent or be compromised, actually. (P4)

The majority of the participants also described harrowing incidents where they were physically assaulted in their communities. P7 shared a time where she and friend where physically assaulted by a group of individuals based on discovering their gender identities. While P7 survived the incident, her friend was tragically murdered:

I've been brutally attacked while I was with my friend. Eventually, later on, she was murdered by just a group of men. And unfortunately, we had no one to help us immediately. (P7)

P7 was able to assistance from the public eventually, but the incident left her with a broken arm and her friend dead. As P7 states:

It's so painful. I left with a broken arm, but I found treatment, and I'm okay.

Mentally, emotionally, I felt a lot of trauma, and I felt like I was completely shattered before I came back around to recollect myself. (P7)

P8 was physically assaulted by a man after being outed as a trans woman in public:

I talked to a gentleman, who discovered my gender identity from an onlooker, and then proceeded to physically assault me. (P8)

P8 also stated that:

I address who I am from the outside, and I'm not afraid of that. The person I was talking to, he was attractive, according to me. And so, we're just talking, and it was all good. It was all nice until some lady, she began watching everything, then gave me this look. She asked, "Why were you with him?" Like, the lady was asking the man, "Why would you do such a girl? Why would you do with her?" And at that moment, the guy realized that there was something odd. I don't know how he felt, but his reaction changed almost immediately. And he was like, "Are you gay?" And I told him, "That's not how you ask. That's not how you tell some person." And he got so mad, and he slapped me across the face and was like, "You're making me seem weak." (P8)

P8 indicated that this was their first incident of harm being inflicted on them. It was evident that their gender identity was the motivation behind their attack. P9 experienced an incident similar on the public transit. P9 details the incident on the bus where a stranger mistaken them to be a sex-worker and then proceeds to physically assault them:

This one time I was in a bus, and some man called me a hooker. From the way I would say that I was dressed. And I got all defensive and told him that there's no way I was expected to explain to him who I thought really am, and it agitated him. And he, like, grabbed me, and punched me in the face. The funny thing is, no one stood up for me, and everyone was like, that's not my business. (P9)

P9's statement follows what Kaniya Walker of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the U.S. Transgender Victimization Survey, have stated about trans women of color and the sex industry: Both police and civilians profile trans women of color as sex workers even when they are not engaging in sex work, as they seen as easy targets, especially if they are from a low-income community (Walker, 2020). Walker (2020) also states that laws that criminalize sex work push the industry underground, which makes it more dangerous. Sex workers face high rates of violence because clients assume they can assault or rob sex workers and get away with it (Walker, 2020). Criminals appear to take advantage of the fact that so many trans women of color are afraid of reporting the incident to the police for fear of what will happen to them. If they were to call the police, they could be arrested for selling sex, and they could also be abused by law enforcement (Walker, 2020). Being a sex worker is thus dangerous whether people are trans, cis, LGBTQ, or straight, but it is especially dangerous if they are a trans woman of color (Walker, 2020).

P10 identified an incident where they were physically assaulted in public and mocked for the assault. P10 was also verbally harassed and threatened for their gender identity, and in turn, the participant also considered suicide:



I was actually slapped by someone I don't know. When someone actually goes through that, was the point in time that because of all the hate reading hostility that was actually coming towards me, I was actually fighting depression. Yeah, I was attacked. I was just, like, lying down there almost like this and all that, but I didn't really get up from many people, God is looking. You got why you did that. And yeah, I remember a young guy, I think he was around 20 then, He was the only person laughing. I think I was actually going to consider suicide because of how much hatred people were actually shown to me. (P10)

All participants seem to agree that without effective hate-crime legislation to include protections for gender identity in the state of Florida, their lives will continue to be in danger from violent offenses. This feeds into the second theme that was developed from the initial coding: the lack of support trans women of color receive, can lead to isolation and self-harm.

## **Theme #2: Trans Women of Color Receive Little Support, Leads to Isolation and Self-Harm**

The second theme is identified as “trans women of color receive little support, leads to isolation and self-harm.” When asked about their victimization experiences, several participants indicated that they received little support from the community. Specifically, participants reflected on what community support systems that they rely on. P2 stated that they do not rely on law enforcement:

I've just learned to cope up with everything. Hasn't been that smooth. So, I am sticking with that. We have police, we have neighborhood watch, friends, and

family. These are safety mechanisms. No, I don't rely on law enforcement. I'm afraid because I feel like we are the most targeted group, so I always have that here. I don't have trust for them. I feel like I just need to have myself alone in my own system. (P2)

P2 suggests that they keep to themselves mostly. They may rely on family and friends, but not the safety mechanisms such as law enforcement. This speaks largely to the mistrust the trans community has towards law enforcement in the state of Florida.

P10 was verbally harassed and threatened for their gender identity. The participant also considered suicide. When asked if they reported this incident to law enforcement, P10 stated:

Well, I didn't know about police because as far as I know, there are complex cases of such victimizations and violence. It leads to unwanted attention. It's also, I don't know, but it would have actually feel good if the people who get attacked and victimized actually get that justice they wanted. (P10)

This was also a sentiment shared by P1. When asked if they reported their victimization to law enforcement, P1 stated, “No way. Why would help they anyway? It is okay, they will not understand.”

Kimberle Crenshaw, whose works empower people of color to name and theorize their own experiences and social observations, suggests that the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them (Fenner, 2020). Crenshaw's works on intersectionality apply in this study; specifically, that trans women of color in the United States appear to face double discrimination as

they are targeted for their race and their gender identity. Evidence can be found in the fact that P3 was verbally and physically assaulted by coworkers in a health care practice, where coworker purposely used the wrong pronouns. P3 recalls:

There are also issues of not being addressed properly by your coworkers, not being using the right pronouns for you, and not agreeing to be comfortable with each other. I, once, had an experience with the coworker who does not agree with my identity. I've been transitioning. So, he purposely used to use the wrong pronoun for me and it's not something that's really cool. (P3)

This is willingness to isolate and disrespect trans women of color, which is largely based on the person's gender identity. Similarly, P4 was physically assaulted in the neighborhood they resided in. P4 explains:

I was actually bullied from time to time by my peers and all the young individuals in my neighborhood who saw me and treated me as someone who didn't deserve to be alive. So, I was constantly bullied from time to time, on the streets and in public places. (P4)

This reality of isolation and alienation from the broader community has led to higher rates of self-harm for trans women of color. Virupaksha et al. (2016) believes that the suicide attempt rate among transgender persons ranges from 32%–50% across the country. Gender-based victimization, discrimination, bullying, violence, being rejected by the family, friends, and community, harassment by intimate partner, family members, police and public, discrimination and ill treatment in the health-care system, are the major risk factors that influence the suicidal behavior among transgender persons (Virupaksha

et al., 2016). Specifically, the state of Florida appears to maintain a hostile environment towards trans women of color. These experiences identified by the participants are a clear indication of this issue. This leads to the third theme that was developed out of the initial coding: the state of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity.

### **Theme 3: State of Florida's Environment is Hostile to Race and Gender Identity**

The third theme is identified as the "State of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity." Questions were asked about the participants' experiences dealing with their racial and gender identities. When questioned on the hostility towards African Americans, P7 spoke on their experiences with their racial identity:

Because maybe they're the most overlooked people and there's just that mentality; and also, that hatred that just comes out with everything because of being a Black person or someone of color. (P7)

P9 said something startling about the issue of racial discrimination that is truly a part of the American condition:

Most people think that we are intruders, that we don't belong here, and it's not our space. So, they feel like they need to push us out, which is not right. And it is not true, because there's enough space for everyone. When you look back, we're told through the history of African Americans that white Americans are the ones that belong here, which is not true at all, because some were born here. Some of the Black Americans were born here, and still, the white Americans feel we don't belong here. Like, the white, they make us feel like we don't belong here. (P9)

When asked about their victimization experiences, several participants indicated that they subjected to a hostile environment at work and in public settings. P3 worked in an environment where coworkers were apathetic to their gender pronouns: “My coworker purposely used the wrong pronouns to identify me.” P2 identified the inequality of public services that are administered and how trans women of color who live in Florida always receive less than any other population:

I would say that there have been a lot of inequalities for public services, housing discrimination, which is something very critical, especially for issues of maybe mobility, or maybe we also have a limitation maybe to social support if they're need basically, I will say, just limited public services. (P2)

When asked what types of violence exists in her community in Miami that affects trans women, P8 discussed an incident that involved another woman:

I remember she was a trans woman, and I don't know if they were arguing about something or I don't really what went down, but all of a sudden, she was on the ground and there was this dude who was beating her up, was roughing her up and down. I felt that the man felt that he was like, cheated or something, that the woman looked like a woman. But the moment that she started talking, her voice was so deep, and the man was like, “Why would you make me stop and waste my time on you and your man?” And the dude asked the woman, “Like, are you gay or something?” (P8)

It is clear that there is open discrimination against trans women of color in the state of Florida. When addressing what should be done to protect trans women of color in Florida, P4 observed:

It's really difficult to say because a lot of people want to abide by the policies. The right policies need to be in place to ensure that the right of every transgender woman is met within the state. The establishment of government policies I believe could help protect the rights of the women, including trans women. (P4)

All participants indicated that an expansion of the current hate crime legislation in the state of Florida should include crimes committed against a person's gender identity. As it is a hate crime to commit a violence against an individual's racial identity, so should be a hate crime to commit an act of violence against a person's gender identity.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the findings and results of the research method and protocol described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presented findings from semi-structured interview questions of a purposive sample of 10 participants identified as adult trans women of color who experienced victimization while residing in the state of Florida. Chapter 4 also presented procedures for the collection and analyzing of the data compiled from the interviews.

The researcher's analysis discovered common themes and connections to results which were presented in the literature review regarding feelings of isolation, abandonment, being misunderstood, and increased vulnerability. The data analysis and coding recognized three themes that consistently emerged in the data. The three themes

collected from the participants were as follows: (a) violence towards trans women of color leads to discrimination; (b) trans women of color receive little support, leading to isolation and self-harm; and (c) the state of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity. Each theme was reviewed within the transcripts and used to develop structural descriptions of how each participant described their lived experiences. The descriptions from the interview transcript allowed for a connected analysis of each victimization experience. Each participant spoke extensively regarding the thematic concepts and allowed the researcher the opportunity to better understand the victimization experiences of trans women of color residing in the state of Florida. All participants identified that without effective hate-crime legislation to include protections for gender identity in the state of Florida, their lives will continue to be in danger from violent offenses.

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the true nature of the lived experiences concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in Florida. The results of this study highlight the crisis within Florida's transgender community regarding the well-being of trans women of color. All of the interviewees shared their harrowing experiences with lack of support systems, a sense of belonging, and human respect. The methods of this study for quality assurance were also discussed. Chapter 5 focuses on the implications of the findings and further recommendations from the research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to determine the true nature of the lived experiences concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in Florida. Three themes emerged from the data to describe the victimization experiences of 10 selected participants who identified themselves as transgender women of color. All 10 participants were adults over the age of 18 who had resided in the state of Florida at the time of their victimization. These individuals were able to provide specific details about their victimization experiences during each interview over the Zoom virtual platform. The essential narratives correlated with the lived experiences concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in Florida. The narratives included themes such as violence towards trans women of color leads to discrimination, trans women of color receive little support which leads to isolation and self-harm, and the state of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity. These themes emerged from each participant's experiences regarding their victimization experiences as they were explained and as they related to the research questions of this study.

The results from the data analysis of the participant interviews revealed there has been direct discrimination against transgender women of color within the state of Florida. Each participant's lived experiences with violent crime also prove that the broader population does not truly understand the concerns of the transgender community of Florida. All study participants provided suggestions on how the state of Florida can tackle the discrimination that transgender women of color face. This material is reviewed



further in the Interpretation, Recommendations, and Conclusion sections of the current chapter.

Recommendations to address this issue are examined in this chapter. These include the participants suggesting that the general population needs to be educated within the state of Florida as they did not have a good understanding of what it means to be transgender. Implications for social change will also be discussed and include ways in which the state of Florida can provide protections for transgender citizens by expanding the hate crime statute to include “gender and gender identity.” Lastly, recommendations for additional research were discussed, followed by reflections of the researcher with this research process.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis to code and determine which elements emerged as themes from the interview transcripts of the 10 participants in the study: Step 1—becoming familiar with the data, Step 2—generating initial codes, Step 3—searching for themes, Step 4—reviewing themes, Step 5—defining themes, and Step 6—write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Each of the participants identified with the same social and economic background. This goes along with the key demographics of the participants indicated in the previous chapters. All data presented in the study were collected from interview transcripts acquired during the interview process.

**Theme #1: Violence Towards Trans Women of Color Leads to Discrimination**

In all 10 cases, the participants perceived danger while dealing with the public in their Florida communities, which may have been based on their past experiences. Nine of the 10 participants have had violent experiences in Florida that led to discrimination. A couple of participants had to deal with rape and sexual assault. Specifically, P2 stated in their interview that they had been sexually harassed before they were raped. This finding supports the data from the Virginia Transgender Health Initiative Study, as 26.6% of transgender participants reported a history of sexual assault since age 13 years, with 89.2% of those stating their gender identity or expression was the primary motivator for the assault (Testa et al., 2012).

A majority of the participants had dealt with verbal and physical assault. This finding was not surprising as it aligns with the trans panic defense, discussed in the literature review. Lee (2020) suggested that a murder defendant asserting trans panic will claim that the discovery that the victim was a transgender female—an individual who identifies as a woman but was thought to be male when born—provoked him into a heat of passion, causing him to lose his self-control. This particular finding illustrates how trans women of color should have better ways to communicate their issues with the public without the fear of persecution or discrimination, especially after a traumatic event. This claim is made because trans people, thus perceived, have the obligation to be completely open about their transgender status, and the failure to do so is considered a wrong (Rome, 2018).

The majority of the participants saw the acts of violence as an avenue for purposeful hatred and discrimination towards their gender identity. This aligns with the work of Momen and Dilks (2021) as discussed in Chapter 2, as they argued that much of the violence against trans individuals is impacted by society's rigid adherence to a gender binary (woman/man) and to the notion that there exists a linear relationship between natal sex, gender, and sexuality. This finding suggests that a tangible way to increase the quality of life of Black trans women is to extend legal protections to them and to change the way that they are treated under the law (Forestiere, 2020).

Crenshaw (1991) has stated in her work that trans women of color live within intersections of discrimination based on race, being women, and being transgender. This was evident in the responses of the participants. I believed that trans women of color experience race and gender in oppressive settings in the state of Florida. These findings supported my principal theoretical beliefs around intersectionality and womanist theory, that discrimination of sexual, racial, and gender inequalities negatively affect women's well-being (Bauman, 2021; Lightsey, 2015).

Furthermore, the findings presented in this study supported the conclusion of Briones-Robinson et al. (2016) who stated that the transgender community had a high level of mistrust of the police because of their previous interactions. Transgender women and gender non-conforming citizens of color will likely encounter negative interactions with law enforcement. This followed my assertion that law enforcement in Florida does not properly disclose hate crime statistics pertaining to gender identity. I believe that while trans women of color in the state of Florida respect the role of law enforcement

officers, they would never go to police departments to ask for assistance. The participants were very cautious towards police involvement in their affairs. All participants who experienced victimization never reported their incidents to law enforcement. For example, P6 has a mistrust of these public officials, while P7 went even further to identify how these communities treat trans women openly. This aligned with the theme discussed in the literature review concerning negative impact of social constructions in policy towards transgender citizens in Florida.

Each of the participants during the interviews also stated they felt they were being targeted by large crowds and strangers based on their gender identity. Specifically, P8 was assaulted by a man after a complete stranger outed them as being transgender, and P9 was assaulted on public transit by a stranger after being mistaken for being a sex worker. After the incident, P9 described being isolated—a common coping mechanism trans women of color use when dealing discrimination through violence. This finding showed that trans women not only experience discrimination through violence, but they receive little support from the community. This left trans women of color feeling isolated and vulnerable to self-harm. This also led into the second theme uncovered from the interviews.

### **Theme #2: Trans Women of Color Receive Little Support, Leads to Isolation and Self-Harm**

In Chapter 2's literature review, there was recent research that suggested trans people do not experience or enact gender separately from other social positions such as race, class, and sexuality (de Vries, 2015). One theme looked at assessing the needs of

trans women through the intersectionality of race and gender. The researcher was not surprised to learn that, aside from being discriminated by the broader public, each of the participants felt that they receive little support from the public and the government. Incidentally, this would lead to isolation and self-harm on the part of the participants.

I learned from Participant P10 that they considered committing suicide after they were assaulted. Virupaksha et al. (2016) stated that the high prevalence of depression and suicidal tendencies among transgender persons seems to be highly influenced by societal stigma, lack of social support, HIV status, and violence-related issues which require further thorough investigation and necessary mental health counseling, crisis management, addressing drug abuse, and providing them livelihood opportunities.

It also was not surprising to learn of the participants' experiences of not receiving the attention from the community at-large after their victimization experiences. As stated in Chapter 2, transgender women and gender non-conforming citizens of color have and will encounter hostile interactions with law enforcement. P4 said that after they were sexually assaulted, they did not go to the police for help. P9 also did not report their victimization to law enforcement, identifying a significant area of crime that law enforcement is unable to correct. This revelation aligns with the theme discussed in the literature review regarding the poor communication between law enforcement and the transgender community. This finding suggests that the lack of attention trans women of color would face from the community would make them feel depressed and alone. This would also lead to social isolation, a finding that aligns with the work of Smart et al. (2022). In their work, trans women of color were found to limit interactions and public

spaces where they anticipated potential mistreatment, which also limited social connections (Smart et al., 2022).

I also learned about the harassment trans women of color faced by health care providers. P6 was harassed and verbally accosted by hospital staff. This finding aligns with recent research that would suggest that perceived discrimination by clinicians contributes to health care avoidance, increased substance use, poor general health, and poor mental health among transgender individuals (Garcia & Lopez, 2022). Transgender persons of color in the U.S. South also reported more healthcare access barriers and discrimination experiences compared to White transgender persons and those in other regions (James et al., 2016).

It is important to note that trans women of color in the current investigation did find solace in each other rather than the broader community. P7, who was brutally assaulted by a group of people, expressed their grief that their friend was also attacked and murdered while also suggesting that they were not able to get the care they needed to deal with their trauma. I found this information to be interesting, as these findings show that trans women of color seem to trust each other in that crisis moment, instead of the community or even law enforcement. This aligns with the work of Bauman (2021) and womanist theology, as discussed in the literature review. Bauman suggests that womanist theology advocates for justice towards sexual and gender identity, where gender identity should be understood as an identity and not an act.

This community needs to be supported to strengthen their resiliency factors and draw culturally sensitive and transgender-inclusive suicide prevention strategies and

increase protective factors to tackle this high rate of suicidality (Virupaksha et al., 2016).

This also would suggest that the state of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity.

### **Theme #3: State of Florida's Environment is Hostile to Race and Gender Identity**

The situation in the state of Florida appears to be dire as the current hate crimes statute does not include crimes against gender and gender identity. Based on the interviews conducted with trans women of color who were victims of violent offenses, there appears to be a hostile environment in the state of Florida. This aligned with the theme discussed in the literature review concerning the interpretive effects of policy on target communities. For example, P8 recalled that in the area of Florida where they live, they encounter other trans women of color facing physical and verbal assault. Despite being a federally protected class, transgender citizens are not protected as class under Florida current hate crime statutes. As discussed in Chapter 2, withholding protections such as discrimination protections and restroom access have been impacting the way minority members view themselves. Hence, attributing resources and protections to particular populations and withholding resources from others have impacted target communities, such as the transgender community in the state of Florida.

This comes at a time when legislation has been implemented in the state of Florida that blocks teachers from discussing gender identity with students in elementary schools and was mentioned by all 10 participants in the study. This restriction includes education on the use of pronouns, which aligns with the willing misidentification trans women face based on their gender identity, discussed in Chapter 2. The Trevor Project

further ties affirmation of transgender and nonbinary persons, such as respecting pronouns and allowing them to change legal documents, to lower suicide rates, reflecting the necessity of safe and supportive spaces for LGBTQ+ children and teenagers (Zapata, 2023). There have been numerous bills introduced in Florida to limit access to healthcare and social activities for trans community, which will make this community even more vulnerable to discrimination.

The participants identified a systemic problem in the state of Florida where trans women of color are discriminated in both race and gender identity. Without changes to the hate crime statute by policy makers, trans women of color will continue to feel unsafe in the regions they call home.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research study required the use of a narrative inquiry. Narrative research is measured to document the lived experience of a hidden population within society. A narrative inquiry here presented an opportunity for a marginalized communities to share their lived experience. The researcher performing the inquiry must be profoundly entrenched in the topic with a spacious understanding of the subject's life experience in order to represent the subject's life experience efficiently and accurately. However, there are limitations with this research, and they are present in this study.

First, the study began with a concern for getting enough participation to reach saturation of the data to maintain the validity of the project. This concern came about as the result that members of the transgender community tend to stay away from shelters because of the fear of assault or discrimination. This target population was hidden and



difficult to access. As I was an outsider of the transgender community, the data heavily relied on the victimization experiences of the participants and no other sources. I had to believe each participant met the selection criteria outlined in this study and that their experience was valid. The interviews were conducted on the Zoom virtual teleconference platform and not in person. The participants were allowed to choose to appear on screen or not for the virtual interview.

Another limitation of this research method relies heavily on the memory of the subjects. The events that the participants had to recall were harrowing and traumatic and happened well within their past as adults residing in Florida. Therefore, the inclusion of triangulation by the researcher helped control this limitation within the study by asking the interview question in a different way.

Race was a limitation due to the lack of racial diversity of the selected participants. All of the participants who were interviewed identified themselves as African American. The study requested participants to be identified as trans women of color, which also included members of the Asian American, Latin American, Native American, and Multi-racial populations. The researcher did not obtain participants of these racial communities which would present a limitation to the data collected since only trans women who were African American were represented fully. Interestingly, the other selection criteria in the study were not limitations, as the participants were all over the age of 18, resided in the state of Florida, and identified themselves as trans women who were victims of violent offenses.

In addition, the researcher used qualitative methodology in this study. Qualitative research doesn't regard truth as objective, but as a subjective reality that is experienced differently by each individual (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Qualitative research methodology observes that a phenomenon can be isolated into multiple variables that can be studied independently. This is a limitation as any reader must decide whether the researcher has rationalized their chosen approach to the study at hand. Perhaps, a study using quantitative or mixed methods methodology would have sufficed for researching a hidden population and the phenomenon affecting that population. However, qualitative research asserts that a phenomenon is more than the sum of its parts and must therefore be studied in a holistic manner (Ryan et al., 2007). This is why the qualitative methodology was chosen.

Finally, researcher bias always limits any research. Years of dedication and perseverance have allowed the researcher to maintain the objectivity and credibility of this research. This was done by creating a thorough research plan, asking general questions to the participants, showing the respondents their individual transcripts for evaluation, and maintaining the transcript records.

### **Recommendations**

The data aligned with themes that demonstrated mistrust, fear, lack of knowledge, and discriminatory actions that took place at shelters. While this study only observed the experiences of transgender women of color who were victims of crime, it did not account for the perspectives of law enforcement officers who investigate these crimes and the government of Florida, which is responsible for the creating and implementing policy.

Future research should examine the perspectives of police departments who investigate hate crimes against the trans community and the policymakers who govern the state of Florida and create legislation.

Second, this study did not focus on the underreporting of crimes against the trans community of Florida. The FBI's annual hate crimes statistics report (Department of Justice, 2021) revealed that 2020 saw an 8% increase in reported hate crimes, with 8,263 incidents reported nationally—the highest total since 2002. The increase in reported hate crimes comes despite the fact that the number of law enforcement agencies providing data has dropped from 15,558 in 2019 to 15,136 in 2020 (Department of Justice, 2021). Of the agencies that do participate, the vast majority report no hate crimes. Indeed, in 2020, over 84% of participating agencies did not report a single hate crime (Department of Justice, 2021).

Of the 687 law enforcement agencies in Florida, just 452 participate in the FBI's hate crimes reporting program. Of those 452 participating agencies, just 54 reported hate crimes to the FBI in 2020. Overall, only 11.9% of Florida law enforcement agencies actually reported one or more hate crimes; the national average was 15.7% (Department of Justice, 2019). Fully 145 Florida cities reported no hate crimes at all. Zero hate crimes were reported in St. Petersburg or Miami, which each have populations over 250,000 (Department of Justice, 2019). Five cities with populations over 100,000 reported zero hate crimes, including Miami Gardens, Pompano Beach, Miramar, Tallahassee, and Cape Coral, and 17 cities with populations of 50,000–100,000 reported zero hate crimes. Coral Springs and Lakeland, both with populations between 100,000–250,000, did not report to

the FBI (Department of Justice, 2019). This was a serious limitation discovered by the current study.

Participants also mentioned additional recommendations that reinforced their belief that the general population and community service organizations did not have a good understanding of what it means to be transgender. Participants experienced issues regarding pronoun usage, true name versus dead name usage, and current policies that address sleeping and hygiene areas, when related to the transgender community.

Participants expressed the need for an education movement throughout society to address this lack of knowledge.

## **Implications**

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

The findings of this study were significant because they could help to inform policies regarding trans women reporting their victimization. Furthermore, the findings of this study did help with programming for trans women of color who have been victimized. As a benefit, participants were offered professional services in their community after the completion of the interview. Participants were also placed in touch with community organizations that would provide assistance. This study's findings can contribute to the current literature on the discrimination that members of the transgender community face and to contribute a positive change in communities throughout the United States. The social change implications from this study could have positive impacts for both community leaders and transgender citizens of the state of Florida. It is

hoped that education, advocacy, and healing would be three positive impacts that can result from this study.

From a public policy perspective, these findings can enable a focus on an effective public policy review to protect transgender citizens, especially trans women of color, from further violent crimes. While non-transgender-identified individuals are sometimes subjected to similar treatment, it is epidemiologically not possible to prove that the rates of violent crimes of trans individuals are significantly higher than the non-trans rates due to the general invisibility of the trans-identified population and the lack of reporting of transgender-related hate crimes (Lombardi et al., 2001; Witten, 2003, 2004; Witten & Eyler, 1997), it is generally understood within the trans population that transgender individuals can enrage others by their mere existence.

This study was also significant because the findings fill a gap in the literature related to the lived experiences of trans women of color who have been victimized. There was a limited amount of literature related to transgender women of color and their lived experiences concerning victimization in the state of Florida. This study suggests that positive social change does not depend on any particular area of society, but instead on the ability of key political actors to successfully cooperate in the policy-making process. It is hoped that based on the data collected, this study will impel law enforcement agencies to collect data regarding violent offenses against those who identify as transgender in order to help protect communities where there is a high risk of offending. This in turn will also protect transgender citizens across the country as the data published

will force law enforcement officers to spend more money on hiring more officers and crime prevention strategies in local communities.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The responses of the 10 participants developed a foundation of knowledge concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in Florida. Trans women of color in America are far more likely than most other people to experience serious roadblocks and harms, ranging from extreme poverty to violent murder. Further research is needed to understand the experience of intersectional discrimination across multiple identities, including gender identity and race (Mukkamala & Suyemoto, 2018). The researcher will therefore disseminate the study findings through various methods, including publishing the study through ProQuest. The researcher will also present the study to research participants, the state of Florida, and other civil society organizations. The findings of this work should help to encourage further research in this area.

The goal of this research is to expand the current hate crime statute in the state of Florida to include gender and gender-identity. By listing violent crimes committed against the trans population of Florida as hate crimes, the trans community may receive true justice and protection under the law.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher investigated the lived experiences concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in the state of Florida. The narrative approach was selected because it is often used to better understand identity since narratives provide us

with access to people's identity and personality (Butina, 2015). The principal questions of the study were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of transgender women of color in the state of Florida who are victims of violent crimes?

RQ2: How do transgender women of color in the state of Florida make meaning of their victimization experiences?

This narrative inquiry examined these research questions and found in the theoretical framework involving womanism and intersectionality. Transgender women of color who experience victimization while residing in the state of Florida were dealing with a difficult living environment that includes ongoing discrimination, isolation, and continued hostility towards their gender identity.

The current hate crime statute, which includes crimes against race, religion, and sexual orientation, must be expanded in the state of Florida to include gender and gender identity. These findings are in line with literature and theories which were discussed in the study. As stated in the literature review, trans women face stigma, discrimination, and systemic oppression. Hate directed toward transgender people, known as transphobia, leads to unequal access to education, employment, and other economic resources (Arayasirikul, 2016). The experiences of trans people of color in the United States explicate the institutional meanings attached to social positions, their interconnection, and the ways they are rooted in hegemonic narratives and normative expectations (de Vries, 2015). Trans women of color from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background who live in predominantly White societies face discrimination and violence

on the basis of the intersection of gender, sexuality, and racial identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Based on the results of the research study, the researcher can also conclude that as the State of Florida's environment is hostile to race and gender identity, as violence towards trans women of color leads to discrimination, as well as little support from the public, all lead to isolation and self-harm. Womanist and Crenshaw's Intersectionality theories afford a concrete framework for understanding how public policy relates to the lived experience of minority target populations. This framework recognizes that trans women of color are characterized simultaneously by multiple intersecting social categories, which are properties of the individual in terms of their identity, as well as characteristics of social structures, that potentially expose trans women of color to multiple forms of marginalization (Ussher et al., 2022). This discovery is crucial because it indicates that policy makers in the state of Florida must be aware of the lived experiences of transgender women of color who are victims of violent crime.

There is a critical need to better understand the lived experiences of transgender persons in the southern portion of the United States (Edmiston et al., 2016). Using the narrative inquiry approach along with the assistance of transgender rights groups on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn, this study did bring awareness to the lived experiences of communities that do not have visibility and access to stringent protections based on their gender identity, i.e., transgender women of color who have been victims of violent offenses in the state of Florida. Each participant in the study was able to share their story through this study's narrative research design.



In conclusion, this study attempted to provide an understanding of the lived experiences concerning victimization involving transgender women of color in the state of Florida. Violence against transgender women is widespread and systemic in Florida and transgender citizens are not a protected class under the state's Constitution. Trans rights often hinge on case law interpretations or individual state laws (Gyamerah et al., 2021). This research study presented three themes that should be explored with additional research in the future. It is time to call on policy makers in the state of Florida to implement changes to the state's constitution by expanding its hate crime statute to include gender and gender identity. It is the responsibility of Florida's lawmakers and law enforcement agencies to ensure that all communities within the state of Florida are protected from violent offenses, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. The state of Florida must adhere to realm of public administration that is compassionate to all of citizens in both implementation and execution.

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### Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself?
2. How do you go about your day to day living?
3. What things do you like to do?
4. When you were growing up, what types of careers did you think about pursuing?
5. What does being a resident of Florida mean to you?
6. What safety mechanisms can you depend on as a resident of Florida: police, neighborhood watch, friends, family, etc?
7. How often do you speak to others in your community about your life experiences? How often do others in the trans community speak to you about their life experiences?
8. How often do you use social media websites? Which platforms do you like to use?
9. Why do you use these social media websites?
10. How do you feel about law enforcement in the state of Florida? How do you feel about crime in the state of Florida?
11. How often do you watch television news or read news articles concerning violent crime in Florida? How often does that story involve a person of color? A trans woman of color?

#### *Gender Identity*

1. What determines gender?
2. Why do citizens identify as transgender, gender non-confirming, genderqueer, and nonbinary?
3. What does it mean for a person to be transgender?
4. How about gender nonconforming, genderqueer, and nonbinary?
5. How to people realize they're trans, gender non-confirming, genderqueer, or nonbinary?
6. How important is your gender identity to you?
7. How has the expansion of transgender rights at the Federal level affected your well-being?
8. As there is no expansion of transgender rights at the state level in Florida, how has this affected your well-being as a resident of Florida?
9. What kind of hardships do the members of the trans community in Florida face? Why does society give people who don't follow gender norms such a hard time?
10. As a transgender woman, who resides in Florida, what rights do you not retain for which you had before transitioning?
11. Why are people hostile to trans identity? Why are people hostile to trans female identity?
12. What types of violent crime do you believe trans women often experience in your area?

### *Race*

13. What determines race?
14. What does it mean to be a person of color given the climate of our nation in 2021?
15. Why is there so much hostility to people of color who identify as African American? Latin-American? Asian-American? Or Multi-racial?
16. As a person of color who resides in Florida, what kind of discrimination/microaggressions have you encountered in your day-to-day life?
17. What types of violent crime do you believe people of color often experience in your area?
18. How important is your racial identity to you?

### *Victimization Experience*

19. Would you tell me what you are able to remember about your experience, where would you like to start?
20. What are you able to tell me about what was happening before/during/after the crime?
21. What was going on in your mind when you realized you were in danger?
22. What were you feeling—physically and emotionally—immediately after the incident?
23. If there was someone you trusted to talk about the incident after it occurred, when you told them, what were you thinking and feeling?"
24. What are you able to share with me on any friends/colleagues/ classmates that might have noticed a change in your physical appearance or behavior (withdrawn/sad/angry) after the incident?
25. If you reported this crime to law enforcement, how did it make you feel?
26. What should be done to protect trans women of color across the state of Florida?

### **At the End of the Interview**

**(Express gratitude and close the interview):** Once again, thank you for taking time to be part of this study. I have gone through the questions I had prepared for the interview. Are there any other information on any aspects covered in this interview that we have not addressed and which you would like for me to know?

**Thank you!** This has been very helpful.

**(Seek permission for member-check):** I also wanted to let you know that the transcripts of this interview was made available to you, so that you can review to ensure that they represent the experience and opinion you intended to communicate during this interview. When you receive it, I would appreciate it if you could take some time to review and forward it back to me at your earliest convenience. You may also add any reflections that may come to mind as you read through the transcribed interview. Do I have your permission to send the transcript of the interview to you?

**Thank you!**

**END**

**Write up interview notes:** Complete the reflexive journal as soon as possible, in order to accurately capture the context and experience of the interview process.

**Notes on:**

**Self:**

**The Interview processes:**

**Timing:**

**Questions/Answers:**

## Appendix B: Flyer

**PARTICIPANTS WANTED!!!**

If you are 18 or older and have been a victim of crime in the state of Florida, you may be eligible to participate in a research study

Little is currently known regarding the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the United States. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to explore the lived experiences of victimization among transgender women of color in the Trans communities in Florida. This research will provide essential data to prompt significant changes in policy regarding hate crimes.

**Location**

Interviews was conducted over the ZOOM platform.

**Eligibility Requirements**

- Transgender or Non-Con Female
- Identifies as a Person(s) of Color
- 18 Years and Older
- Resident of the State of Florida, and can speak on experiencing victimization while living in Florida

**\*\*Eligible participants upon completion will receive an Amazon Gift Card\*\***

**If you're interested or unsure if you meet the requirements, call, or email a member of the study team:**

Andrew Vaz, MSc, MPA, MPhil, PhD Candidate