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UN SOLO PIE ADENTRO: SENSE OF COMMUNITY OF PUERTO RICANS IN MIAMI

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Transnational migrants’ identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation and are continuously pulled in different directions as old and new members of multiple communities wrapped in a single experience (Aranda, Hughes, & Sabogal, 2014). Particularly for Puerto Ricans in the United States (U.S.), symbolic and cultural bonds are linked to their communities on the Island which require us to expand traditional notions of sense of community as a process and as an enactment of connections between people and transnational social spaces. Therefore, this study explores the ways Puerto Ricans living in Miami, Florida define the concept of community and construct their sense of community towards their local, national, and transnational communities. In-depth interviews with fourteen Puerto Ricans living in different localities of Miami-Dade were conducted and recorded. Thematic analysis was used to map the transnational connections of the participants. Findings suggest that emotional connections developed through shared events, symbols, and stories sustain the sense of belonging to their transnational communities both on the Island and in the U.S. Un solo pie adentro provides a comprehension of the Puerto Rican diaspora’s sense of community and how its members managed to stay connected, invest resources and time, and find reciprocity in the communities which they belong to in the aftermath of two historical hurricanes.

Keywords: transnationalism, Community Psychology, migration, identity
Without a sense of caring,
there can be no sense of community.

Anthony J. D’Angelo
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Transnational migration has strengthened long-distance nationalism, developing a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in different geographical spaces to a specific territory that they see as their homeland (Duany, 2003; Glick Schiller, 2005). Broadly defined, transnationalism refers to the maintenance of social, economic, cultural, and political networks between migrants and their communities of origin (Duany, 2010). Transnational migrants commonly organize their everyday lives in complex ways, across extended spaces, and in ways that increasingly challenge the containing powers of nations and states (Robins, 2008). Particularly for “boricuas”, or Island-born Puerto Ricans, living in the United States (U.S.), the nation can no longer be restricted to the communities on the Island, “but is instead constituted by two distinct, yet closely intertwined fragments: that of Puerto Rico itself and of the diaspora settled in the continental United States” (Duany, 2003, p. 429).

Being part of diasporic communities creates a social consciousness that locates individuals in multiple physical, cultural, and social spaces (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Once Puerto Ricans leave the Island, they not only carry bags full of souvenirs, personal effects, and innovative electronic devices but also their cultural practices, values, and identities (Duany, 2003). According to Aranda (2007), ruptured social and cultural networks, and the loss of face-to-face contact with family and friends result in ethnic identities that transcend borders, cross national allegiances, and membership in a global imagined community. This bifocality entails aspects of life here and there, retaining a strong identity linked to the history of the community and the existence of a strong sense of community (Bruneau, 2010).
The term psychological sense of community was first described by Sarason (1974, p. 41), as the feeling of belonging and being a meaningful part of a larger collectivity that strengthens relationships and participation in the community rather than dilutes them. Scholars within the Community Psychology field have worked on understanding the sense of community, with a strong emphasis on the perceptions individuals or groups have towards their local and neighborhood community (Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, & Perkins, 2013; Li, Hodgetts, & Sonn, 2014; Zhang, Zhang, Zhouz, & Yu, 2017). Nevertheless, the sense of belonging to a transnational community has not been sufficiently studied.

Identities of transnational migrants are configured in relationship to more than one place, which requires us to expand traditional notions of sense of community as a process and as an enactment of connections among people, settings, and social spaces (Li et al., 2014). Previous research on Puerto Rican transnationalism in Florida has focused on the Puerto Rican community in Orlando, which has been characterized as a space for maintaining transnational connections, especially kinship ties, with the Island (Duany, 2010; Aranda, 2007). Particularly in South Florida, the experience of transnationalism of Puerto Ricans in locations without a large co-ethnic community has not been thoroughly examined. Unlike other Latin Americans and Caribbean immigrants in Miami, whose communities are established within specific areas, such as Venezuelans in Doral or Cubans in Hialeah, Puerto Ricans are dispersed all over the area (Toro, 2014). Consequently, transnational connections might take on more meaning because they are associated with feelings of satisfaction that come from a sense of belonging to their Puerto Rican communities on the Island (Aranda, 2007).
The overarching aim of this study is to explore the sense of community of Puerto Ricans in Miami, Florida using a transnational paradigm. Studying this psychological construct in the aftermath of historical hurricane Maria provides an understanding of how transnational connections and catastrophic events impact the construction of community. In order to understand how Puerto Rican migrants in South Florida experience a sense of community, it is important to know how they interpret what community means. Therefore, this study also aims to describe how Puerto Ricans define community in the context of their transnational experience.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Expanding the Acculturation Model

Implicit in most psychological theories of immigration, acculturation, and intergroup relations is that immigrants balance their involvement in the dominant or ‘mainstream’ culture of the host country with the maintenance of their heritage culture. The extent of migrants and immigrants’ involvement with the two cultures creates what Berry (2005) describes as the four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, marginalization. In this model, the first strategy, assimilation, is when individuals start seeking constant interactions with the dominant culture and avoid the maintenance of their cultural heritage. On the other hand, when separation strategy occurs, individuals hold on to their native culture and avoid interaction with the host culture. When individuals desire to be embedded in both worlds—home culture and host culture— they opt for the integration strategy. Lastly, the strategy of marginalization shows that there are challenges that limit the possibilities for immigrants to maintain contact with the heritage culture and interact with other cultural groups.

The acculturation strategies described by Berry (2005) seem to look at the process of migration within the context of the host country. However, the increasingly globalized society requires us to extend the within-society mechanisms referred to in the acculturation model to the transnational context. In an era of technologies and globalization, transnationalism has set up new pathways for migrants and immigrants to maintain connections with their homeland. According to Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004), these connections are held in a transnational social field that connects migrants’ communities and social networks both in homeland and host country. Whereas
acculturation focuses on forming new relationships and maintaining the heritage culture in the host country, transnational contact appears to influence these interactions in the host culture and determine the nature of the acculturation patterns (Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013).

In the case of Puerto Rican migrants, they are not only part of the communities on the Island but are also part of the diasporic communities formed in the U.S. Puerto Ricans have transformed the U.S. in different linguistic, social, economic and political ways. Particularly in cities where Puerto Ricans are highly concentrated, the local community enhances their sense of belonging to the Island and keeps them engaged with their transnational communities formed in both territories. Therefore, viewing the experience of Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. from an acculturation perspective does not capture the complexities of their cultural adjustment across these borders. Understanding the phenomena of migration from a transnational perspective allows us to expand the notions of migrants to a global community that is also locally present.

Puerto Rican Migration to Florida

As patterns of relationships between immigrants and hosts are changing dramatically in the global era (Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013), Puerto Rican migration has been set as a controversial topic to study. Some scholars (Duany, 2003, 2006; Aranda, 2007) have argued that the Puerto Rican migration should be understood within the transnational paradigm. Others believe that using transnationalism as a model to comprehend the phenomenon of Puerto Rican migration does fully capture the political affairs between Puerto Rico and the U.S. (Melendez, 2017; Vargas-Ramos 2015).
Melendez (2017) argues that Puerto Rican migration should be understood within the context of the U.S. colonialism that surrounds Puerto Rico.

Nevertheless, the concept of transnationalism can apply to Puerto Rico, because as an unincorporated territory, the Island belongs to but is not part of the U.S. mainland, which means that the U.S. is not legally in charge of the social and cultural affairs of the Island. Puerto Rico and the U.S. share a historical and political trajectory, however, the culture, language, and social interactions that form Puerto Ricans are very distinct from the ones in the mainstream American society. Therefore, transnationalism helps us understand the ways Puerto Ricans maintain their cultural heritage and other connections to the Island in both the Island and the U.S. mainland.

The social, historical and political context seems to distinguish Puerto Ricans in the U.S. from other migrants who move across international borders (Vargas-Ramos, 2015). As Puerto Rico is a U.S. Commonwealth., the lack of legal barriers between the Island and the U.S. mainland facilitates the movement and cross-border linkages. A significant component of the contemporary Puerto Rican population in the U.S. is characterized by the constant back-and-forth movement, naming the Island a “nation on the move” (Duany, 2003). The linguistic, geographic, cultural, and religious borders crossed when leaving a homeland with its own distinct identity and culture makes Puerto Ricans an appropriate population to be studied from a transnational perspective.

The exodus of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. accelerated after World War II (1945-1965), when thousands left the Island to find jobs in seasonal agriculture, manufacturing,
domestic service, and other industries in the mainland (Duany, 2010). By the late 1970s and 1980s, Puerto Rico’s economic difficulties led many Puerto Ricans to look for better opportunities in the U.S. Higher wages, better working conditions, opportunities for occupational advancement, and the promise of a better life attract middle-class Puerto Rican migrants from the Island to the U.S. mainland (Ariza, 2010). In Florida, the first wave of Puerto Rican migrants settled in Tampa Bay area from 1885 to 1940 and expanded to Hillsborough County, where a small number of Puerto Ricans were located until 1930 (Duany, 2017). During the past three decades, there has been a significant increase in the Puerto Rican population in Florida settling in three main regions: Central Florida (Orange, Osceola, Volusia, Seminole, and Polk counties); South Florida, especially in Miami-Dade and Broward counties; and Tampa Bay (Duany & Matos, 2006).

In Central Florida, the Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford metropolitan area has experienced the profound cultural, economic, demographic, linguistic, and even religious transformations made by the Puerto Rican population (Duany, 2010; Duany 2017). With the increase of Puerto Ricans living in the Orlando area, Duany (2010) carried out a study to explore how Puerto Rican business, civic, political, educational, and religious leaders in Orlando represent themselves as part of the growing Spanish-speaking population of Central Florida. The study findings show that some of them were still focused on their families in Puerto Rico, while most had reoriented their everyday life to the U.S. mainland (Duany, 2010).
Boricuas in Miami

Long before Orlando’s emergence as a major Puerto Rican niche in the 1990s, Miami Dade-County’s urban, suburban, and rural areas were where many Puerto Ricans settled (Feldman, 2011). The earliest recorded movement of Puerto Ricans to Miami-Dade consisted of a small number who settled in the 1940s to work in the garment industry, agricultural businesses, and tourism (Duany & Matos, 2006; Duany, 2017). Particularly during the 1950s, many Puerto Ricans migrated to the Wynwood area in North Miami, where they located and formed a large Puerto Rican neighborhood called “Little San Juan”.

There is no record of the number of Puerto Ricans living in Wynwood upon their arrival in the area in the 1950s, however, according to Feldman (2011), 2,577 Puerto Ricans settled in Wynwood and the neighboring areas—including Allapattah, Edgewater, and Buena Vista—by the 1970s. Following the economic recession of the early 1970s, poverty increased in Miami, residential and commercial suburbanization accelerated, and low-income, inner city neighborhoods became increasingly isolated and segregated by race and class (Feldman, 2011). Puerto Rican residents with the financial means have been leaving Wynwood for decades, establishing themselves in other parts of Miami-Dade County and Broward County or moving to Central Florida (Ovalle, 2004).

Many Latin American and Caribbean immigrants choose to live in Miami because it facilitates strategies to keep them present and active in the lives of those left behind (Aranda, Hughes, & Sabogal, 2014). As reported by U.S. Census estimates, there were 105,340 Puerto Ricans living in Miami-Dade and 1,014,340 in the state of Florida in 2016. According to Bhugra and Becker (2005), an increase in concentration of an ethnic
group in a specific area may improve the social support to deal with struggles such as cultural stress and language barriers. With the exception of Puerto Rican sites such as the Roberto Clemente Park and the Borinquen Health Center in Wynwood, the Puerto Rico Chamber of Commerce and some businesses, the Puerto Rican community in Miami is not concentrated in a particular location. Therefore, studying the transnational sense of community of Puerto Ricans in Miami provides a contrast to the more concentrated Puerto Rican community in Orlando where their feeling of belonging to a larger collectivity may be easier to attain.

**Embodying the Concept of Community**

Understanding an individual's sense of belonging to one or multiple communities requires a review of the concept of community, and how the term has been previously defined. Social scientists have found that the nature of community stems from social interactions and negotiations (Gusfield, 1975; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). A community is characterized by a group of people who have something in common such as cultural traditions, values, and migration experiences (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Communities are geo-political, social, and cultural entities, which makes their spatial expansion transient or permanent among different groups of immigrants according to duration in the new country, citizenship, ethnic composition of social networks, and country of settlement (Rebhun, 2014). More specifically, Yoshikawa, Wilson, Peterson, and Shinn (2005) view community as a geographically and demographically outlined population that operates with a shared social identity and possesses what Putnam (1995) describes as social capital: networks, norms, and mutual trust in benefit of all involved.
A community can be both geographical, associated with neighborhood and locality, and relational, linked to spirituality and home (Gusfield, 1975; Bess, Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002), and it can also be transnational. The transnational community can be understood as an “imagined community” where people engage in significant relationships while living outside the home country (Li et al., 2014). One could argue that the positive sense of belonging to the larger community was easier to achieve in the past because communities had more face-to-face contact than they do currently, making it easier to grasp everything that existed within the community’s boundaries (Sarason, 1974). Nevertheless, the rise of information, communication technologies, and travel in the new millennium, has played an important role in facilitating the transnational commitments and relationships across geographical borders (Sun, 2013). As Li et al. (2014) point out, migration is one of the main processes that have contributed to the diversified nature of community. Therefore, this study challenges the traditional idea that a strong psychological sense of community is associated with having the same geographical location and suggests that transnationalism may be useful to understand the complex nature of the Puerto Rican community.

**Sense of Community**

**Exploring a Traditional Model**

As McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined it, their model of sense of community is formed of four different elements that intersect in the course of the interactions between individuals and the communities they belong to: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections. The first element, *membership*, describes the feeling of belonging, of being part of the group and contributing to the
group’s sense of community. To feel that one is a member of the group, the authors point out that individuals establish common symbols that maintain community boundaries, which provide emotional safety and identify themselves as part of a larger collectivity where they feel valued. This personal investment can eventually strengthen their sense of community and create emotional connections. The second component is influence, a bidirectional concept that illustrates the importance of a member’s influence in the group and the group’s ability to impact its members. Integration and fulfillment of needs, sense of community’s third element, explains the extent to which individual values are shared with the community and the community’s ability to fulfill its needs based on these values. Lastly, shared emotional connections, is an element of the sense of community based on shared stories and events that occur within the community, and where individuals can participate and feel identified while strengthening their ties and being emotionally embedded.

Multiple Sense of Community

A study by Brodsky and Marx (2001) explored the psychological sense of community components (PSOC) and multiple sense of belonging of predominantly African-American women involved in a job training and education center in Baltimore. Participants expressed their PSOC in relation to their macrommunity, represented by the center, the subcommunities formed by different “cliques” or groups of teachers and students, and their neighborhood. They identified the center as part of their family (membership), place where they receive love and comfort (fulfillment of needs). Celebrating success together and promoting the goals of the center revealed a more positive PSOC to the territorially defined macrocommunity and subcommunities than
with home communities. Sharing similar experiences with other African-American women connected them emotionally to the center, which sometimes made it difficult to interact with women in their own neighborhood. The results demonstrated that sense of belonging and identification can be attached to multiple communities at the local level.

In another study, Li et al. (2014) expanded the literature on multiple sense of belonging to examine older Chinese migrants’ experiences in their local communities in New Zealand and transnational communities in China. The authors conducted three interviews to investigate the life history of the participants in China; their activities and social connections created in New Zealand; and their reflection on their experiences of ageing in place in both countries. The authors found that in order to maintain a sense of community, the participants needed to create a history of residency in the new environment that connected them transnationally with China. Emotional attachment to China is essential for their construction and maintenance of sense of community. The data revealed that transnational telecommunication was vital in maintaining cultural and social networks with China. Negative experiences in their neighborhood in New Zealand impact their perceived emotional security. However, successfully ageing in place and sense of community were linked to their civic participation and contributions to make it a safer place. This study suggests that participating in the host and home communities enhances the emotional ties and sustains multiple sense of community, including transnational communities.
Civic Participation in the Community

Other studies have also linked sense of community to political and civic participation. A study by Mannarini and Fedi (2009) explored the different ways people located in two different cities in Italy (n=1,192), who were involved and not involved in organizations, defined the concept of community. Findings suggest that people who were part of different cultural and neighborhood organizations or associations based their definition of community on emotional bonds and civic participation in the community. Similar to Li et al.’s (2014) study findings, participants who were involved in organizations marked high on sense of community and identified local elements such as their house, family, and neighborhood as part of their community. Those who were not involved in any type of association based their definition on the concept of sharing, describing that a community is based on shared goals and common rules, and maintaining relationships. Mannarini and Fedi’s (2009) data suggest that political activism is sometimes associated with low sense of community, and this can be an indicator of discontent and critical view of the context, which might serve as a motivation to engage in social action.

To study sense of community among activists in Israel, Itzhaky, Zanbar, Levy, and Schwartz (2015) examined the contribution of personal and community resources to their well-being and sense of belonging. Results showed that community resources such as organizational commitment, representation, and project effectiveness combined to enhance the participant’s sense of belonging to the community. Additionally, the authors found that those who were active in neighborhood associations (representation) felt they had more influence on their community and that enhanced their leadership confidence.
Particularly, those who were high in representation were those who completed projects together (project effectiveness), which increased their sense of belonging to the community and personal well-being.

The sense of belonging to the larger collectivity can be strengthened or weakened depending on the quality of the interactions between the individuals and their communities. As seen in the literature, civic participation in neighborhood organizations, emotional and security bonds with multiple communities, and shared values and goals can contribute to a positive sense of community. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) and their principle of shared emotional connection, the more relevant and successful the shared event is to the people involved, the greater the community bond. In the next two sections, I will describe how experiencing challenging events together can influence sense of belonging and civic participation among members of the same community. Specifically, these sections will discuss how changes in familial structures and natural disasters can impact an individual’s sense of community and sense of place.

**Impacts of Gentrification on the Individual's Sense of Place and Community**

Gentrification refers to the process in which higher income land-users replace lower income land-users to increase capital investment in the neighborhood (Doan, 2018). The interactions and experiences in a location create a sense of attachment, and when neighborhood resources are displaced, changes in one’s position in the neighborhood structure—one’s “place identity” — can contribute to a sense of loss of stability and control. Therefore, gentrification constitutes a type of displacement, where changes in the local social structures occur, impacting the sense of community. In their study, Shaw and Hagemans (2015) interviewed community housing residents living in
two gentrified communities in Melbourne, Australia to understand their experiences and how gentrification affects a sense of placement in the community. The interviews indicated that familiarity with and in a place enables a sense of place identity and is shown to be essential to individual and collective feelings of safety. Shop and neighborhood facilities represent resources that enable people to feel a sense of place, while gentrification and loss of familiarity redefine the parameters within which low-income residents perceive and make sense of their neighborhood.

The Wynwood neighborhood near downtown Miami has drastically changed over the last decades, and not by accident. A group of investors, including David Lombardi, set out to reinvent the area and make it into an arts district, changing the social, economic, and housing patterns of many of its residents. Recently, Feldman (2011) explored how neighborhood partnerships and community-based arrangements facilitated the gentrification of Wynwood between 1970 and 2010. According to his findings, wealthy developers, collectors, gallerists, and even government officials focused on re-developing former manufacturing properties in the area. Feldman’s study presents the effects of gentrification in higher costs of living and the transformation of the social environment in the neighborhood, creating pressures that have excluded low-income residents— especially Puerto Ricans— and shaped their thinking about the place they call home (Feldman, 2011).

As developers converted Wynwood’s warehouses into art galleries, the spaces of the northern, residential half of the neighborhood either fell into disrepair or closed, such as the coffee and bakery shops. Feldman’s (2011) study also showed the civic participation of the neighborhood residents working along with the Social Justice Center
(SJC) towards the re-construction of the Roberto Clemente Park’s community center as a way of preserving it as a symbol of the Puerto Rican community in Miami. Similar to “Little San Juan”, the Puerto Rican neighborhood in Chicago (Humboldt Park) is a representation of another gentrified community where symbols of Puerto Rico contribute to a sense of place (e.g. flag, murals). Symbols for a neighborhood may reside in its name, a landmark, logo, or an architectural style, and their individuality provides meaning and value to the community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

**In Moments of Crisis: Participation, Shared Events and Sense of Community**

As previously mentioned, McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested that people who experience important events together, including crisis, are more likely to develop a greater community bond. In their study, Procopio & Procopio (2007), examined how different men and women in Louisiana reconnected with the members of their communities after hurricane Katrina using Internet communication. The findings suggest that participants were eager to share their Katrina experiences as well as to show support through posting encouragement words online in different blogs. Through an online survey, the participants selected the Internet as an important way to gather specific information about the damages occurred, such as finding flood maps or aerial footage and communicate with friends and family through different online posts in their hometown media. (Procopio & Procopio, 2007). According to the data, the most affected by Katrina were even more likely to participate in online-communities and sustain different forms of communications. This study suggests that communities geographically located in different spaces may reconstitute their physical connections by using virtual communications to support each other in crisis situations.
Current Context

This master’s thesis was written during an unprecedented crisis in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria making landfall in Puerto Rico in September 2017. Being the first major natural disasters on the Island during the existence of social media, most Puerto Ricans from the diaspora were venting their fears away in online posts and expressing their concerns about their families and properties (Minet, 2017). The organization and management of relief efforts by Donald J. Trump’s administration and the Puerto Rican government towards this catastrophic event in Puerto Rico have not been sufficiently responsive. This historical moment has mobilized the Puerto Rican community in Miami and other U.S. cities to be involved on what is happening on the Island through social media and also through developing initiatives for getting donations and giving voice to the experiences of their families. Particularly after the catastrophic Category 4 hurricane Maria that hit the Island on September 20, 2017, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have been key in helping connect Puerto Ricans in South Florida, particularly in Miami, with the purpose of organizing relief efforts to help the communities impacted.

Different groups and organizations, such as the Puerto Rico Relief Committee, Ana G. Mendez University in Miami Lakes, leaders of the Puerto Rican community in Wynwood and owners of different Puerto Rican localities in the South Florida area gathered on September 21, 2017 at the Roberto Clemente Community Center to discuss the logistics for sending the donations to the people in the Island (Cruz, 2017). Others, like me, went to the drop-off locations to help organize the donations or volunteer in other ways. Therefore, studying the transnational sense of community of Puerto Ricans
living stateside in this historical moment provides an additional opportunity to study the process of mobilization of resources and civic participation from the diaspora.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Approach

In this study, I used an exploratory qualitative research approach to describe how Puerto Ricans living in Miami-Dade County define the concept of community and construct their sense of community based on the transnational connections they have to their communities in Puerto Rico and U.S mainland. This qualitative research approach does not rely on preestablished parameters to describe the participants’ social settings and experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rather, it uncovers the motives, inquiries and personal history that shaped the study to capture the reality of the participants (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). This qualitative methodology allowed me to enact my position as a member of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Miami and approach the participants without giving me the authority to anticipate their answers.

Researcher Positionality

I acknowledge that I did not start the creation of this study with a blank slate. My positionality in this research study reflects my world-view and where I come from (Holmes, 2014). The ideas and inquiries written came from my experience as a Puerto Rican living in Miami, where I have built multiple sense of communities in relation to my communities in Puerto Rico and the communities I have built in this city. I chose to title this master’s thesis, *Un solo pie adentro*, because it is reflective of my own story. In the process of coming to the U.S., I made the decision to split my life between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland in search of a way to successfully navigate my own migration process.
As a transnational migrant, I am constantly visiting the Island, searching for updates on the political, economic, and social status of the Island and making sure that my family members are doing well. Like many of my participants, my transnational connections to the Puerto Rican community are formed by interactions on the Island and cultural practices both there and in Miami. Nevertheless, in this research study I acted as a partial insider of the community (Haarlammert, Birman, Oberoi, Moore, 2017). I enacted my knowledge as a member of the Puerto Rican community and acknowledged some of the cultural similarities with my participants, such as the language and love for *comida criolla* (Island cuisine), but I also recognized that our experiences as part of the Puerto Rican diaspora are different.

**Conceptual Framework**

Overall, a key defining element of transnationalism consistently underscored in the literature is the activities or transactions of migrants between home land and host society across borders. Transnational migrants make decisions, take actions, and feel concerns while developing identities within social bonds that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (Glick Schiller, Bash & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). These actions sometimes involve civic participation, which incorporates them in active individual or collective membership and cooperation with their communities to pursue shared goals (Putnam, 1995; Mannarini & Fedi 2009, Ostertag & Ortiz, 2015). Classical ‘transnationalists’ have argued that transnationalism is mostly a first-generation phenomenon (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). However, second-generation immigrants can exhibit transnational practices and emotional attachments to their parents and grandparents’ homeland that influence their concept of “home” (Wolf, 1997).
Others argue that transnationalism is more common in conditions where migrants form a considerable proportion of the new nation, like Mexicans in the United States and Chinese in various parts of Asia (Van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013). Conceptualizing Puerto Ricans as transnational migrants recognizes their second-class citizenship (Aranda, 2007). Only Puerto Ricans residing in the U.S. acquire full rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship, including voting for the President and paying income taxes (Duany, 2010). The hybrid identities of Puerto Ricans in the diaspora are formed by regulations of belonging legally, politically, and economically to the U.S. and symbolic and functional attributes the Island possesses, such as the flag and anthem; and national cultural and educational institutions (Duany, 2017). In this study, transnationalism served as a lens to reflect how Puerto Ricans living in different parts of Miami, Florida constructed their sense of community in relation to their local, national, and transnational communities.

Additionally, McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) elements to define SoC: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs and emotional connection were utilized as sensitizing concepts (Patton, 2015). They were fundamental to understand how Puerto Ricans constructed their sense of community using transnationalism as a model.

**Research Question**

Guided by the framework of transnationalism, this study asked the following question: how do Puerto Ricans living in Miami construct their sense of community? Participant’s reactions in face of historical hurricanes Irma and Maria were crucial to consider as I interviewed them. Their sense of community may be modeled by the connections developed in the aftermath of these natural catastrophic events.
Methods

Participants

The study sample consisted of fourteen (F=11; M=3) Puerto Ricans identified in between the ages of 25 and 77 years old who migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States. In order to participate in the study, the individuals had to self-identify as Puerto Rican, live in Miami, and speak and understand English or Spanish. Interviewing fourteen participants allowed me to capture each of the participant’s experiences in depth and complexity without getting too visually or intellectually overwhelmed with the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were recruited by snowball sampling techniques and sampled for maximum variation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) with respect to location within Miami (see Figure 1), age of arrival in the U.S., time living in Miami, sex, marital status, and employment.

All participants’ sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Thirteen participants were born in different cities of Puerto Rico and only one was born in Miami. Time of residence in Miami ranged from less than a year to 42 years. Only three pairs shared the same area of residence within the city. From all fourteen participants, one of the interviewees moved for the second time to Miami after hurricane Maria. Additionally, the majority of my participants were relatively well educated, which may reflect the population of Puerto Ricans living in Miami.
Figure 1 *Participants’ location of residence within Miami*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Age of Entry to the U.S.</th>
<th>Time in Miami</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Location of Residence</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Barrio Caimito, San Juan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Cutler Bay</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Research Grant Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mayaguez</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Brickell</td>
<td>Juris Doctor/Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bayamon</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Little Havana</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Social Media Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camilla</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hato Rey</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; time (3 years); 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; (4 months)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>South Beach</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant at Language School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>San Sebastian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Little Haiti</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Coordinator at Dorothy Quintana Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Moca</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cutler Bay</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Work Placement advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Ponce</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>North Miami</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Unemployed (Pensioned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td>Age of Entry to the U.S.</td>
<td>Time in Miami</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Location of Residence</td>
<td>Level of Education</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>South Miami</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Cupey Alto</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Homestead</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>Case Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Wynwood</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Management of BHCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Arroyo</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Wynwood</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>High Position of BHCC Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Cabo Rojo</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Hialeah</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Culinary Arts Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margarita</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>West of PR</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>Dadeland</td>
<td>Doctor of Medicine</td>
<td>Medical Graduated Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>San German</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Dadeland</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>Dental Hygienist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Borinquen Health Care Center = BHCC*
Instruments

To collect the data, I developed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A) to inquire about the connections my participants have created and maintained as members of one or multiple communities in the United States and Puerto Rico. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to gain insight into the ways the participants interpret and order the world without establishing bounds for their answers (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A crucial part of the interview was asking the participants to define community, mention members of their community/ies, and detail their involvement with the community/ies they belong to, including social networks with people inside and outside their identified core of community members. The interview also inquired about civic participation in relief efforts for Puerto Ricans affected by hurricane Maria and ways of supporting their family members on the Island. At the end of the interview, I provided a brief questionnaire to the participants to self-report their sociodemographic characteristics such as age, occupation, migration history, and civil status (refer to Table 1).

Procedures

To carry out the study, I obtained approval from the University of Miami’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) before starting recruitment efforts. Once those approvals were met, I created a list of Puerto Rican voluntary associations in Miami and distributed a flyer (see Appendix C) to invite potential participants to take part in the study. I reached out to Puerto Rican networks, both on the Island and in Miami, parks and local businesses in the Wynwood area, and the people that I connected with during
Hurricane María’s aftermath. Puerto Rican networks on the Island collaborated in referring the study to their friends and colleagues living in Miami. Additionally, I reached out to Puerto Rican-based organizations and institutions such as the Dorothy Quintana Community Center, Carlos Albizu University, Borinquen Health Care Center, Isla del Encanto Restaurant, and Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce.

Once contact was established with the participants by phone call or text, I made sure they were eligible to participate and scheduled an interview. The day before our meeting, I texted the participants to remind them about the interview. All interviews were coordinated at their places of choice, such as a coffee shop or their workplace. Once at the meeting, I explained them the objective of the study and as participants signed the audio consent (see Appendix B), I made sure that they understood the results were confidential and their identity was going to be protected. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and recorded with an audio recorder. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour and every interviewee received a $25 gift card to thank them for their participation.
**Data Analysis**

To make sense of the information obtained through the interviews, I used thematic analysis, a six-phased method to analyze qualitative data (Braune, Clarke, and Rance, 2014). The data analysis started with familiarizing myself with the data. I transcribed all recorded interviews and debriefings. I also provided a pseudonym for each of the interviewees to recreate some of their stories. The second phase consisted of reviewing the transcription and coding them in Spanish to create meaning of the data. Following this phase, I focused on recurrent features or patterns across the dataset and developed a set of different themes that arise from the participants’ experiences with their community/ies.

After all the themes were created, I engaged in the fourth phase of the analysis formed by two levels. In level one I did an in-depth, exhaustive reviewing to check that the themes and sub-themes had a consistency. I also redefined and refined themes that were problematic or did not represent the data accurately. In level two of this phase, I created a “thematic map” (see Figure 2) to relate the themes across the database (Braune, Clarke, and Rance, 2014). Once I established the themes, I named them and finalized the data analysis by contextualizing them in relation to the research question to create the full report of the findings, which is shown in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents themes and sub-themes to explain how participants construct their sense of community from a transnational perspective in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and Maria. My findings suggest that Puerto Ricans construct their transnational sense of community through the emotional connections they have with their communities of Puerto Ricans on the Island and the diasporic community of Puerto Ricans. These emotional connections are reflected in shared symbols, events, and stories. They vary dimensionally from low to high with some of my participants experiencing a strong connection, and others not strongly connected to their communities.

The participants defined a community as a group of people that share things in common, like types of music and Spanish language, do things together, and protect each other during challenging situations. This group of people can consist of friends, family members, a fraternity, a dance team, or a religious group. For example, Abigail described a community as families from different backgrounds that live and work in the same area. Similarly, for Roberto, a community is often formed by people who defend each other and have a sense of belonging that can be initiated geographically. Roberto’s sense of community is split between his family’s hometown and his own:
Both Roberto and Pablo identified their respective fathers’ hometowns as part of their transnational communities.

Margarita defines community as the context that forms the identity of an individual and place where they belong in the society. Karla’s definition of community consists of family members on the Island and in the diaspora, and friendships created stateside united and supporting each other at the same time. For many of my participants, other Latinos and Spanish-speakers who came to Miami searching for the “American Dream” form part of their communities. Although they do not share connections to the Island, they share other aspects of culture and language. In order to have a community, we need to understand each other, expressed Robert.
Emotional Connections

Emotional connections to the transnational Puerto Rican community experienced by the participants emerged as a core theme in the analyses (See Figure 1). They are enacted in different ways. They include participants’ territorial connections to Puerto Rico through migrations and visits. The different patterns of territorial connections are influenced by economic situations, family needs, and sense of identity. Participants’ emotional connections are also maintained through activities in the Miami area. These activities include cultural practices that enable them to connect with Puerto Rican culture while living in Miami, such as food and music, social connections with members of their communities, and taking part in the mobilization of the Puerto Rican community in Miami through civic participation.

The impact of the hurricane on maintaining these connections is crucial to my participants. After the natural event passed through, some participants traveled to the Island to support their family members and other members of their communities. Their family constellation was reconfigured as many brought family members to live or stay with them. Participants also had strong emotional reactions to what happened on the Island in the aftermath of the hurricane, including worries and guilt.
Figure 2 Components of emotional connections
Territorial Connections

As mentioned above, participants’ emotional connections to the transnational Puerto Rican community are formed by territorial connections to the Island, including migrations and visits.

Migration. The different patterns of migration include one-directional migration for some participants who came to the U.S. and stayed and cyclical migration between the U.S. and Puerto Rico for others.

One-directional migration. Participants who engaged in one-directional migration to the United States, moved for new employment offers, educational opportunities, and health resources. Geographical proximity was also important to include in some of my participants’ decision to move to Miami. Olga first moved to Buffalo, New York, with her four children in search of special education for her disabled daughter. For her, moving to Miami was the best decision because it is closer to visit Puerto Rico from Miami. She acknowledges that the only way she would return to Puerto Rico is if it becomes a state, which would bring “all the full rights and privileges to the Puerto Rican community on the Island”. Like Olga, Jean chose to study at the University of Miami instead of going to New York because it is closer and cheaper to go on vacations to Puerto Rico from Miami.

In addition, geographic and cultural similarities to Puerto Rico found in Miami, such as the tropical weather and Spanish-speaking population, connect some of my participants emotionally to Puerto Rico. Daily encounters in their neighborhood and workplace in Miami often connects them to their communities on the Island. Ana expressed that driving by low income areas in Miami makes her remember her
neighborhood in Puerto Rico. *Karla* admits her neighborhood in Little Havana makes her feel close to home:

*Me siento cerca de casa porque en cuestión de las facilidades, como se ven las casas, los apartamentos, los gallos me despiertan frente a mi propia casa. En cuestión de los cubanos, son bien sociables, siempre está el que pasa y te dice buenos días, necesitas ayuda, cómo estás, cómo te sientes, como una comunidad bastante parecida a nosotros los puertorriqueños. Uno viviendo en esa comunidad, que es literalmente de cubanos, sabes en realidad a fondo como son ellos y que es lo que hay dentro de ellos.*

*I feel close to home because in terms of the facilities, how the houses look, the apartments, the roosters wake me up in front of my house. Regarding the Cubans, they are very sociable, there is always the one that passes by and says good morning, do you need help, how are you, how do you feel, like a community very similar to us Puerto Ricans. Living in this community, that is literally of Cubans, you really know in depth how they are and what is inside them.*

*Maria* and *Jean* shared that the back streets of Wynwood reminded them of the houses in Puerto Rico, but they do not go to the area often. *Roberto* shared that his sense of community is very marked towards the hospital where he works because it reminds him about his old job in Puerto Rico. *Abigail* has maintained her connections to the Puerto Rican community through her job as a coordinator in the Roberto Clemente Park located in the old Puerto Rican neighborhood in Wynwood. Direct impacts of gentrification, including increase in the price of rent, tourists all over and cultural influences of people from other nationalities moving to the area have displaced her from familiar structures that connect her emotionally to the Island:
Most of my participants would like to live again in Puerto Rico, specifically when they retire. Others, like Nilda, did not want to leave Puerto Rico at all. She left her job and business on the Island to join her husband in Miami after he accepted a new job offer. The difficulties she experienced when she arrived in 2008, such as learning English, finding a job, and confronting racism contributed to higher emotional attachments to the Island and feelings of going back:

Yo he pasado mucho más trabajo que él. A mi nadie me ayudó a conseguir un trabajo. Para mí la adaptación fue bien difícil porque yo no estaba acostumbrada a lidiar con gente de otras culturas. Yo creo que ese ha sido el choque más fuerte que yo he tenido y a la hora de las entrevistas que obviamente me han dicho hasta en la cara que no me han dado la posición por mi nacionalidad.

I have spent a lot more work than him. No one helped me get a job. For me, the adaptation was very difficult because I was not used to dealing with people from other cultures. I think that has been the strongest clash I have had and at the time of the interviews that they have obviously told me even in the face that they have not given me the position because of my nationality.
Distinct to her, Karla joined her boyfriend one year ago and was eager to start a new life in Miami. Roberto moved to Miami by himself in search for a better job and left his 7-month pregnant ex-wife in Puerto Rico for medical reasons. Easy access (both territorially and economically) to flight back home can alleviate the uncertainties of living in the U.S. During the interview, Roberto reacted to the thesis title, *Un solo pie adentro*, and reflected on his own experience of leaving the Island. For him, Miami is only a transitory place where he can work to provide financially for his family. However, he feels guilty for not “growing roots in the city”, partly because he recognizes that he can easily return to Puerto Rico if things do not work out for him. His strong connections to Puerto Rico keep him emotionally embedded to his communities on the Island to a point that he feels like a ghost:

> **Yo lo miro así. El título tuyo se llama un pie adentro y otro afuera. Siempre vamos a estar así. Es como si tú vivieres como un fantasma aquí. Tú estás experimentando lo que está pasando, pero no estás experimentando del todo. Así me siento yo. llevo 12 años.**

> **I looked at it this way. Your title is called one foot here and one foot there. We are always going to be like this. It is like if you were living like a ghost here. You are experiencing what is happening, but you are not experiencing it all. I feel that way, I have been twelve years.**

Roberto is unable to manage a transnational sense of belonging because his emotional connections are tight to his geographical communities in Puerto Rico. These feelings detach him from fully engaging in a life in the U.S. His feelings of belonging to the local community are stronger and the lack of a local sense of community makes him unable to experience a transnational sense of community. On occasion, he visits Orlando to connect with Puerto Rico because he identifies a strong presence of the Puerto Rican
community there. For some of the participants, one-directional migration might become cyclical over time, depending on their experiences in the U.S. and connections to Puerto Rico.

**Cyclical migration.** Some participants engaged in cyclical migration patterns between the U.S., other countries, and Puerto Rico. Reasons for going back to Puerto Rico include taking care of family members, raising children close to their parents and saving money by living with relatives. In particular, Camila’s forced move to Miami after losing her job post-Maria left her wanting to return to Puerto Rico. Social connections built when she previously lived in Miami helped her retake her old job in South Beach. Participants like Evelyn, Maria, Ana and Margarita lived between the states and Puerto Rico before establishing themselves in Miami. Ana’s attachment to her grandmother in Barrio Caimito inclined her to return to Puerto Rico to help her aunt take care of her health. Nevertheless, her constant relocations on the Island and high acculturation into U.S. culture have shaped her Puerto Rican identity and feelings of belonging to Puerto Rico:

Desde temprana edad como me mude tanto, desde temprana edad estuvimos en otros países. Aprendí inglés antes del español o a la misma vez. Siempre yo era como “a little bit of an outsider” y como nos mudamos tanto so siempre me sentí algo desconectada y ahora que estoy acá me siento más así aún.

I moved a lot since I was a kid, since I was a kid we were in other countries. I learned English before Spanish or at the same time. I was always a little bit of an outsider and because we moved a lot I always felt I was disconnected. I am feeling it more know that I am here.
Maria’s forced decision to return to Puerto Rico after running away from her husband in New York got mixed up with her feelings of dissatisfaction with the larger Puerto Rican community on the Island. Her emotional attachments and social connections with other Puerto Ricans outside her social network are low:

The decision to study in the U.S. and a relatively affluent life may release Maria from home ties and enable her to live a life more “true” to herself in Miami (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). Contrary to Maria, Evelyn, who is 77-years-old like Maria, felt a need to connect with the Island after spending most of her childhood and adolescence living with her grandmother in New York. Her emotional ties to the Island were sustained by her strong Puerto Rican identity, returning to Puerto Rico, marrying a Puerto Rican man, and raising her children surrounded by the Puerto Rican traditions she learned with her grandmother.

Visits. With respect to visits to Puerto Rico, some participants go to the Island continuously, while others do so occasionally. The frequency of their visits to the Island greatly depend on their socioeconomic background and the responsibilities they have, such as providing economically for family members and taking care of businesses in
Miami. Puerto Rican migrants with the resources have the ability to travel frequently. Globalization and relative economic privilege facilitate further travel following migration, making it easier to see and keep in touch with family and friends (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009).

Participants emotionally attached to the island exhibit higher connections through constant visits to the Island. Sharing events such as birthday celebrations, holidays and summer trips to Puerto Rico connects them emotionally with their original communities when they are feeling nostalgic and do not want to miss any event. Those participants who visit less have previous negative experiences on the Island and appear to have lower emotional connections. Margarita shared that while she was living in the Dominican Republic she used to visit the Island twice a month to spend time with her nephew, something that has been reduced to twice a year now that she is living in Miami. She does not go to the Island as often as before but when she does, she stays for longer periods of time.

Nilda’s friends always expect her to come every year during the weekend of her birthday. Abigail tries to go at least once a year and likes to bring Puerto Rican souvenirs to her friends in Miami as symbols to connect with the Island. For some of my participants, visiting their hometown during Christmas holidays, spending time with friends, and going on casual exploratory adventures during the summer are some of the ways they stay engaged in Island networks. I don’t want to miss any celebration, said one of my participants about the importance of staying updated on any family event. Some of them have properties in Puerto Rico and need to take care of them.
As mentioned earlier, Roberto’s emotional connections are highly tied to his community on the Island. Every time he takes his eleven-year-old daughter to the Island to celebrate Puerto Rican festivities with his mother and 20-year-old son he gives himself therapy to keep focused on his goals of staying in Miami to study and provide financially for his family. Visits to Puerto Rico helps them recharge when they are feeling homesick or nostalgic and empower them to return to Miami with more strength. Both Olga and Maria enjoy their sporadic visits to Puerto Rico but admit they would never live again on the Island. The vast educational and socioeconomic resources obtained in Miami were compared to the lack of opportunities in Puerto Rico such as better employment for experienced professionals in diverse fields and health care services.

The sense of belonging to the Puerto Rican community can be frustrated by lack of contact with the Island. For Ana, not being physically in Puerto Rico limits her participation on social media about the new actions of the Puerto Rican government, including the education and labor reforms. I feel like it is not my place and that I am not Puerto Rican enough because I am not going through the same situations as them on the Island, revealed Ana. Pablo, who was born in Miami, has built deep-roots in the city. He has not visited Puerto Rico in twelve years, however, he is connected to his parents’ hometown in San German and to the Puerto Rican community in Miami through the Borinquen Health Care Center.

Cultural Connections

Emotional connections to the Island are also enacted through the cultural practices participants engage in Miami. Feelings of belonging to cultural traditions and symbols often connect them to their Puerto Rican heritage. These connections have shaped their
cultural identity as members of a larger transnational Puerto Rican community. These practices involve the recreation of symbols, including elements of food and festive traditions that have accompanied them in their diasporic experiences in the United States, such as parrandas (Puerto Rican Christmas carols).

**Recreating events and traditions.** Cultural events celebrated in Miami, such as the Fiestas de la Calle San Sebastian help participants feel a sense of belonging to the Puerto Rican community. Participants recently arrived in Miami mentioned they connected emotionally with Puerto Rico by attending the 2018 Fiestas in Bayfront Park. Others, like Olga and Abigail, went when the event was celebrated at the Roberto Clemente Park in Wynwood. Abigail expressed her frustration when sharing that the organizers had to change the location of the event this year due to violent situations that happened during the celebration:

> Y antes aquí se celebraba. Antes estoy hablando de más de 30 años. Se cerraba la calle y se hacían las fiestas de Puerto Rico. Eran aquí. Este parque, aquí traían artistas grandes. Pero como pasa en todas partes, siempre hay unos cuantos que dañan todos, que si las drogas.  

> It used to be celebrated here. Before, I am talking about more than 30 years. The street would be closed, and the Puerto Rican holidays were made. Were here. This park, they would bring important artists. But as it happens everywhere, there are always some that damage others, the drugs. Then, imagine, it is a matter of security now.

According to Roberto, taking the Fiestas out of the Wynwood area and charging a cover for the event, lessens the cultural meaning of the celebration, particularly because in Puerto Rico it is free of cost for the community. Amanda, a mom of two from San German, frequently connects with the Puerto Rican community in Miami through events
celebrated by Isla del Encanto Restaurant in the newly established Boqueron Social Club. Initiatives to enhance the Puerto Rican culture in Miami include *parrandas* and Three Kings Day.

Some of them agreed that cultural connections to Puerto Rico through the organization of events that celebrate Island traditions can bring the Puerto Rican community in Miami together. *Jean* mentioned that domino tournaments and *chinchorreos* (Puerto Rican road trips to drink and eat in different local sports bars) would be a way to enact the Puerto Rican traditions and create a sense of community in Miami. Sports events have played an important role in uniting the Puerto Rican communities both on the Island and in the diaspora. *Nilda* shared that when “Team Rubio” played in the 2017 World Baseball Cup, she wore her “PR” baseball cap to support the Puerto Rican team and feel part of them. After his divorce, *Roberto* coped with feelings of loneliness and lack of sense of community in Miami by going with his eleven-year-old daughter to athletic events that connected him to Puerto Rico such as the Puerto Rican Night at the Marlins stadium and a soccer game of Puerto Rico versus Miami.

Four of my participants maintain their emotional connections to Puerto Rico by teaching their children about symbols and elements found in the iconic folk tales of the Puerto Rican heritage. For example, *Evelyn* gave her son a Puerto Rican poetry book to show him the history of slavery and colonization in Puerto Rico. *Pablo* shared that one day he showed his nine-year-old daughter the traditional *jibarita* dress (Puerto Rico’s national female wardrobe) and had to buy it so she could wear it on her ‘What’s your culture?’ event at school.
Food, music, and other symbols. Food connects many of my participants to the Puerto Rican community on the Island. A couple of years ago, Olga organized her own kiosk to sell traditional Puerto Rican dishes like mofongo (mix of deep-fried mashed plantain with garlic and spices) at Fiestas de la Calle San Sebastian. She explained that forming part of this event connected her culturally and emotionally to Puerto Rico. Jean mentioned that when he arrived in Miami, he searched for Puerto Rican restaurants in the city to feel close to home. El Bajareque, one of the few Puerto Rican localities that remain in Wynwood, Jimmy’z Kitchen in South Beach, and Isla del Encanto in Kendall are some of the food places my participants go to connect with the Island and experience the flavors of the Puerto Rican diaspora cuisine. Whenever Roberto wants to feel like it is a Sunday in Puerto Rico he goes to El Palacio de los Jugos, a local Cuban cafeteria, because it reminds him of Guavate, one of the most traditional places to enjoy traditional Puerto Rican dishes and music in Cayey.

Elements of the Puerto Rican food are present in the cooking experiences of some of my participants. Every Christmas, Evelyn makes coquito, a traditional coconut drink, for the members of the Puerto Rican community at Dorothy Quintana elderly center. One of the few ways Maria connects with the Island is through her kitchen and cooking styles. Cooking traditional Puerto Rican dishes for non-Puerto Rican members of their communities in Miami makes some of them appreciate their culture and maintain emotional connections to the Island. For example, Olga, who invites members of her non-profit organization to share their culture and eat traditional Puerto Rican dishes at her
Ana makes homemade dishes to feel emotionally connected to her Puerto Rican roots and members of their communities on the Island:

And if you want another symbol well food. Is very important that is not missing. I cook because I can go to Sedano’s and buy surullitos (“sorullitos” or corn sticks) but it’s not the same. So, yo a couple of week before, for Three Kings Day I felt super nostalgic and made “mallorcas” from scratch. So, things like that or I call my mom and ask her: “How do I do a pot of rice with peas, how do I do this or that?” And those little things remind me about my family, grandmother and my community in Puerto Rico.

Emotional connections to Puerto Rico can also be manifested through cultural connections with music. For Camila, listening to reggaeton every morning as she walks to her job on South Beach makes her feel close to her old neighborhood where she used to walk to go to school. Puerto Rican artists like Residente and Ednita Nazario are part of the daily tunes of some of my participants. Specifically, for Ana, listening to Residente’s lyrics of resistance against the oppression of the Puerto Rican government enhances her sense of belonging to the Island.

Identifying with diverse tropical rhythms present in Miami connects some of my participants with other Latin Americans in the city. Dancing salsa with Cuban friends when they go out is priceless for Roberto, who takes advantage of every opportunity he has in the city to maintain his connections to the Island. Other participants connect to
their culture through the rhythm of the pleneros, who play the panderetas (tambourines), which are instruments used in traditional parrandas and other Puerto Rican events. Even for some of them, cleaning along with Puerto Rican tunes makes them feel like it is a cleaning day at their old house in the Island. Music and food infused with Puerto Rican elements revive old experiences shared with their communities back home. Participants identified other symbols that connect them to Puerto Rico, such as the Puerto Rican flag and national anthem, and the coqui (Puerto Rican-native frog).

Language. Language has also played a basic role in maintaining deep-rooted emotional connections to Puerto Rico. Singular expressions such as ¡Ay bendito! (similar to Oh, God!) keep participants in tune with the Island and other Puerto Ricans in the city. Participants talked about having a unique Puerto Rican accent in Spanish that distinguishes them from other Latinos. Jean shared he has developed a Puerto Rican measurer called El boricuómetro to help him identify other Puerto Ricans by their way of speaking. The Spanish language also connects them to other Latin American and Hispanic communities in Miami-Dade, where 1.8 million of its 2.7 million inhabitants are Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Nilda expressed pride for her Puerto Rican accent and her place in the Latino community:
Particularly for participants who have lived in the United States since they were young, feelings of belonging to a larger Puerto Rican community were sustained by speaking Spanish as their main language at home. When *Evelyn* moved with her grandmother to New York, she was not allowed to speak English in the house. Language is part of my participants’ acculturation into mainstream American society and maintenance of their heritage culture. *Maria* decided to speak only Spanish at home because she knew her son was going to learn English at school and she wanted to make sure that he grew up speaking both languages. *Ana* and *Pablo* are fluent Spanish speakers, however, they admit it has become a secondary language and it does not tie them emotionally to Puerto Rico. *Carolina*’s experience as a Culinary Art student highlights struggles with language acculturation. Not being able to speak her native language has convinced her that she must go back to Puerto Rico as soon as she finishes her degree because she does not want to feel constrained to speak her language whenever she wants to:}

*Sí, lo de Latina no hay forma de disimularlo, más Latina no puedo ser. No, no, yo siempre recibo una buena aceptación. Yo todo lo cojo como a chiste. A mi no me importa tener acento ni me va a importar nunca porque yo ante todo soy Latina. Yo soy 100% americana y 100% Latina, es la mezcla perfecta. No me molesta que me gufteen por el acento boricua porque “it’s what I am” y me voy a morir con el bendito acento.*

*Yes, there is no way to hide the Latina thing, I couldn’t be more Latina. No, no, I always receive a positive acceptance. I take everything as a joke. I don’t mind having an accent and I will ever care because I’m Latina before anything. I am 100% American and a 100% Latina, that is the perfect mix. I don’t mind being bothered by my “Boricua” accent because it is what I am, and I will die with the “frikin” accent.*
Social Connections

Many of my interviewees admit having difficulties to connect with other Puerto Ricans in the city of Miami. According to them, Puerto Ricans are a minority group that is scattered all over Miami. Ana admits there is not an established location where she can go and “be Puerto Rican”. Other participants have formed their own Puerto Rican community with Puerto Rican co-workers and friends. Having her own Puerto Rican community in Miami, formed by her housemates and two best friends from Puerto Rico, keeps Karla connected to the events happening on different cities of the Island. For Jean, his Puerto Rican community in Miami has become part of his family and they have shared many events together, including visits to the Island. Maria’s social connections with the Puerto Rican community in Miami have endured some changes in the last two decades. She mentioned that as she has gotten older, these connections have been limited to her social network formed of four or five Puerto Rican girlfriends with whom she occasionally visits the Island. Contrary to when she arrived in Miami for the first time where social connections consisted in attending salsa music events and socializing with other Puerto Ricans at Brickell Bay Club.
Interactions with other Latin Americans and Hispanic are common due to their strong presence in Miami. Some of my participants connect in social events with Cubans because they share things in common such as coming from another Spanish-speaking Island, being social and caring about others. Roberto explained that being a minority in the city forces Puerto Ricans to be quieter and subtler in comparison to other major Latino communities who like to brag about their culture. For Nilda, interactions with other cultures have been challenging because she does not feel culturally reciprocated. She is disappointed by the lack of manners and tact of the people in Miami in comparison to her fellow Puerto Ricans on the Island. Camila’s social network in Miami does not consist of Puerto Ricans; her girlfriends are from Europe and Virginia, colleagues with whom she works at the language school. She rarely encounters any Puerto Ricans on South Beach and when she does, she tries to establish relationships with them.

Constant visits and interactions with the Puerto Rican community in Orlando are one way that some of my participants are connecting to the Island. Carolina often visits her family in Orlando when she feels homesick and lonely. Some of my participants’ interactions with other Puerto Ricans have been minimal due to the lack of sense of community. According to Amanda and Ana, many of the Puerto Ricans who move to Miami are working professionals who do not feel the need to connect with the Puerto Rican community in the U.S. mainland. For Roberto, the presence of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Orlando is stronger than in Miami because there is an established community with businesses and people who recreate the communities on the Island. His visits to the Orlando area are propelled by his desires to eat at local Puerto Rican restaurants, read the
Island’s main newspapers, and interact with other Puerto Ricans at the local supermarkets.

Telecommunication services, particularly the Internet, including social media platforms and *Skype* have been key in connecting many of my participants with their communities on the Island on a daily basis. Their communities also expand to other states in the U.S. and in Europe where online communication has been key in connecting them. They communicate through daily text messages and video calls with family members and friends when they are feeling homesick and nostalgic. This keeps them tied to their transnational community and focused in the goals they have set for themselves in Miami. Social media networks have facilitated long-distance connections between participants and their immediate communities. Being active on social media platforms keeps them *al día* or up to date with events on the Island. Additionally, being involved in social media groups created for the Puerto Rican diaspora in Florida helps them integrate into various Puerto Rican communities both at the local and national level.

Particularly before and after hurricane Maria, social media played an important role in connecting the Puerto Rican diaspora in Miami to their communities on the Island. Family members and friends would post or send them pictures of the destruction Maria caused in their hometowns. It also worked as a network to reconnect old friends and family members in the aftermath of the hurricane. *Ana* reconnected with an old Puerto Rican friend living in Chicago to develop a digital platform where people on social media could provide immediate information about the status of the communities impacted by hurricane Maria.
Lack of electrical power and phone reception on the Island after the hurricane delayed the communication between my participants and members of their communities. Other participants were able to communicate with their family members using analog telephones and diverse venues of national radio. Personal connections on the Island and word of mouth also served to connect participants with their loved ones. A couple of days after Maria, Jean was able to get in touch with his father after a friend of a friend went to his house in Mayaguez and lent him a phone. Sharing this catastrophic event with their communities on the Island through social media platforms and unstable communication drove many of my participants to engage in relief efforts.

Civic Participation

For many participants, civic participation entails joining neighborhood and non-profit organizations to address issues in their communities. Olga created her own non-profit organization to provide emotional support to individuals with HIV. She often uses the Dorothy Quintana Center as a place to hold the group meetings because it connects her to her neighborhood in Puerto Rico. Evelyn also contributes to the Dorothy Quintana Center and the Puerto Rican community in Miami by donating gifts and food to different events held in the Wynwood community. Last year, Nilda joined an all-Latina women organization to share her experiences as a Puerto Rican woman. Civic participation at the individual and collective level provided participants a pathway to connect to their communities in Miami as they embodied their feelings of belonging to the Puerto Rican community on the Island. For some of them civic participation was strengthened in the aftermath of hurricane Maria.
Impact of Hurricane Maria

In the wake of hurricane Maria, feelings of belonging to the larger community on the Island drove many of my interviewees to join other members of the Puerto Rican and Latino community in Miami to contribute to the recovery of Puerto Rico. Most of my participants criticized the lack of emergency procedures and slow response from the U.S. government to provide aid to Puerto Rico. They expressed frustration when comparing it with the active responses before and after hurricanes Irma in Florida and Harvey in Texas. Participants who organized or participated in relief efforts mentioned that they did it because “it was their duty to help their people” and were impressed by the quick response of the Puerto Rican community in Miami to assist the Island. According to them, there has been more participation of the Puerto Rican community after hurricane Maria impacted the Island in September 20, 2017. They were also surprised by the great amount of donations and support given by other Latino and Hispanic communities in Miami.

Supporting family members after hurricane Maria included traveling to the Island and sending resources to cover the immediate needs of their communities, such as water and canned food. Jean and his wife created a relief effort fund to collect donations and managed to send them to Puerto Rico on a private plane. One week after the hurricane, Margarita was able to connect with an activist friend and organize a visit to Puerto Rico to help her communities directly. On her way to meet with her immediate family members and friends in the west coast of the Island, she stopped at various animal shelters and affected neighborhoods to provide medical assistance.
Ana’s emotional connections to the Island were enhanced as she managed to transform her frustrations of not being able to help in the recovery of the Island into collecting and sending donations through the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce in Miami. However, knowing that people were still without power and resources made her feel guilty and disconnected because she could not do anything else unless she was on the Island. Camila, who experienced the hurricane in Puerto Rico, felt guilty because she left her parents in the aftermath:

Yo vine de Puerto Rico. Antes no me sentía tan mal cuando viví en el 2013 pero ahora tengo más cargo de conciencia por mi familia, por todo lo que está pasando en PR y yo sé que estoy aquí. Ahora es más fuerte porque pasamos un huracán categoría 5 todos juntos, se te queda un poco más grabado en la mente porque todos estuvimos juntos, no es lo mismo de que hubiera pasado el huracán y yo estuviera aquí…yo estuviera tal vez un poquito más tranquila.

I came from Puerto Rico. I did not feel so bad when I lived in here in 2013 but now I have more conscious burden for my family, for everything that is happening in PR and I know I’m here. Now it's stronger because we passed a category 5 hurricane all together, it stays a little more recorded in the mind because we were all together, it's not the same as if the hurricane had passed and I was here ... I could have been maybe a little bit calmer.

Participants mentioned they were constantly watching the news and searching on social media for any updates on the hurricane. Contrary to Camila’s assumptions, some of my participants were worried about the safety of their family members on the Island after they saw the magnitude of the hurricane. Others were confident that they were going to be safe. Overwhelming thoughts about possible dangers during the hurricane drove Roberto to bring his mother to Miami. A few weeks after Maria, he traveled with her
back home to help her fix the destruction that Maria caused in her house. *Nilda* brought her mother after the hurricane and expects to bring her again for the next hurricane season. She mentioned feeling worried about the conditions of the Island and shared her expectations for the future:

*Yo sé que eventualmente todo va a volver a lo mismo... “whatever”, pero es la incertidumbre de qué me voy a encontrar allá... que yo espero que de aquí a mayo esté por lo menos 95% normal. Y voy con la visión de visitar barrios y ver de qué manera puedo ayudar. Si entro campo adentro y veo que todavía hay gente en condiciones péssimas, ver cómo puedo ayudar, ya sea comprándole agua o comida.*

*I know that eventually everything will return to the same thing ..." whatever ", but it is the uncertainty that I will find myself there ... that I hope that from here to May it will be at least 95% normal. And I go with the vision of visiting neighborhoods and see how I can help. If I go in the field and I see that there are still people in terrible conditions, see how I can help, either buying water or food.*

*María* hosted her cousin from Puerto Rico after she lost her house in the hurricane’s aftermath.

The Puerto Rican community in Wynwood played an important role on helping Puerto Ricans arriving in Miami after Maria. *Pablo* and *Evelyn* have built their own place in the Puerto Rican community in Miami as part of the Borinquen Health Care Center. They organized a station at the airport to orient recently arrived Puerto Ricans about a 3-month period of free health services at their main clinic located in Wynwood. As part of the Board Committee of the clinic, *Evelyn* believes Borinquen should always be administered by Puerto Ricans to make sure they keep providing the health and social resources the community needs. *Abigail* collaborated with the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce to organize a station at the Roberto Clemente Park to provide recently arrived
Puerto Ricans with immediate resources, including food and clothes. Her sense of belonging to the Puerto Rican people moved her to help many families settle in Miami:

First, I take their information when they arrive to the center. I make a copy of their ID; the plane ticket is very important to know that the person came after the hurricane. Of course, child, I’m seeing that this is my people. Do you understand me? People from a lot of places have certain difficulties but when one sees that it is one of ours, that is from where you come from…one feels inclined to help.

Yo primero le cojo la información cuando llegan aquí al centro. Le hago copia de su ID; del pasaje es bien importante para saber que esa persona vino después del huracán. Claro, niña, que yo estoy viendo que esa es mi gente. ¿Tú me entiendes? Mucha gente de muchos países tiene ciertas dificultades, pero cuando uno ve que son los de uno, que es donde uno viene…uno como que se siente inclinado a ayudar.

For most of my participants, supporting their communities contributed to their transnational sense of belonging. They felt a stronger connection with their family members and old friends on the Island, and to other Puerto Ricans in Miami.
Results Summary

In this study I found that transnational sense of community was created through the participants’ emotional connections to their Puerto Rican communities both on the Island and the U.S. mainland. These connections are the overarching theme that was the basis for the construction of sense of community from a transnational perspective. Emotional connections were expressed by 1) territorial connections to the Island, 2) cultural connections, 2) social connections, and 3) civic participation with their communities both on the Island and in Florida. Participants’ feelings of belonging to their transnational community were tied to the recreation of cultural practices, participation in social events and sharing symbols with their communities. Experiencing the event of the hurricane from the diaspora intensified the participants’ sense of community and transnational connections. The impact of hurricane Maria on the Island drove participants to feel part of the disastrous event and invest in resources to support their transnational and local communities. The sub-themes are interrelated with each other as they form the major theme of emotional connections.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand the transnational sense of community of Puerto Ricans in Miami, Florida. This qualitative project details the different ways Puerto Rican migrants maintain their emotional connections to their transnational Puerto Rican community while forming new communities in the United States. In this chapter, I will discuss the contributions of the findings to the field of Community Psychology and transnational migration. The results presented above describe how members of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Miami express their sense of belonging to the communities that form their transnational social fields. This also study highlights the impact of hurricane Maria on intensifying civic participation and emotional and social connections to their Puerto Rican communities both in Puerto Rico and in Florida. Study limitations, strengths, and implications for future research are also presented in this chapter.

Study Contributions

Community Psychology and Transnationalism

This research study intends to fill a gap in understanding psychological constructs across different levels of analysis in the increasingly global world (Birman, 2011). Within the field of Community Psychology few studies have used transnationalism as a model to understand the complex nature of sense of community among migrants (Li et al., 2014), focusing instead on the local, geographically defined, place-based communities (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). The context of transnationalism expands the notions of sense of community to a globally imagined community (Aranda, 2007).
A transnational approach to understanding sense of community brings a new perspective to the Community Psychology field. It also serves to describe how the elements of McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) model of sense of community are exhibited beyond the local or relational context. Through these components, membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections, transnationalism acknowledges a plurality of cultural codes and symbols that expand territories and multiple locations of “home” (Wolf, 2002). The first element, membership, relates to Puerto Ricans’ sense of belonging to the communities on the Island and in the U.S. Patriotism and identification with cultural symbols, such as traditional dishes like mofongo and music events such as parrandas and Fiestas de la Calle San Sebastian are present in the transnational social field of many Puerto Ricans living in Miami.

Some participants identified with the Puerto Rican community in Orlando and the broader Latin community in Miami. Others established boundaries to distinguish themselves from other members of the Hispanic or Latino community. Emotional security to their family members and friends was provided during the aftermath of hurricane Maria by posting encouraging messages online and forming part of the Puerto Rico se Levanta (Puerto Rico Rises) collective movement. This social campaign has served as an inspiration for many Puerto Ricans to visualize the Island rising above adversity.

The second element, influence, seems to be reflected through the involvement of Puerto Ricans in community and non-profit organizations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Additionally, feeling valued in the community was crucial to maintain a transnational sense of community. Third, integration and fulfillment of needs was displayed in the
financial and emotional support the Puerto Rican community on the diaspora provide to their communities both on the Island and in the U.S. Receiving social support from their transnational communities helps Puerto Ricans navigate their life in Miami. Lastly, *shared emotional connections* is present in frequent visits to the Island, shared events, and strong connections to the Puerto Rican cultural heritage. Emotional connections to Puerto Rico in the event of the historical hurricane Maria seemed to have been embodied through the investment of time and resources to assist their communities on the Island.

Analyzing the sense of community of Puerto Rican transnational migrants provides insights on the transnational social fields in which their multiple communities are embedded. Transnational social fields connect actors, through direct and indirect relationships across borders (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Frequent visits to the Island and cyclical migration are facilitated by the ability to move back and forth between the U.S. and Puerto Rico without legal boundaries. When territorial connections are not present, social connections with relatives and friends on the Island, cultural practices, and civic participation in community organizations set up in the new country cultivate their transnational sense of community.

Emotional, symbolic, and territorial connections to Puerto Rico foster feelings of belonging to the transnational Puerto Rican communities. Sometimes, deep-rooted connections to the geographical community on the Island limit the creation of a transnational sense of community in Miami, where there is not an ethnically concentrated community of Puerto Ricans. Simultaneous engagement both on the Island and the U.S. mainland, might put Puerto Ricans in a position of dual loyalty that can challenge or
alleviate their adjustment process in the U.S. Partial membership in both countries means belonging to multiple communities simultaneously, where they can identify as members of different communities, each of them fulfilling specific needs (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

**Transnational Community**

According to Bhugar & Becker (2005), sense of belonging tends to occur when the individual and surrounding population have similar social characteristics. Consistent with the literature on multiple sense of community at the local level (Brodsky & Marx, 2001), Puerto Ricans in Miami exhibit a multiple sense of belonging to their organizations and neighborhood communities, particularly if they are formed by Latinos or other Puerto Ricans. As mentioned earlier, recent studies on Puerto Rican transnationalism have been focused on the large community of Puerto Ricans in Orlando, whose sense of belonging is expressed towards a transnational community that is also locally present in ethnically dense neighborhoods (Duany, 2010; Aranda, 2007).

The contribution of this study is to examine transnationalism in the context of Miami, where there is a smaller and more dispersed community than in Orlando. In the Wynwood area, a Puerto Rican heritage remains visible in some of the street art and local businesses, however, there is no strong physical presence of the Puerto Rican community in Miami, especially when compared to the experience of Little Havana or Little Haiti. Studying the experience of community from a transnational standpoint where a local co-ethnic community does not exist, broadens the understanding of the expressions of these connections across borders.
Incorporating the dimension of emotional connections to the literature on transnational migration helps us understand the context of community. For Puerto Rican transnational migrants in Miami, their communities are not only geographical but ideological and emotional as well (Wolf, 2002). Although they do not live in a geographically ethnically concentrated community, the ways in which they maintain their connections are similar to Duany’s (2010) study of Orlando Ricans. A variety of involvements Puerto Ricans in Miami sustain in both the Island and U.S. mainland, include identification with both nations, frequent mutual visits, eating traditional Puerto Rican food, and business-related activities. Additionally, Puerto Ricans migrating directly from the Island, feel the need to maintain traditional family values, such as familismo, and direct family involvement (Ariza, 2010). As a core value of Puerto Rican families, familismo, which emphasizes the importance of family unit, has endured the changes in cultural values brought about by repeated migrations, and the pressures to acculturate to the American society (Zayas & Palleja, 1988).

This study contributes to the literature on Puerto Rican transnational migration to the state of Florida by describing the contemporary experience of Puerto Ricans in the local context of greater geographic dispersion. In addition, the study highlights the experience of a relatively under-studied population, Puerto Ricans in South Florida, where most social research has focused on the migration experiences and transnational ties of Cubans (Eckstein & Barberia, 2002; Duany, 1999; Portes, 1980).
Transnational Sense of Community in the Aftermath of a Disastrous Hurricane

In times of crisis, feelings of incompetence, both at the individual and collective level, increase, and psychological well-being is affected, consequently impacting people’s sense of community (Vallejo-Martín, Moreno-Jiménez & Ríos-Rodriguez, 2016). After hurricane Katrina, Procopio and Procopio (2007) investigated the role of Internet communication in supporting geographically based communities in crisis. Their findings demonstrated that the Internet has the capacity to sustain a geographic community affected by a catastrophic event through online encouragement and support. However, that study did not explore civic actions outside online communities.

One of the intentions of this project was to expand the knowledge of community support during natural events such as hurricanes. This study contributes to the field of Community Psychology and the framework of transnationalism in understanding the transnational sense of community among migrants in the face of a crisis back home. The findings of this study help document the reactions of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the aftermath of the catastrophic hurricane Maria. Transnational migration is a process and transnational practices ebb and flow in response to events or crisis (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Particularly, these findings describe the mobilization of Puerto Ricans in Miami to provide resources and support to their transnational communities and fellow Puerto Ricans arriving in the city after the hurricane. The data gathered support the idea that community resources increase the individual’s sense of belonging to the community (Itzhaky et al., 2015). Moreover, it shows that altruistic behaviors can stem from that sense of belonging and solidarity with fellow members of one’s community, even when they are located in another place.
Limitations and Strengths

Limitations and strengths presented in this section served as balancing points to pursue the completion of this master’s thesis. The purpose of this qualitative research was not to generalize the experiences of the Puerto Rican diaspora in Miami, and the sample of this study was not representative of the range of experiences. In recruiting this sample, I relied on my social networks and connections with Puerto Rican organizations, which may have resulted in identifying those who were more civically engaged in the Puerto Rican community. Additionally, I recognize that using my master’s thesis title, *Un solo pie adentro*, in the recruitment flyer may have primed participants to think about their migration experiences to the U.S. in a discordant way. Another limitation of this study is that several participants rely on public transportation, which often made it complicated to coordinate a common place to meet that was appropriate for the interviews. Others had to be rescheduled on multiple occasions due to changes in their own agenda and lack of transportation.

Being a member of the Puerto Rican community was a double-edged sword. For some of my participants, that I was Puerto Rican made them believe that I was knowledgeable of their experiences and that we practice the same Puerto Rican traditions. Occasionally during the interview process, I felt they expected me to be knowledgeable of their experiences. I found myself constantly stepping-back and quickly reflecting on my reality to be able to clarify and expand on the information gathered without making assumptions based on my own background as a Puerto Rican. Nevertheless, engaging in this reflection process allowed me to focus on the participants’ experiences and gather any missing information in order to provide validity to their responses. I recognize that being a member of the Puerto Rican community in Miami was a major strength of this
Taking part in the community helped me connect with other members who were eager to participate in this project. I was also able to establish a trusting atmosphere where my participants could feel comfortable to detail their experiences.

**Implications for Future Research**

This master’s thesis is a pilot study that serves to create an initial understanding of the transnational sense of community of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. Researchers acknowledge the importance of including the generational experiences of immigrants and migrants when studying the complex ways they interact in their transnational social field (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). This research study did not capture the transnational sense of community of second-generation or third-generation Puerto Ricans in-depth because only one of the participants was born in the U.S. Therefore, future research could focus on exploring the transnational sense of community from a generational perspective.

In the aftermath of hurricane Maria, there is an open window to describe the role sense of community played in the family relations of Puerto Ricans. Examining the diverse context of the Puerto Rican family as a transnational community, could expand the literature on transnationalism and sense of community. Furthermore, future research could explore the sense of community and civic participation among Puerto Ricans who experienced the hurricane on the Island.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Sense of Community of Puerto Ricans in Miami Interview Guide

Interviewer(s):_________     Date:___________
Interviewee Participant ID:____

Introduction:
Thank you for talking with me. I just moved a year ago from Puerto Rico and this conversation is very important because I am interested in getting to know about the communities that you have built here in Miami, and how have you maintained in any way your connections with Puerto Rico in the Island and in the city of Miami. I am also interested in learning about your interactions with your communities in Puerto Rico in the aftermath of hurricanes Irma and María. Please feel free to ask any questions or to interrupt the conversation if you need to.

Domain 1: Miamiricans

- At what age did you come to the U.S. and who did you come with?
- Why did you/your family move to Miami?
- How was your life when you came for the first time to Miami?
  - Where did you live?
  - What did you do in terms of studies, work and activities?

And here in Miami:
- What was it like when you came for the first time?
- Where did you established?
- What did you do in terms of studies, work and activities?

- I have read that the Wynwood Arts District in North Miami was known as “Little San Juan” because of all the Puerto Ricans that came to live in the area, do you know anything about it?

For interview in Wynwood site/home:
- I have read that this neighborhood was known as “Little San Juan” because of all the Puerto Ricans that came to live here, do you know anything about it?
- What aspects of this neighborhood remind/reminded you about Puerto Rico?
- How has been your experience living in this area?
- How have you experienced, if in any way, the changes in this neighborhood due to the new buildings and arts district development in the area?

Domain 2: Community

- How would you define community?
- What are the special/key elements/aspects of your community/ies?
- Who are the members of your community/ies?
- What is it like to live in Miami and maintain your relationship with your community/ies from Puerto Rico (in Miami and in the Island)?
- What elements remind you about your community/ies to Puerto Rico?
Domain 3: Sense of Community
- How do you experience belonging to your community?
- What places in Miami remind you about your community/ies in Puerto Rico?
- What characteristics do you have in common with the members of your community/ies?
- What activities do you do to be involved in your community/ies?
- How would you describe your interactions with your community/ies in the Island and Miami?
- How often do you visit the Island?
- What is it like to live in Miami and maintain your relationship with your community/ies from Puerto Rico (in Miami and in the Island)?
- What symbols/representations make you feel you belong to or identified with your community/ies?
- How do you provide emotional support/safety to your community/ies?
- Are you involved in any organization or association with your community/ies?

Domain 3: Hurricane Maria
- How would you describe your interactions with your community/ies in Puerto Rico after the hurricanes?
- How has been your communication with your family members, colleagues, friends in Puerto Rico?
- How has the Puerto Rican community in Miami reacted to this event?
- With what specific situations have you had to deal/cope with in the aftermath of these hurricanes?
- Has your relationship with your community/ies in the Island changed in any way?
- Have you been involved in any relief efforts to support the island of Puerto Rico?
- Is there anything that you would change about your community/ies?

For Puerto Ricans that came after hurricane Maria:
- For how long do you plan to stay in Miami?
- Did you receive any type of support when you arrived in Miami? Which one?
- Who helped you?
- Have you connected with any Puerto Ricans? How?
- What do you think about the Puerto Ricans that have met in Miami?

Domain 4: Sociodemographic profile
- Sex: _____M _____F
- What is your age?
- Where were you born?
- What is your marital status?
- What is your highest academic degree completed?
- What is your current employment occupation?
- In what area do you live? Who do you live with?
APPENDIX B

Authorization for Audio Recording in a Research Study

By engaging in this conversation, I authorize the Department of Psychological and Educational Studies and the University of Miami to take sound recordings of me.

By engaging in this conversation, I authorize the University of Miami to use in any manner said audio recordings, in whole or in part as follows.

(Please read and check box next to appropriate permission statement):

☐ For the purpose of teaching, research, scientific meetings and scientific publications, including professional journals or medical books;

☐ For research purposes only.

I agree that the University of Miami, its Trustees, officers, employees, faculty and agents will not be responsible for any claims arising in any way out of the taking and use as described above of such recordings. I understand that I will not have an opportunity to inspect and approve such recordings prior to their use.

_________________________________________  ___________________________  ______________
Signature of Participant            Printed Name of Participant               Date

_________________________________________  ___________________________  ______________
Signature of Person                   Printed Name of Person                     Date

Obtaining Consent                    Obtaining Consent
APPENDIX C

Recruitment Flyer

BORICUAS IN MIAMI!

As part of my master’s thesis at the University of Miami titled Un solo pie adentro: Sense of community of Puerto Ricans in Miami, I would like to talk to you about the connections that you have with your communities in Puerto Rico and Miami.

Let’s learn about our Puerto Rican community in Miami!

To thank you for your participation, you will receive a $25 gift card.

To participate in this project please contact:
Andrea Ruiz Sorrentini
Master Student
Email: acr158@miami.edu
Telephone: 787 981 4991

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

[Image]
VITA

Andrea C. Ruiz Sorrentini was born in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico on January 29, 1993. Her parents are Waldemar Ruiz Acosta and Magaly Sorrentini Velez. She received her elementary and secondary education at Colegio San Agustín in Cabo Rojo. In June 2016, she graduated *Magna Cum Laude* with a bachelor’s degree in Psychology from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. In August of the same year, she was admitted to the Community and Social Change master’s program at the University of Miami, where she was granted a Master of Science in Education degree in May 2018. She currently lives in South Miami, Florida.