THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME?

THE EXPERIENCES OF UNSTABLY HOUSED TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING YOUNG PEOPLE

by

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ABSTRACT

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THE EXPERIENCES OF UNSTABLY HOUSED TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING YOUNG PEOPLE

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Adviser: Professor SJ Dodd

The purpose of this project is to expand knowledge about the lived experience of unstably housed transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) young people in order to inform programs and policies meant to address their needs and to contribute to the broader conversation regarding gender identity. Specifically, this project will generate new knowledge on the subject of housing instability among TGNC young people through an analysis of the youth's spoken and visual narratives about the meaning they assign to their gender identity and their experiences of housing instability.

The goals of this exploratory project are: 1) to document the meaning and significance of gender identity/expression for unstably housed TGNC young people, 2) to examine the interplay between gender identity and the experience of housing instability among TGNC young people, with particular attention to the role that stability/instability plays in the reconfiguration of identity among TGNC young people. The knowledge gained from this project has the potential to inform social work practice on multiple levels, including program development, clinical and public policy interventions, and the broader discourse regarding what it means to be transgender or gender non-conforming as well as the shifting definition and impact of homelessness.

The data collection methods employed in this qualitative inquiry include semi-structured interviews and the visual method of mapping with TGNC young people who have experienced housing instability. NVivo9 was utilized for data management and storage. The heuristic process of phenomenological inquiry guided analysis.

The sample included 27 self-identified TGNC young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who have experienced housing instability within the past 18 months, but who are not currently without shelter at the time of the interview. The sample includes young people who identify as transgender men and women, in addition to those who do not identify as transgender but whose gender identity and expression are self-identified as different from traditional gender norms. Participants were recruited via study announcements posted in community spaces where LGBTQ young people congregate.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> *I just feel like, I have, like, more of a, of a struggle. Because I'm, cuz I'm not a label. If you're a female, you're just a female. If you're a man, you're just a man. Like, whatever. I'm a transgender male, you know? It's like, that's even more. - Nino*

Nino's statement is reflective of the unique facets of transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) young people's experiences. Unstably housed TGNC young people in New York City experience circumstances that other unstably housed young people do not encounter. Understanding their specific challenges, successes, and occurrences provide insight into how to craft effective policy and programmatic solutions to diminish the rates of housing instability among this population. Although TGNC young people are one of the most marginalized subgroup of unstably housed populations, there is a lack of research into their experiences. Prior to proposing solutions aimed at intervening with this population, more needs to be known about their pathways into homelessness as well as their encounters once unhoused.

This study documents the meaning and significance of gender identity and expression for unstably housed TGNC young people, and examines the interplay between gender identity assertion and the experience of housing instability among TGNC young people, with particular attention to the role that stability/instability plays in the reconfiguration of identity among TGNC young people. The interaction between housing status and gender identity expression has not specifically been explored among a population of unstably housed TGNC young people. Much of the research and service provision meant to address the needs of unstably housed TGNC young people does so within the context of the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth population, rather than differentiating the needs of TGNC young people from their LGB counterparts. To the extent that housing instability among TGNC young people has

been researched, it has been as part of a broader LGBT category. While unstably housed LGB and TGNC young people may share some of the same needs, TGNC young people must contend with several unique dimensions of experience, such as coming out processes that may also involve changing their names and sex designation on identification and medical services related to gender transition. Further, diverse gender identities and expressions are not as widely accepted, nor recognized or protected, as diverse sexualities. This inquiry seeks to examine the specific experiences of the unstably housed "T" in LGBT. The following section identifies and formulates the study problem. It contextualizes the problem within the current social climate, discusses the scope and significance of the problem, and explains the relevance of this issue to social work practice and policy. The section begins with a review of relevant concepts.

Concepts

Language is dynamic; it continues to shift as the issues surrounding housing instability among TGNC young people evolve. The lack of consistent language use over time complicates program and policy interventions, directly impacting the populations for whom these interventions are designed. It is important to discuss the complexities surrounding the terminology used to describe the homeless population, the runaway/homeless youth population and LGBT/TGNC people, because language used to describe these populations has changed over time. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) set forth the following definition of homeless:

> An individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/topics/homelessness/definition).

The above definition serves as a guideline for homeless service programs receiving federal funds. Until recently, the guidelines did not include youth. A draft revision of HUD's definition allows for unaccompanied youth to be considered homeless if they meet the following criteria: they have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the previous 90 or more days, they have had three or more moves in the last 90 days, and they will likely continue to be unstably housed because of employment barriers or a disability (http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/3006).

The phrase *runaway and homeless youth* did not emerge as descriptive of the population until 1977, when the Runaway Youth Act was renamed the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act will be discussed in greater detail when examining the policy response to the issue). Historically, youth who were not living at home were referred to as *runaways*, a term which implies delinquency and rebellion. The renaming of the policy marked the first formal inclusion of the term *homeless* in relation to unstably housed youth. Currently, the phrase "homeless youth" encompasses people who are runaways, throwaways, street youth, and systems youth (Moore, 2005). The following is a brief definition of the aforementioned categories, as defined by Rotherman-Borus, Koopman, and Ehrhardt (1991). Runaways are youth who leave their homes without the consent of a parent or guardian. Runaways leave home for a variety of reasons, including escaping abusive home environments. The term throwaway refers to youth who are forced to leave their homes by a parent or guardian. Street youth describes those youth who do not have basic shelter. Youth who leave problematic foster or group home placements are referred to as systems youth (Rotherman-Borus, Koopman, and Ehrhardt, 1991).

In the decades that have followed that passage of the RHYA, much debate has surrounded not only the definition of the term *homeless*, but also that of *youth*. Although age is an important factor in meeting the criteria of a homeless youth, programs, policies, and research studies have not adopted a consistent age range when addressing this population (Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). The age range is most commonly between 12 and 21, although some studies have also included young people from age 21 through the age of 24 (Kidd & Davidson, 2006; Kipke, Weiss, & Wong, 2007; Moore, 2005), a developmental period newly referred to as emerging adulthood. According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is the period during which mucg identity exploration takes place. During this time, many young people are still emotionally and financially dependent upon familial support. This combination has proved problematic for some LGBT/GNC young people whose families withdraw their emotional and financial support due to conflict over sexual orientation and/or gender identity. However, despite their reported dependencies, a young person's age often limits their access to services. For example, in New York City, the majority of shelter beds for youth are reserved for young people between the ages of 18 and 21 (Hirsch, 2007). The New York City Council proposed to raise the age limit for services provided to homeless youth through the RHYA from 21 years to 24 years when the RHYA was pending renewal in 2008. The efforts were unsuccessful. The varying definitions of the phrase *homeless youth* have a direct impact on policy, program, and research interventions. The impact includes variability in age restrictions across programs and findings that are less able to be generalized to a general population of "homeless youth," due to the lack of consensus regarding exactly what a "homeless youth" is. Varying definitions simultaneously complicate society's understanding of the population, the development of programs and services for the population, and the legislative response to the problem.

Varying definitions of *homeless youth* cause difficulty not only in accurately quantifying the problem but also in developing appropriate and comprehensive policy responses (Ray, 2006). As it currently stands, the RHYA defines a *homeless youth* as a person who is under the age of 21, for whom living with a relative is not safe, and who has no other safe living arrangement (www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/aboutfysb/RHYComp.pdf). Without specific criteria for determining what "safe" is, one could interpret this term in various ways. For example, one could assert that a young person who doubles up with friends has a safe living arrangement, despite the precarious nature of that arrangement. Shelters may be considered a safe living arrangement by some but not to others. TGNC young people may not feel safe in sex segregated shelter facilities. If TGNC identity development and assertion is viewed through the lens of pathology, a home in which a family attempts to stifle or correct gender expression may be considered safe. Conversely, Davis (2009) stated that a home in which TGNC identity is discouraged or disallowed is traumatic. The difficulty in establishing a clear and consistent definition is apparent when considering the subjective nature of the suggested explanation of the phrase *homeless youth*, and especially in relation to TGNC youth who are particularly vulnerable within this definitional flux.

As is evident, defining the problem is a controversial issue. In fact, Toro & Warren (1999) report that the problems surrounding definitions and estimates of the homeless population are the most divisive issues relating to homelessness. The main points of contention regarding the definition of homelessness are the specifics of the living arrangements that denote homelessness and the period of time a person must live in such an arrangement in order to be classified as homeless. Also unclear is whether or not those in institutions who have no permanent address should be regarded as homeless and if those who are precariously housed

(doubled-up with friends or relatives) should be considered homeless. In their article *Homelessness in the United States: Policy Considerations*, Toro & Warren (1999) raise the question of including those staying in shelters for runaway youth in the definition of homelessness.

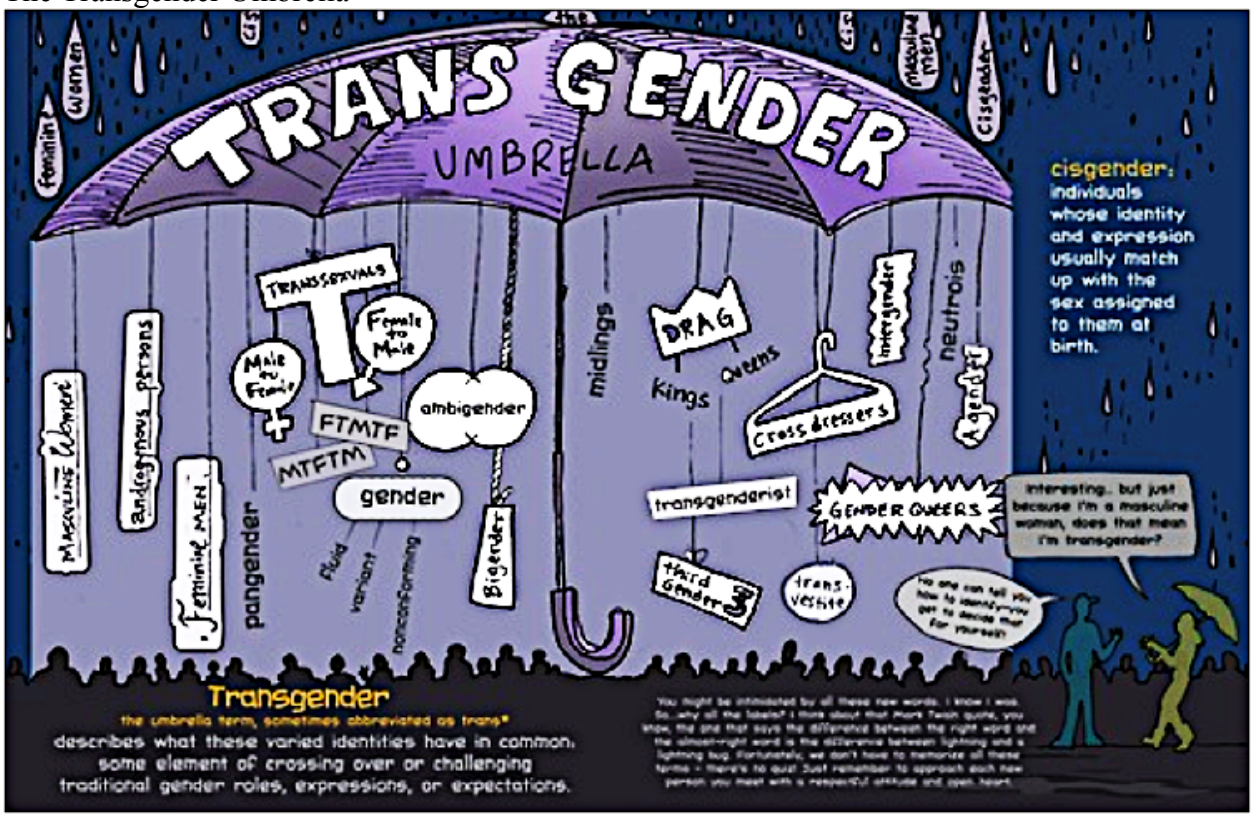
A consistent and inclusive definition of the term *homeless* must be constructed in order to fully understand the scope of the issue. Researchers and policymakers agree that it is necessary to differentiate the housed from the homeless, in order to understand and address the needs of the homeless population and all of the subpopulations within. However, the distinguishing line between these two groups is frequently arbitrary and potentially contentious. The binary construct of "housed" vs. "homeless" does not allow for a range of possible and plausible situations, such as being precariously housed or at risk of losing housing or unstably housed.

In order to broaden the scope and to foster a more inclusive definition of the homeless population, Toro & Warren (1999) advocate avoiding use of the phrase *the homeless*. The term has become part of our vernacular; it is simplistic and carries a pejorative connotation, while defining the issue quite narrowly. The use of a simplistic term such as *homeless* to describe a heterogeneous group of people leads to a one-dimensional conceptualization of the population and results in simplistic solutions. Similarly, the historic lack of recognition of unstably housed TGNC young people as a distinct population has led to the creation of simplistic solutions that may not be applicable to their specific needs. For example, the solution of providing shelter is insufficient for TGNC young people if the staff within the shelters and the policies informing them are not actively inclusive and affirming of TGNC identities. Discrimination often begins during the intake process, and issues frequently arise regarding sleeping arrangements and access to gender appropriate bathroom facilities (Quintana, Rosenthal, & Krehely, 2010). In order to

encompass the variety of living arrangements (streets, shelter, doubling up with friends/family) for runaway and homeless youth, the term *unstably housed* will be used for this project. This will provide a more inclusive conceptualization of the population, while encouraging a new framework for conceptualizing the idea of housing in/stability.

The use of *LGBT, transgender* and *gender non-conforming (TGNC)* also require further explanation. Due to the limited representation of transgender youth in the literature, much of the information presented will be about the broader population of LGBT youth. When possible, information will be provided about transgender young people specifically. The term transgender is an umbrella term, encompassing a range of identities (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Burdge, 2007; Davis, 2009). It is commonly used to describe individuals whose gender identity and/or expression transgresses established societal gender norms, or who are seen as "gender different" (Davis, 2009, p. 6). Some transgender people identify fully as a gender different from their birth sex, some identify as cross gender or genderqueer, often presenting ambiguous gender expressions (Burdge, 2007; Grossman et al., 2005). The following diagram (figure 1) provides greater detail about the many possibilities within the term transgender (Hill & Mays, n.d. retrieved from http://www.thegenderbook.com/#).

Figure 1
The Transgender Umbrella



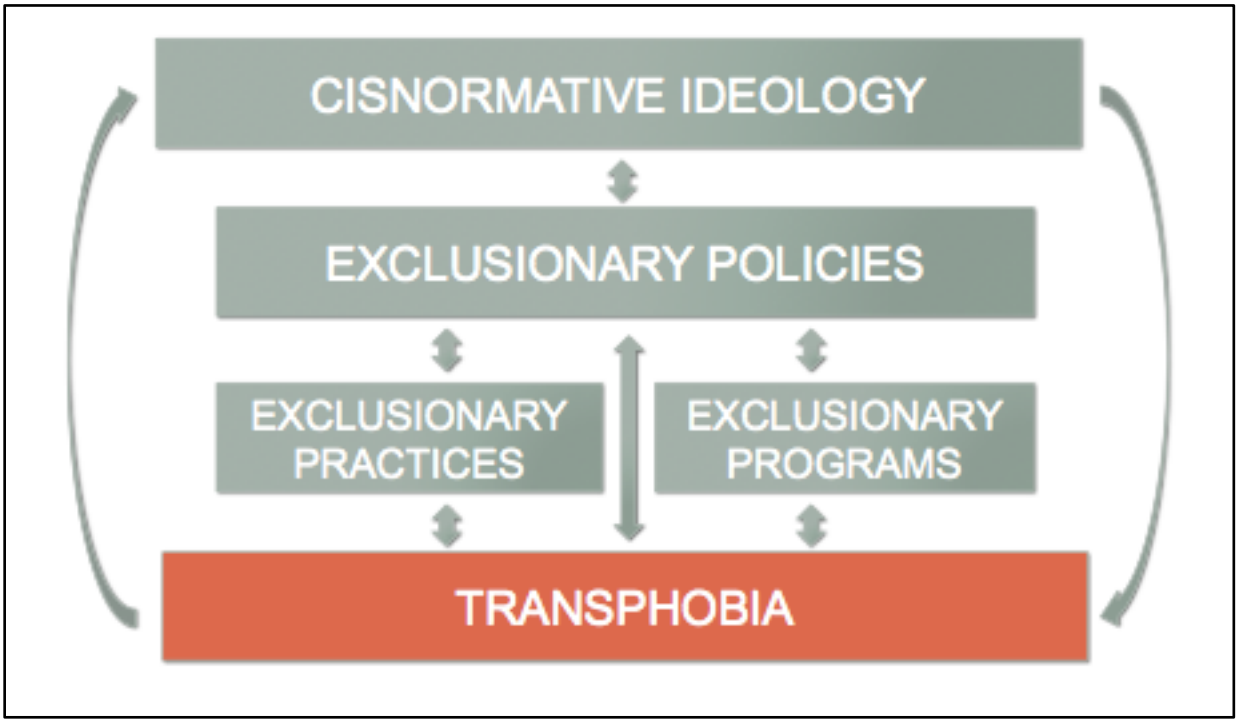
This inquiry purposefully includes GNC youth so as not to exclude those who do not adopt the term transgender but who also must navigate a binary gender system that invalidates their identities and overlooks their experiences. This choice mirrors the criteria utilized in the Washington, DC Transgender Needs Assessment Survey (2000). Xavier (2000) reported that determination of eligibility presented a challenge in the study, due to the diversity of terms used by GNC people to identify themselves. In this study eligibility was open to anyone who visibly presented as GNC, rather than limiting participation to only those who self-identified as transgender. In this inquiry, GNC will be used to describe those whose physical presentation (gender expression) and/or internal sense of gender (gender identity) fall somewhere in between the polarized "maleness" and "femaleness" that characterize the widely accepted dichotomous view of gender.

Orienting Concept: Cisnormativity

The concept of cisnormativity provides an orienting framework for this dissertation. Cisnormativity can be understood as the belief system that underlies transphobia (Pyne, 2011). It describes the presumption that all people are cissexual, meaning that all people will identify with and live as the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, if a person is born with a penis and assigned male at birth, the widely held presumption is that he will continue to identify as male and live as male for the duration of his life. This presumption is so widely held that it is rarely questioned and is considered the norm. This societal norm privileges cissexual people over those who are not, systemically conferring cissexual people's rights and power within society at large.

As such, cisnormativity contributes to the erasure of TGNC people. It shapes our entire social context, from the individual practices of human interaction to the establishment of organizations and the procedures of institutions (Bauer, et al., 2009). As an orienting concept, cisnormativity broadens the analysis of the harassment and discrimination experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people from the micro level of interpersonal interactions to the macro level of institutional structures that produce and maintain their marginalization. Unlike the idea of transphobia, cisnormativity refers to a prejudicial ideology that is systemic in nature. Conversely, transphobia refers to an individual attitude or behavior (Ansara & Hegerty, 2011). This is an important lens through which to view the participants' narratives, and is a level of analysis rarely utilized when researching or intervening with TGNC populations. The following diagram illustrates the ways in which cisnormativity impacts societal systems and the people within those systems, ultimately aiding in the production and maintenance of transphobia.

Figure 2
The Impact of Cisnormativity



The practice of broadening the analysis in this way is not new. The same type of shift occurred when researchers, advocates, and social workers traded the concept of homophobia for concepts like heteronormativity and heterosexism. Heteronormativity and heterosexism enable an understanding and analysis of the systemic marginalization of LGB people and the structural favoring of heterosexual people over LGB people (Ansara & Hegerty, 2011). The same shift should occur regarding the terms transphobia, cisnormativity and cisgenderism. Three recent papers support this shift in language and level of analysis (Ansara & Hegerty, 2011; Bauer, et al., 2009; Pyne, 2011). Such conceptualizations are lacking in scholarship examining the needs, experiences, and challenges of TGNC people and communities. It is imperative that social workers grasp this concept if they are to make real change for those experiencing harassment and discrimination based on gender identity or expression.

Cisnormativity directly impacts the experiences, health, and well being of TGNC young

people (Bauer, et al., 2009). TGNC people are rendered invisible through policies, practices, and within language. Cisnormative systems preclude entry for TGNC people, and as such, renders them invisible. Bauer, et al. (2009) confirm that although needs assessments and research studies have consistently documented the harassment and discrimination experiences of TGNC young people and their difficulty accessing services, an analysis of the production and maintenance of their marginalization is virtually absent. As a result, the arrival of a TGNC person within systems such as youth shelters creates an emergent crisis for which program staff and established systems are ill prepared. The common solution for the above occurrence is for programs to either send the TGNC young person elsewhere, or to figure out how to navigate this single, special case. The responses are reactionary rather than proactive, and do nothing to solve the large structural challenges that exist for TGNC young people and the systemic challenges for service providers.

Research Problem

Housing instability among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people is gaining visibility as a complex contemporary social problem. Whereas the issue of runaway and homeless youth first garnered federal attention in the 1970s, only recently has the overrepresentation of LGBT youth within the larger runaway and homeless youth (RHY) population has been acknowledged (Bolas, 2007; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Ray, 2006; Yu, 2010). Recent attention has also been drawn to the overrepresentation of TGNC young people within the RHY population, as well as the issue of housing instability among TGNC people in general (Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Yu, 2010; Bolas, 2007; Ray, 2006; Mottet & Ohle, 2006; Xavier, 2000). Though the literature suggests that transgender young people are disproportionately represented in the population of unstably housed youth (Bolas, 2007; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Ray, 2006; Yu, 2010), little is known about

their individual characteristics, their experiences with housing instability, the reasons for their housing status, the interplay between their TGNC identity and their access to housing, or the meaning these young make of their experiences. The aforementioned concepts are important to comprehend for those seeking to provide better programs and services to unstably housed TGNC young people and those at risk of becoming unstably housed. Without an understanding of who unstably housed TGNC young people are or how they came to be unstably housed, prevention and intervention efforts cannot be adequately targeted towards this population of young people.

Transgender young people who are unable to disclose their identity will not achieve identity integration if this aspect of themselves must remain hidden, foreclosing opportunities for peace in any part of their lives if they are not able to find a balance between their social interactions and their gender identities (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell & Hubbard, 2005). They must be able to express their gender identities, which, in some cases, mean being free to "re-make" themselves both socially and physically. This process of re-making not only affects them but also affects their families, peers and teachers (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell & Hubbard, 2005). While the process of disclosure and re-making can have a positive impact on the young person's identity integration, their families, peers and teachers do not always experience it as such and may work to stifle TGNC identity expression (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell & Hubbard, 2005). What happens when one's parents, teachers and peer groups do not allow the "re-making" process to take place? What happens when those people most active in a young person's life do not accept or support the expression of their gender identity? Some young people may deny their identity, or keep their gender identity hidden. To repress, deny, or otherwise modify one's gender identity has been described as gender management (Davis, 2009). Gender management allows one to compartmentalize aspects of their identity and expression while they

sort out the costs and benefits of coming out. While employed as a survival tactic for some TGNC young people, gender management can also produce feelings of anxiety and depression (Davis, 2009). While some young people may deny or hide their identity, others may not, and either be forced to or voluntarily seek out alternative living spaces in which they can safely and openly embody their true gendered selves. This inquiry seeks to examine the experiences of a group of New York City based TGNC young people who were either forced out or voluntarily left their homes in search of a living space in which they feel safe. It explores who these young people are, what meaning they assign to their experiences of housing instability, where they find/define new homes, and how these places facilitate the young people openly being "who they really are."

The limited amount of literature concerned with the population of unstably housed TGNC young people is primarily focused on psychiatric adjustment, and the sexual, physical and mental health related risk factors associated with these identities and experiences. Little is written from a transgender-affirming perspective (Burgess, 2009; Mallon, 2009; Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006; Ryan, 2003; Stieglitz, 2010). With the exception of a few notable publications (Grossman, D'Augelli, & Frank, 2011; Mallon, 2009; Mallon, 1999; Stieglitz, 2010) there has been no in depth investigation into the population from a non-pathological standpoint. It creates a world in which unstably housed TGNC young people experience HIV infection, risk, pathology, and victimization; this provides a narrow and limited view of their life contexts (Stieglitz, 2010). While unstably housed TGNC young people may experience higher rates of victimization and risk, to singularly focus on the adverse aspects of their experiences creates an inaccurate representation of their lives, needs, and experiences.

The risks for this population are well documented (Bolas, 2007; Burgess, 2009; Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler & Cauce, 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Grossman, A. & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell & Hubbard, 2005; Morrow, 2004; Ray, 2006; Walls, Hancock & Wisneski, 2007). Burgess (2009) mentions the need to modify and expand the academic literature to balance negative references with diverse, unbiased representations of the transgender community. Social work research has not yet investigated what might concurrently exist alongside the inherent risks involved with housing instability among TNGC young people. Garofalo, Deleon, Osmer, Doll & Harper (2006) report that transgender youth face significant challenges due to social isolation and limited understanding of their lives and experiences.

The literature indicates that belonging to a transgender community – that is, knowing and involving oneself with a support network of similar others - offers support to those in conflict regarding the formation and expression of gender identity and is a protective factor for many TGNC young people (Cooper, 2009; Maguen, Shipherd, Harris & Welch, 2007; Stieglitz, 2010). Additionally, finding other TGNC-identified people can lead to disclosure of one's identity, thought to be a critical step in identity integration (Maguen, Shipherd, Harris & Welch, 2007). Could the safe space for identity exploration be provided on the street/out of home? It has been noted that an LGBT person's created family, made up of non-biological members from whom an individual receives support and affirmation, is often viewed as a stronger source of support than their families of origin (Connolly, 2007; Cooper, 2009). When transgender young people are forced to remain hidden at home, it is unlikely that they receive support from their families and those in their immediate surroundings. In fact, Davis (2009) asks us to consider

> "whether inability to live out one's gender role in childhood is a childhood trauma. This is what almost all transgender-identified youth typically encounter until they are finally able to express and seek support for their actual gender identity – typically during their post-adolescent development" (p. 16).

Davis' notion brings to focus a potential unique aspect of homelessness for TGNC young people, asking us to consider when, where, and how young people are able to express their gender identity. Could a young person's pathway from home to the street also be a pathway towards the assembly of a complex identity that could not previously be expressed and was not previously supported?

Scope of the Problem

It is difficult to accurately measure the scope of the problem, due to inconsistencies in the definitions of the terms *homeless* and *youth*, creating a double definitional challenge. An additional challenge lies in the identification of unstably housed young people, who may or may not be accessing social services and are less likely to be living on the street than homeless adults. More difficult than estimating the prevalence of housing instability among young people as a social problem is identifying a population as specific as TGNC young people within the general population of unstably housed young people. Unstably housed LGB/TGNC young people have been described as invisible (Dunne, Prendergast & Telford, 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Invisibility and definitional issues aside, advocacy groups and academics have recognized the issue of housing instability among LGBT young people. According to a report issued by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the issue of unstably housed LGBT youth has reached epidemic proportions. The prevalence of housing instability among LGBT youth has recently been estimated to be between 20 and 40 % of the approximately 1.6 million homeless youth in the United States (Kipke, Weiss, & Wong 2007; Ray, 2009; Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt, & Gwadz 2005; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Van Leeuwen, Boyle, Salomonsen-Sautel, Baker, Garcia, Hoffman, & Hopfer, 2006; Wardenski 2005). According to this estimate, the percentage of unstably housed LGBT youth is at least three times greater than the percentage

of the general LGBT youth population, which is thought to be between 5 and 7% of the overall youth population (Lehrer, 2007; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Ray, 2006).

The cumulative oppression of lacking stable housing coupled with a LGBT identity places unstably housed LGBT youth in a precarious state of existence. Familial and societal limitations disrupt both the personal health of LGBT youth and the health of their interpersonal relationships (Connolly, 2005). In addition, the literature consistently asserts that unstably housed LGBT youth are at a higher risk for sexual victimization, suicide, depression, HIV risk behavior, and involvement in the criminal justice system, and higher levels of exchanging sex for money or a place to sleep (Noell & Ochs, 2001; Moon, McFarland, Kellogg, Baxter, Katz, MacKellar & Valleroy, 2000; Ray, 2006Rew, Whittaker, Taylor-Seehafer & Smith 2004). The historical attention, albeit brief, paid to TGNC young people in research has focused on risk factors and psychological adjustment frequently through the lens of pathology. The web of cultural oppression composed of transphobia, homophobia, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity and the internalization of each impacts the culture at large and affects LGBT people in profound and subtle ways (Connolly, 2005).

Anticipated Contributions to Social Work

This study contributes to the social work profession by providing information about a growing population for which little empirically based knowledge exists. This will, in turn, help social workers better understand the experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people, a population that is increasingly being served by social workers. Furthermore, program and policy development will be impacted by knowledge produced about this population. The proposed contributions to the field of social work are consistent with the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (2008) which states that social workers should not only conduct

research in an effort to help develop knowledge, but also to combat injustice and oppression. TGNC people are subject to physical and psychological harm; it is within the role of the social worker to establish representations of TGNC people that are compassionate and truthful (Mallon, 2009).

The study will contribute empirical research to the knowledge base of the profession with regard to a group that is underrepresented in the research literature, often marginalized in public policy and programmatic interventions, and in need of direct services. The proposed study will contribute to the profession on multiple levels. It will help inform individual practice by adding to the knowledge base pertaining to the characteristics and experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people and the meanings they make of their experiences. Meeting the needs of this population is of great interest to social service providers. Over the past decade, the need has emerged for programs specifically designed to provide services for unstably housed LGBT young people. Local media have reported varying degrees of violence experienced by LGBT young people in mainstream youth or adult shelters (Jacobs, 2004; Murphy, 2005; Kaysen, 2005). The number of unstably housed TGNC young people coupled with the victimization they experience within mainstream shelters, demand the attention of social service providers and policy makers. An increase in an understanding of the characteristics, developmental processes, and experiences associated with being an unstably housed TGNC young person will help inform practice interventions with individual clients as well as lend insight to those in a position to craft more competent public policies, such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which directly impact program design and implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Theoretical constructs offer a framework for social work practice with individual clients and client systems. They are meant to help one better understand situations, experiences and processes. Notably, theories relevant to the development of transgender identities are both limited and limiting. It has been suggested that models of sexual orientation development are applicable to transgender identity development (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). However, the sometimes inappropriate coupling of LGB and TGNC identity development processes is illustrative of one of many ways that TGNC identities are erased within our cisnormative society. Likewise, traditional developmental models, such as those taught in human behavior courses, are inadequate in their application to TGNC youth (Hawkins, 2009; Mallon, 2009). Understanding the historical framework of pathology most often used to understand transgender identity development is important to this inquiry. If the predominant discourse assumes pathology, then the meaning of TGNC experience has already been made. From this pre-made experience, rooted in pathology, research, service provision, and policies have been informed.

Maguen et al. (2007) contextualizes the complexities of transgender identity development and expression against a backdrop of societal stigma. Characterized by societal stigma, each stage of transgender identity development is impacted. The degree of this impact is unknown, as few studies examine the development of TGNC identity or a TGNC individual's experience of their identity formation. However, professional groups within the social sciences have recently taken notice of the injustices TGNC people face. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) recently recognized the pervasive nature of discrimination faced by TGNC people in their policy statement, Transgender, Gender Identity and Gender Expression Non-

Discrimination (APA, 2008). The resolution calls psychologists to "address these problems at both an individual and a societal level (APA, 2008, paragraph 1)" and recognizes the potential of research to "inform treatment, service provision, civil rights and approaches to promoting the well-being of transgender and gender variant people (APA, 2008, paragraph 12)." The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) released a statement similarly acknowledging the oppression TGNC people face and the negative outcomes that result from discrimination and prejudice. Further, NASW supports the development of competent and supportive practice environments for people who experience prejudice and transphobia (Social Work Speaks, 2009).

This project seeks to answer the call of the APA and NASW by producing knowledge that is reflective of the experiences of TGNC young people, effectively re-making the meaning of TGNC identity among unstably housed young people through their the participants' descriptions of their lives, rather than assuming an underlying pathology or developmental mishap as the catalyst for their experiences. What follows is a brief review of models commonly utilized for understanding TGNC identity development.

The Medical Model

The model most often used to understand transgender identity development is the medical model. Medical discourses have heavily influenced the theoretical conceptualizations of TGNC identities and subsequently the frameworks made available to the world at large (Sanger, 2008). Medical models focus on a binary construction of gender, and a binary construction of transgender identity. The emphasized focus is "'correcting' gender deviance through reassignment to the 'appropriate' gender" (Shelley, 2009, p. 30). This inherently oppressive framework reflects society's frequent rejection and denial of transgender, and especially of, GNC identities and experiences (Shelley, 2009). The NASW does not view TGNC identities as

pathological and encourages the development of informed, competent practice settings (Social Work Speaks, 2009). Though the social work profession as a whole may not endorse the medical model of correction and reassignment mentioned above, social workers and their clients must interface with macro and micro systems that subscribe to such pathologically based understandings of TGNC identity. Further, social work education includes instruction with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), which pathologizes TGNC identities. The diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) provides a stark example of the oppressive nature of the medical model. A brief synopsis of concerns surrounding GID is warranted and relevant to understanding the impact of the medical model.

Gender Identity Disorder. "Western psychiatric and medical traditions have set the standards for the diagnosis and care of transgender persons in the US. It is important to consider their impact" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p.30).

GID made its debut in the DSM III in 1980 in the form of two diagnoses, gender identity disorder of childhood (GIDC) and transsexualism. In the same edition, the diagnostic category sexual orientation disturbance (which replaced homosexuality in 1973) was replaced with ego dystonic homosexuality (Drescher, 2009). The latter category was removed with the publication of the DSM III-R in 1987, signifying the end of official psychiatric pathologization of sexual orientation. An additional category was added to the GID repertoire at this time - gender identity disorder of adolescence and adulthood, nontranssexual type. The new diagnostic category was GID, with specific criteria for children and adolescents/adults (Drescher, 2009). Some argue that the timing of the introduction of GID as a diagnostic category was not a coincidence and was intended to provide a means for diagnosing "homosexuality" following its removal from the DSM (Burgess, 2009; Langer & Martin, 2004). It is not a stretch to hypothesize that the new

diagnosis was simply another way to pathologize subversive identities. The implications of the diagnosis are far-reaching. Transgender activist Pauline Parks proclaimed "every psychiatrist who diagnoses GID in a patient merely by virtue of the individual's transgender identity is complicit in the manipulation and control of transgender people and their bodies" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 31).The DSM IV eliminated the added diagnosis and created one diagnosis to include GIDC and transsexualism.

Despite recent advocacy efforts, a version of GID will remain in the forthcoming 5th edition of the DSM. The newly named diagnosis of Gender Incongruence incorporates some of the linguistic suggestions and criteria revisions suggested by professionals and transgender rights advocates. For example, the change in the diagnostic label from GID to Gender Incongruence removes the inherent suggestion that one's identity is disordered. The shift is subtle, but powerful. Is it enough? Incongruence still suggests that congruence is the norm, and that incongruence is inherently problematic (DeCuypere, Knudson, & Bockting, 2010). Additionally, the new diagnosis removed the requirement to specify sexual orientation, an important step in distinguishing gender identity from sexual orientation. However, despite some of the improvements from the GID language and diagnostic criteria, the fact remains that TGNC identities, or gender incongruence, continue to be viewed as non-normative and result in the production and maintenance of prejudice and discrimination against TGNC people. The existence of GID as a diagnosable psychiatric condition automatically renders TGNC people unequal in our society.

TGNC people are identified as the problem by virtue of the diagnostic category GID. Langer & Martin (2004) contend that there is no scientific evidence indicating that a diagnosis of GID indicates actual differences in a child's gender identity or gender role behavior. They

further assert that even if it did so, it is not at all clear that atypical gender role behavior or gender identification signifies a mental disorder. The existence of GID prohibits the consideration of societal beliefs about gender as part of the "problem." Burdge (2007) draws an interesting parallel between the role of the individual vs. the role of society in relation to gender identity and poverty. She states:

> Ending gender oppression to help transgender people is analogous to finding structural solutions to eliminate poverty, rather than trying to help poor people cope with their unfortunate plight in a hostile environment. We cannot end gender oppression by ignoring the inherent oppressiveness of the hierarchical gender binary (p. 247).

Conversely, proponents of the diagnosis argue that the distress experienced by TGNC people is not solely a result of the negative reactions of others. Zucker (2006) argues that, more than the societal response, "it is the marked disjunction between somatic sex and psychological gender that causes their distress and motivates such individuals to seek out treatment (p. 543)." From this perspective, addressing society's intolerance of gender diversity as the patient rather than addressing a TGNC individual as the patient is an oversimplified suggestion for dealing with a multidimensional situation. Zucker (2006) argues that a singular focus on stigmatization overlooks "the complex biological, psychological, and interpersonal factors that are likely contributory to the development of GID in children" (p. 548).

People who embody characteristics traditionally attributed to the "other" gender are stigmatized and categorized as deviant (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006), furthering the negation of their identities and their marginalization. More psychosocial and health problems are experienced by members of a marginalized group than the general population (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). According to the National Transgender Discrimination Study (2010) (N=6,450), survey respondents reported worse health outcomes than the general population

across multiple health care issues, including higher rates of smoking and substance use than the general population, higher rates of HIV infection (over 4 times the rate of infection in the general adult population in the United States), and alarmingly high rates of suicidality. While approximately 1.6% of Americans have attempted suicide during their lifetimes, 41% of the survey respondents reported a history of suicide attempts (Grant, Mottet, & Tunis, 2010). When examining suicidality and other mental health issues, it is crucial to differentiate between inherent distress and socially imposed distress. The latter is a result of outside forces. In the case of TGNC people, it is the result of deviant category assignment and society's subsequent mistreatment, discrimination, and harassment. When a distinction is not made between these two types of distress, individual people are pathologized for their response to oppressive forces (Langer & Martin, 2004). Both types of distress are harmful to TGNC people, still the distinction between the two is critical to understand when developing interventions that will ultimately reduce TGNC people's distress. For example, the high rates of suicide reported by the survey respondents do not necessarily point to underlying pathology within individual people. The high rates of suicidality must be considered alongside other survey findings, including high rates of victimization, discrimination in employment and educational settings, housing instability, and family conflict. According to the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH), suicide attempts are often indicators of extreme distress, associated with precipitating events such financial instability and loss (NIMH, 2010). The loss and subsequent distress experienced by transgender people is often the result of bias; therefore the suicide related statistics need to be taken in the context of the bias that begets the social distress that results in internal distress.

Finding ways to exist within an often unwelcoming and antagonistic environment can lead to chronic unrest. Societal pressures to conform to binary gender constructs and the ensuing

discrimination one endures when conformity is not possible reinforce within TGNC young people an already existing fear over being different. As societal stigma is internalized, coping mechanisms a young person establishes in order to deal with an often hostile world may translate into what appear to be mental health issues (Connolly, 2005; Davis, 2009). TGNC individuals may not perceive themselves to have mental health issues, and understand their symptoms as a direct response to the context in which they live. This is one way that the medical discourse on TGNC identities is far removed from TGNC people. This dissociated relationship between the treating and the treated within the medical model does not generally allow for patient input and results in the categorization of TGNC individuals in ways that do not align with their own realities (Sanger, 2008). As such, the concept of normative TGNC identity development cannot occur until transgender identities are detached from their pathological roots (Davis, 2009).

Stage-based Developmental Theories

A general characteristic of stage models is the assumption of a linear progression from one phase to the next, with the individual developing a more complex way of understanding their identity and society (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Widely known examples of linear stage models include Erikson's stage theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1966) and Cass's model of gay/lesbian identity development (Cass, 1979). The model put forth by Cass (1979) suggests six linear stages of identity formation. They are: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis (Cass, 1979). Several limitations of stage models have been identified. For example, stage-based models of identity development involve what Langdridge (2008) terms the "premature foreclosure" (p. 33) of lived experience, by dictating a definitive end to the process. Rather than progressing on a linear path to a definitive end, an alternative notion is one goes beyond acceptance and synthesis.

Langdridge (2008) questions the docility associated with such an endpoint for marginzalized and stigmatized identities. Perhaps additional stages would include rage against injustice or identity based advocacy. Talburt (2004) similarly critiqued stage-based models for creating fixed experiences and developmental solutions leading ultimately to commitment to an identity. An alternative to this model would be the idea of identity fluidity. Diamond's research (2009) supports this notion and suggests that women's sexuality is more fluid than fixed.

Although it has been criticized for its emphasis on binary gender development, its male focus and its heterosexism, Erikson's model is commonly used as a tool for educating service providers (Hawkins, 2009; Mallon, 2009). In addition, it "continues to be utilized as a basis for developing additional theories and models of human development" (Hawkins, 2009, p. 4). Non-heterosexual identity development is a complex and fluid process that is impacted by other psychosocial identities. As such, stage models are inadequate descriptors of non-heterosexual identity processes. Developmental models for lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are lacking. Likewise, few models exist that specifically address developmental processes for TGNC young people (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).

Gender Management

Davis (2009) introduced the concept of gender management. While not a developmental model, the concept of gender management is relevant to developmental processes for TGNC young people, and could be considered when either examining current models for their goodness of fit, or creating new frameworks for understanding transgender identities. Davis (2009) states that the early stages of transgender identity realization revolve around the awareness of difference, and may necessitate that TGNC young people compartmentalize their lives while they weigh the risks and possibilities of coming out. Unable to recognize and being restricted

from expressing one's gender is traumatic, and perhaps abusive, for some TGNC individuals (Davis, 2009). To cope with this trauma, TGNC young people utilize strategies of gender management. Such strategies include:

- *Repression or erasure of gender identity* by consciously or subconsciously deciding to pass quietly and invisibly in the birth-assigned gender and sex. This may involve extensive defenses, often aspects of sublimation.
- *Negation of gender identity and gender reconstruction* by consciously or subconsciously denying one's gender and adopting behavior and expression that confirm the gender assumptions made by others about one's identity and birth-assigned gender and sex. This often includes admission to gender-polarized groups and engaging in what is coded as hypergendered behavior such as joining the military, parenting children, and so forth.
- *Modification of gender identity* to fit within cultural norms where possible – adopting 'moderately' masculine- or feminine-vectored behavior so as to express an aspect of one's gender but still be able to fit as well as possible. (Davis, 2009, p. 8)

According to Davis (2009), rather than exploring and expressing their identity, TGNC young people may have to, instead, manage their identities in order to be accepted by their families and communities of origin. The idea of managing their identity as opposed to exploring and expressing means that young people may stifle, limit, compartmentalize, or otherwise dissociate from their internal sense of their gendered selves in order to safely fit within their families. In her narrative nonfiction book *Transparent*, Cris Beam describes a young person's experience navigating her differently gendered worlds. She writes,

> Ariel had never moved out of her mother's house, but the psychological divide between her two lives was wide. At that time she was 18, and she carried a rolling backpack the size of a large airplane carry-on with her wherever she went, changing clothes, and attitudes, between the different LA's. In her South Central life, Ariel got on buses, went to school, made dinner for her family, and went to church. It was in the space between these two cities that Ariel felt most alone. (Beam, 2007, p. 103)

Ariel's narrative exemplifies the lengths that many TGNC young people must go to in order to remain accepted within the family and community. In one part of her life, she expressed

herself in the way she knew would be accepted by her family and home community, while in her life with her peers across town she was able to articulate the identity that felt true to her. It provides an example of how some TGNC young people navigate various parts of their worlds as different parts of themselves, managing their identities. This notion of gender management likely impacts gender identity development, and would be a useful construct to examine when applying models of TGNC identity development to TGNC young people. Furthermore, gender management provides one possible framework for understanding aspects of TGNC identity development among unstably housed youth. Family conflict and family rejection is the most commonly cited reason for LGBT youth homelessness (Durso & Gates, 2011). If families and communities of origin no longer accept unstably housed TGNC youth, then the need for TGNC young people to manage their identities to receive acceptance may dissipate. Without the need for this acceptance, gender management may no longer be relevant or necessary in the same ways. This research investigates what lies at the intersection of housing instability and gender identity development, and the metaphorical spaces in between.

New paradigms

It is necessary to recognize that TGNC people are not merely another sexual minority group that can be easily included within existing frameworks for LGB development (Sanger, 2008). TGNC young people may undergo a process of social and physical transition that their LGB counterparts do not. Furthermore, TGNC identities continue to be widely stigmatized in our society, and that stigmatization is reinforced through the lack of TGNC inclusion in non-discrimination policies. Healthy models of transgender identity development that do not stigmatize transgender individuals need to be created (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).

Because gender identity is a multi dimensional concept composed of interrelated elements (Saltzburg & Davis, 2010), a model that incorporates both the individual's experience of gender identity development and also a focus on the role of pressure to conform to heterocentric gendered norms is useful. One example of such a model is Egan and Perry's (2010) multidimensional model. The framework contains five primary components: knowledge of group membership, signs of gender [a]typicality, a state of gender contentedness, conformity pressures, and intergroup bias. This type of multidimensional model of gender identity would permit some variation in the explanation of gender-related behavior (Hegarty, 2009), with specific attention paid to the role of societal pressures and norms.

Many traditional models regard transgender identity from a "developmentally pejorative perspective" (Mallon, p.30), the pathological underpinnings of which does not allow for competent micro or macro practice with TGNC individuals. Conceptualizing TGNC youth identity outside the discourse of disorder would allow for the development of more competent programs and policies meant to benefit these youth's development. A paradigm shift, similar to the one that occurred in the literature about LGB identities, from a disease model, must occur in order to better understand gender identity development (Hegarty, 2009). I assert that transgender identities can be inherently healthy. However, given their association with pathology and deviance, this notion may have difficulty taking hold. Davis (2009) states:

> Outside the transgender communities, people identified as transgender are usually perceived through a dichotomous lens and are commonly described as transgressing gender norms, gender variant, or gender deviant. This traditional misreading is predicated on a conception of transgender within a pathologically oriented perspective framed in a language layered in heterosexist, sexist, bigenderist, and transphobic context and meaning" (Davis, 2009 p. 6).

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of the problem

The issue of housing instability among LGBT, and specifically TGNC young people, has only recently begun to receive attention in the field of research. Therefore, there is little history to report about this actual phenomenon. However, a rich and relevant history exists both in regards to the general population of unstably housed young people and also concerning the social evolution of LGBT people as a recognized group. What follows is a brief account of relevant historical facts that have helped inform the recognition of housing instability among LGBT young people as a social problem.

Though housing instability amongst LGBT youth is only a recently acknowledged social phenomenon, "runaway" youth have been a part of our nation's history since the 1600s. The response at that time was punitive and focused on the delinquency of the "unproductive" youth. In 1646 Massachusetts, for example, a law proposed the death penalty for "stubborn or rebellious sons of sufficient years of understanding . . . sixteen, which will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother (Shurtleff 1854 as quoted in Libertoff, p. 153, 1980)." Such laws were often meant to control young indentured servants, as children as young as six were functioning as part of the production force. The state further developed control of young people throughout American industrialization and urbanization, as expectations of youth began to change during the 1800s and legal and social distinctions came about between adults and youth. These legal and social distinctions were reinforced through restrictions placed on and protections for American youth. Reform measures were passed regulating child labor and proposing mandatory education. Importantly, state intervention for runaway youth marked the beginning of state control over the

family unit. The development of the juvenile court system in the early part of the twentieth century further formalized the state's power over family matters (Libertoff, 1980). It is important to note that the perception of unhoused youth remained one of delinquency and the reforms of the time centered on mechanisms of control. This is due to the historic responsibility that police officers and court officials have borne for controlling these youth (Libertoff, 1980). In fact, youth homelessness in America was considered a criminal matter until recent decades (Ray, 2006; Varney & van Vliet 2008).

Interventions were designed in the 1930s to address the needs of transient youth. The services were named Transient Service Bureaus and were designed around the hope that the youth would "settle down and return home" (Libertoff, 1980). There was no federal response to housing stability among youth until 1974, when The Runaway Youth Act (Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974) was passed. Its purpose was twofold: to address the basic needs of unstably housed youth and to decriminalize status offenses (such as running away) by separating services offered to the population from the juvenile justice and law enforcement systems (Ray, 2006; Libertoff, 1980). Taking its cues from the programs of the 1930s, the Runaway Youth Act (and, subsequently, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act) is structured within a framework of family reunification as the solution. The dominant view, and therefore the majority of interventions, considers family reunification as the most viable solution to the issue of unstably housed youth. However, recent studies suggest that the family is frequently an immense source of stress for many unstably housed young people and reunification may not be the most feasible nor beneficial option (Walls, Hancock, Wisneski, 2007; Ray, 2006). For instance, one study reports that one in eight young people will run away before the age of 18, and that 40% of those never return to the place from which they left (Ray, 2006). Despite this

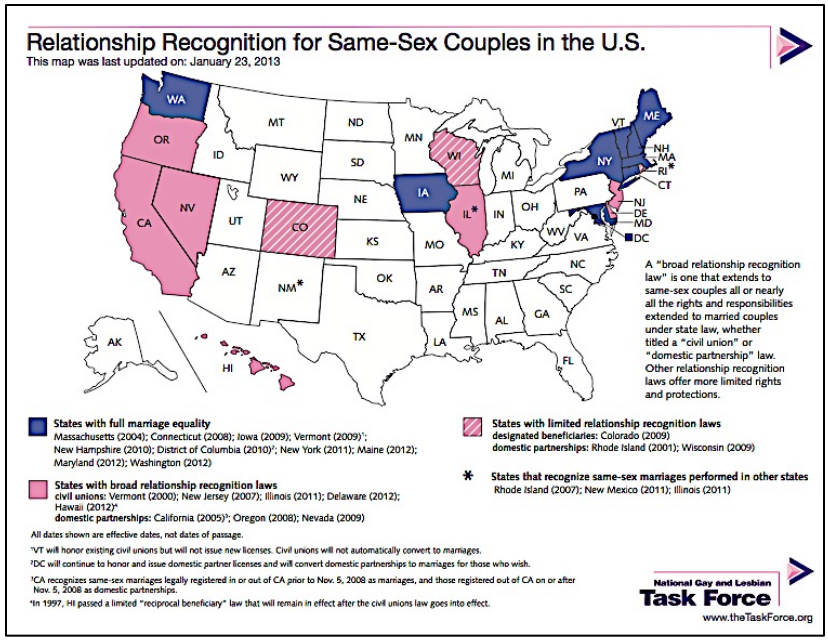
evidence, and although it is not presented as the *only* viable option, the goal of family reunification is both explicitly stated and implied throughout the structure of the RHYA.

It is impossible to understand the complexity of the LGBT youth housing crisis without first understanding the social deviant status historically assigned to LGBT people. Just as youth were historically criminalized based on their housing status, LGBT identities were also criminalized and pathologized outright until recent decades. What follows is a brief account of important events related to the constructed social status of LGBT people. Perhaps the most widely known historical gay rights event occurred in 1969 – the Stonewall Riots. During a routine raid of a New York City gay bar, patrons fought back against the police and subsequently inspired the modern gay liberation movement. The Stonewall Riots did not explicitly mark the decriminalization of LGBT identities, nor did they immediately shift the pathologization of those with LGBT identities. However, the riots did incite a slow social movement that has been characterized by a recurring pendulum swing of progress for LGBT people on one end and a subsequent backlash against them on the other.

The progressively shifting nature of LGBT identities coupled with the rejection of an innate LGB pathology, following the 1973 removal of *homosexuality* as a mental disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and increased visibility of LGBT people in the media/public sectors led to a backlash that is evident in recent legislation. Conservative and religious groups who find LGBT identities threatening to the moral and social fabric of society led the backlash, which is enacted through the implementation of heterocentric policies and the institutionalization of heterosexist practices (Mertus, 2007). Such policies and practices reinforce the systemic oppression of LGBT people in general, and directly impact the perception of unstably housed TGNC young people in the

social and public policy arenas. For example, the debate over same sex marriage has led to the creation of additional anti-gay legislation on the state and local levels, in addition to an attempted Constitutional Amendment to explicitly deny same sex couples the right to marry. This was the first Amendment suggested that served the purpose of discriminating *against* a group of people; previous Constitutional Amendments (the 14th, for example) granted equal rights rather than stripping them away. Though improving in recent history, the fight still continues for LGBT people with regards to marriage legislation. Building upon the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), a flurry of anti-gay marriage measures popped up in many states. DOMA meant that states were not required to honor same sex marriages performed in other states. It further seeks to dictate how marriage is defined under federal law (http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/issue_maps/rel_recog_1_23_13_color.pdf). The following map (figure 3), updated in January 2013, details relationship recognition laws in the United States. At the time of writing, only 9 states and District of Columbia provide full marriage equality, demonstrating the extent of the oppressive treatment of LGBT people and the devaluing of LGBT relationships.

Figure 3
Relationship Recognition Map



The lives and experiences of LGBT people have historically been devalued through the passing of legislation that relegates them to second-class citizenship. Laws not only explicitly restrict the rights of LGBT people; they also systemically erase LGBT people and their relationships through exclusionary practices. Though recent progress has occurred in the area of marriage equality and the military's ban on gay and lesbian service members, discrimination against LGBT people continues to be a sanctioned activity in our society. As demonstrated in the above map, twenty-seven states' laws prohibit the recognition of same-sex relationships. The issue of inequality is exponentially grim with regards to gender identity and expression. Only sixteen states and the District of Columbia ban discrimination based on gender identity and expression (http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/nondiscrimination_laws).

It is important to note that legislation protecting lesbian and gay people often does not include protections for the transgender and gender non-conforming. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (2007), for those jurisdictions whose anti-discrimination policies include gender identity and expression, the addition of the latter came an average of 14.5 years following the addition of sexual orientation (http://thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/years_between_gie_so.) The delay in extending protections to people based on gender identity and expression demonstrates how TGNC people are less protected by laws and less included in policies than LGB individuals. This lack of protection and inclusion results in a greater need for services, advocacy and specialized care and strengthens the need for research related to their specific experiences. These legislative practices demonstrate the ways in which the repudiation and unjust treatment of TGNC people extend beyond the clinical discourse (Shelley, 2009). Western culture renders invisible TGNC young people through marginalizing social structures that assume a binary classification of gender

(Shelley, 2009; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). The fact that laws do not recognize LGBT people as groups worthy of equal opportunity and protection begs the question: how can public policy adequately address the needs of LGBT young people, specifically TGNC young people, who are in need of housing, when LGBT people in general are not recognized or legitimized as valued members of society and TGNC people specifically are pathologized?

Policy Response

While organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the National Center for Transgender Equality and the Center for American Progress recognize the social problem status of unstably housed LGBT young people, no federal programs exist with the specific purpose of meeting their needs. Though unstably housed LGBT young people are recognized as a distinct subpopulation of homeless youth and are disproportionately represented within the population of homeless youth, they are not explicitly addressed in any federal policy related to homeless youth services. Furthermore, no federal protections exist and few state laws are in place to protect LGBT young people from discrimination while accessing federally funded programs (Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010). As previously demonstrated, discrimination against LGBT people is sanctioned in our society. This results in invisibility, and thus omits consideration of their needs from public discourse. Though they have no protections within federal policy, the awareness of their existence within the federal government is emerging. While the 2008 Congressional Research Services report on youth homelessness, released in preparation for the 2008 renewal of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) made no mention of the prevalence of unstably housed LGBT young people (Cianciotto, 2008; Ray, 2006), the updated 2012 report acknowledged sexual orientation as one precipitating factor to homelessness (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2013).

The RHYA is one of the two pieces of legislation meant to address the needs of unstably housed young people; the other is the McKinney-Vento Act. These policies came about as attitudes regarding unstably housed young people evolved, allowing for a different interpretation of the issue than as simply an act of delinquency. The McKinney-Vento Act addresses the education rights of unstably housed young people, with the goal of ensuring a public education for all students, regardless of housing status. The RHYA is meant to address the direct service needs of the unstably housed young people. While the legislation is important, it is insufficient in addressing the needs of such a large and heterogeneous population. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, over 7,500 youth across the country were denied shelter in 2009 due to a lack of resources. RHYA funded programs reported over 800,000 street outreach contacts in 2009 to unstably housed youth; fewer than 41,000 of those youth secured access to RHYA funded shelter beds (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2010). The financial resources allocated to RHYA programs is simply not sufficient to provide services to the quantity of young people in need of housing. Because LGBT young people are disproportionately represented within the population of young people in need of housing services, and because TGNC young people are often the most marginalized of this population, this disadvantages them in disproportionate ways.

Just as distinguishing characteristics make up individuals and groups within the general population, the same is true for those who are unstably housed (Tompsett, Toro, Guzicki, Manrique, & Zatakia, 2006). Current policies meant to address the needs of unstably housed youth do not take the systemic oppression of TGNC young people into consideration, and only take LGBT young people into consideration by mentioning their disproportionate representation (as indicated by the Congressional Research Service Report, 2012). Their unique needs and

experiences are not recognized. TGNC young people have consistently been subject to legal and social invisibility, unsupported by systems that are either unable or choose not to understand their needs. According to a report by the Center for American Progress, providers who receive federal homeless youth service grants are not required to adopt non discrimination policies based on gender identity or sexual orientation, nor are the grantees required to follow fundamental standards of LGBT health care (Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010). Legal and social invisibility is further manifested through unequal access to federally funded services, derived from the lack of inclusive policies and targeted services for LGBT youth in federal grants.

It has been asserted that all GNC people lose legitimacy as social actors, because our society has no place for someone who is not a woman or a man as traditionally defined and dichotomously conceptualized (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). This notion is evident in policies that require congruence between one's genitals and gender identity. In most states, individuals must undergo medical procedures in order to receive a birth certificate reflective of their gender. Courts often interpret that requirement as requiring genital reconstructive surgery, furthering the notion that genitals dictate gender and excluding many TGNC people from this important form of legal recognition (Minter & Keisling, 2010).

Kidd and Davidson (2006) point to the need to examine larger social processes and social policies as they affect unstably housed youth. To that end, studies of unstably housed TGNC young people must be contextualized within our heterosexist society that systemically marginalizes all LGBT people. Many dominant systems in our society are examples of operational heterocentrism. These include education, child welfare, law enforcement, the media, healthcare, and public assistance, all of which directly or indirectly favor heterosexual and non-transgender individuals over LGBT individuals (Herek, 2007). In fact, some service providers,

including emergency shelters, subscribe to the aforementioned policy guide of genitals/gender identity congruence (Bolas, 2007; Spade, 2006; Mottet & Ohle, 2006). It is within this social climate that housing instability among LGBT young people is gaining visibility as an emerging societal problem.

Current State of Knowledge

Enumerating the unstably housed LGBT youth population. The majority of research examining housing instability among transgender youth does not differentiate their experiences from their LGB counterparts. For this reason, findings regarding the entire population of unstably housed LGBT young people will be presented before more specifically focusing on TGNC young people. LGBT young people comprise between 20 and 40% of the approximately 1.6 million homeless youth in the United States (Durso & Gates, 2012; Kipke, Weiss, & Wong 2007; Lankenau et al., 2005; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006; Wardenski 2005). In New York City, between 28 and 44 percent of homeless youth under the age of twenty-one are LGBT identified (Lehrer, 2007). They are more likely to be thrown out of their homes than are non-LGBT youth, frequently due to conflict over their sexual orientation (Durso & Gates, 2012; Mallon, 1992; Whitbeck Chen, Hoyt, Tyler & Johnson, 2005). Research indicates that up to 26% of LGBT youth were kicked out of their homes when they came out to their families, and one-third of unstably housed LGBT young people in state care facilities report a violent physical assault following their coming out (Ray, 2006). Evidence suggests that a growing number of young people run away or are thrown out of their homes due to conflict about their sexual orientation. In one study, 73% of self-identified gay or lesbian homeless youth and 25.6% of bisexual homeless youth left home specifically because of conflict with their parents about sexual orientation (Rew et al., 2005).

The wide range of estimates of unstably housed LGBT young people has been attributed to several distinct limitations in enumerating their prevalence. First, no nationally representative study of homeless youth exists on which to base the estimated prevalence of LGBT-identified young people. Methodological challenges in locating, treating and retaining LGBT young people in treatment perpetuate their under representation in research on homeless youth (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). In addition, underreporting, sampling challenges, and uncertainty with one's sexuality/gender identity potentially lead to unreliable estimates of the prevalence of LGBT young people experiencing homelessness (Whitbeck et al., 2004).

In addition to the aforementioned complications in obtaining accurate estimates of the population, the behaviors of the young people themselves may make them difficult to identify. For example, some LGBT homeless youth do not access mainstream shelter services and are therefore not accurately represented in the shelter population. Some may depend on lovers for shelter or may be sleeping on a friend's couch, while others exchange sex for a bed. When LGBT youth do access mainstream shelter services, there is high probability that they hide this aspect of their identities for fear that they will be denied services, or will experience harassment and victimization. The lack of safe and appropriate shelter services for LGBT youth contributes to the invisibility of these underserved young people (Dunne, Prendergast, & Telford, 2002).

Enumerating the unstably housed TGNC youth population. Just as LGBT youth are disproportionately represented in the homeless youth population so are the subpopulation of transgender youth (Bolas, 2007). Transgender advocacy organizations have recently begun conducting needs assessments of the transgender population at large (The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2010; The Transgender Law Center, 2008; Mottet & Ohle, 2006; Xavier, 2000). While these studies are not specific to the subpopulation of TGNC young people, the

findings indicate that housing instability is a primary issue among TGNC individuals. Preliminary findings from the largest study to date of the transgender population have recently been released. The National Center for Transgender Equality and The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force conducted *The Transgender Discrimination Survey*, surveying 6,456 people, spanning all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam. One-fifth of those surveyed reported becoming homeless as a direct result of their transgender identity (The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2009). This large-scale study is the first of its kind, and while the findings underscore the challenges TGNC people face with regards to housing stability, it does not speak directly to the experiences of TGNC young people. It is fair to estimate at least similar, if not higher, housing challenges among TGNC young people, given their age, familial dependency, and lack of access to income.

A similar needs assessment conducted in Washington, DC found that only 26% of participants (*n=252*) were satisfied with their living situation. Furthermore, housing was ranked as the top most immediate important need of the participants. The State of Transgender California Report noted that one in five respondents (*n=646*) became homeless at some point following their identification as transgender (Transgender Law Center, 2008).

Unstably Housed TGNC Young People

Many TGNC young people live outside of mainstream society, due to prejudice and discrimination in employment, housing, heath care and education. They often end up living on the streets or without a permanent residence (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2009; Thaler, Bermudez & Sommer, 2009; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Yu, 2010; Bolas, 2007; Ray, 2006; Xavier, 2000). As a result, transgender youth are disproportionately represented in the unstably housed LGBT youth population. A recent study in

New York City found that approximately 5% of the 4000 homeless youth under the age of 21 are TGNC (Lehrer, 2007). Notably, the median age for transgender youth's departure from home was a full 2 years earlier than non-transgender youth, with transgender youth leaving home at 14 years of age and non-transgender youth leaving home at 16 (Freeman & Hamilton, 2008). While the risk and frequency of victimization of lesbian, gay and bisexual homeless youth is higher than that of their heterosexual counterparts, the risk for transgender homeless youth is even greater (Bolas, 2007; Ryan, 2003). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force reports that approximately 60% of transgender individuals have been victims of violence or harassment and 37% have faced economic discrimination (Ray, 2006). Mallon and DeCrescenzo (2006) report that transgender youth have a higher risk of suicide and are at a greater risk for HIV infection, particularly because they are often injecting hormones.

Though the literature suggests that transgender young people are disproportionately represented in the population of unstably housed young people (Bolas, 2007; Ray, 2006), little is known about the interplay between their identities and their access to housing, or the impact of housing instability on their gender identity assertion. What *is* emphasized in the research is that for a transgender young person, the expression of their authentic gender identity is critical for their self-preservation (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). In fact, it has been asserted that young people will not find peace in any part of their lives if they are not able to find a balance between their social interactions and their gender identities. They must be able to express their gender identity, which, in some cases, means being free to "re-make" themselves both socially and physically (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell & Hubbard, 2005). Research suggests that the more gender nonconforming young people are, the more likely they are to be victimized (Shelley, 2009; Ryan, 2003). In such a context, victimization and harassment frequently become

normative, as one learns to manage stigma as a part of daily living (Ryan, 2003). Therefore, "realness," the ability to pass as a member of one's gender in addition to feeling real on the inside, is crucial for unstably housed TGNC young people (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006).

"Passing" as a member of one's authentic gender is often the goal of the re-making process previously described. It refers to being perceived as a cisgender person (Davis, 2009). For instance, for a young transgender woman the re-making process could include presenting as female whereas previously she lived her life as a male. This process could occur in any or all of the following ways: altering her manner of dress, changing her name and using female pronouns, obtaining identifying documents reflecting her new name and authentic gender, taking hormones to develop secondary sex characteristics, and/or confirming her identity through surgery (Grossman et al., 2005). Many aspects of the re-making process and the concept of passing are related to social and economic privilege (Davis, 2009; Hawkins, 2009). Unstably housed TGNC young people frequently lack these privileges.

It is important to note that not all TGNC-identified people take part in these processes. While some transgender people identify fully as a gender different from their birth sex, some identify as cross gender or genderqueer, often expressing gender outside of traditional notions of masculine and feminine (Grossman et al., 2005). Such expressions provide the greatest threat to the binary gender system, to which our culture is so committed. This system either renders TGNC people invisible, or uniquely visible as violators of the gender system. Both of these options are dangerous and damaging. A population must first be acknowledged as *real* before they can be understood and deemed worthy of rights. In order to accurately conceptualize and not pathologize TGNC people, the entire notion of authenticity or single truth will have to give way to new categories that are less fixed.

TGNC young people can be at risk in public spaces (Davis, 2009). They also lack youth only space where they can socialize which leads them to increased involvement with adult social groups and in adult activities (Davis, 2009; Moon et al., 2000). At the same time, they have limited access, if any access at all, to positive TGNC adult role models (Davis, 2009; McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010; Steiglitz, 2010). Often LGBT youth serving organizations' policies and practices may not apply to or include TGNC young people (McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010; Mallon, 2009). TGNC young people have difficulty accessing shelter services, which commonly impose binary gender conforming rules, room assignments, and dress codes (Thaler, Bermudez & Sommer, 2009). Therefore, many young people end up on the street rather than in shelters that are meant to keep them safe. The lack of appropriate services and stable housing for transgender individuals often leads to difficulties obtaining and maintaining employment (Ray, 2006). The above factors point to a need for safe places for TGNC young people; the spaces in which other youth might feel safe – social service agencies, health care clinics, schools, group homes – are often the places where TGNC young people are subject to abuse and harassment (Stieglitz, 2010).

Identity Disclosure

The lives of TGNC people are not only impacted by macro level societal limitations; familial stressors also directly affect them. The societal intolerance of perceived non-normative gender expression begets familial rejection of such expression, further fueling society's denigration of TGNC people. Maguen et al. (2007) affirm the significance of disclosure to parents, stating that it is "important in a quest to achieve a solidified sense of self and bolster feelings of self-approval" (p. 4). Often, rather than the family being a place of refuge for TGNC young people, it becomes enemy territory. TGNC people face the very real possibility of being

disowned by their families of origin. It is important to note that this reaction by the family is not due to something the individual has *done*; rather it is a reaction to a fundamental component of the individual's identity. Nevertheless, it is often perceived by the family as something the young person has *done*. Ignorance and the resulting lack of acceptance from their families of origin can leave TGNC young people disconnected from family support (Davis, 2009). In fact, openness with one's family can be experienced as a life-threatening situation (Connolly, 2005).

Following the disclosure of their gender identity, TGNC young people may be ejected from their homes or may be subject to a level of emotional and/or physical harm that necessitates their departure from their homes (Burgess, 2009; Davis, 2009; Thaler, Bermudez & Sommer, 2009; Koken, Bimbi & Parsons, 2009). Our society continuously rewards parents who socialize their children to traditional binary gender roles. This leaves transgender youth in a constant search for a supportive environment in which they can be themselves (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). As long as society continues to reward parents who socialize their children to traditional binary gender roles, and as long as parents continue to do so, transgender youth are unlikely to find that supportive environment within their families and homes.

Koken, Bimbi & Parsons (2009) identified a recurring theme of transwomen's non-forceful departure from home during adolescence. Participants in their qualitative study reported a lack of acceptance and warmth, in addition to unequal treatment compared with siblings. The idea of unequal treatment was also found in Factor and Rothblum's (2007) study of TGNC individuals and their non-transgender siblings. Because the family is often the site of a TGNC person's first experience with their emerging identities, it is also often the site of their first experiences of violence and rejection based on their gender non-conforming behavior (Koken, Bimbi & Parsons, 2009). This violence and rejection often leads to housing instability.

Likewise, a portion of the transgender youth studied by Grossman & D'Augelli (2006) had distanced themselves from their parents, and others were forced to leave their homes. Grossman, et al. (2005) report that more than 59% of the participants in their study (*n*=55) faced negative reactions from their parents upon disclosure of their transgender identity. Not only did parents often react negatively, they also became physically and verbally abusive (Grossman et al., 2005). A subsequent study (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007) found that between 35% and 73% of youth respondents reported "sometimes" or "often" being verbally abused by their parents as a result of their gender expression. Between 13% and 36% of youth respondents reported "sometimes" or "often" being physically abused by their parents due to their gender expression. The implications of familial rejection are far-reaching.

> Abuse by the people who are supposed to help or love you is a grave concern and provides a reason for why so many transgender youth leave home. Hence, discrimination and victimization frequently set into motion a chain of events that can result in a host of challenges for transgender youth including homelessness, isolation, limited educational opportunities, unemployment, a need to engage in sex work and other illicit means for survival and substance abuse. (Steiglitz, 2010, p.199)

Family rejection has been linked to negative health outcomes. Researchers with the Family Acceptance Project have found that high levels of family rejection are associated with negative health and mental health outcomes for LGB young people. Young people who reported high levels of family rejection during adolescence were more likely to report engaging in unsafe sexual behaviors, use illegal drugs, and report suicide attempts compared to young people who reported low or no family rejection (Ryan, Heubner, Diaz, & Sasnchez, 2009). Garofalo and colleagues (2006) report that transgender youth face significant challenges due to social isolation and limited understanding of their lives and experiences. Research does not contextualize the isolation experienced by transgender youth based on their environment or their housing status.

However, the literature does address the significance of transgender identity disclosure. Maguen et al. (2007) state: "It can be the culmination of a life long struggle to quell, temper, or deny the true internal feelings that have caused mental conflict as individuals try to reconcile their internal state with their external appearance within a socially imposed, binary gender system" (p.4).

The challenges facing TGNC young people around disclosure cannot be overemphasized. "Young gender nonconformists face the complicated developmental task of building identities in a social environment that invalidates their reality and may even punish them for violating traditional gender roles (Burdge, 2007, p. 244.)" External factors, such as one's familial response and societal context must be taken into account when examining the process of gender identity development and assertion among TGNC young people.

Can't you just add a T?: Differential Needs of LGBT Young People

The trend in lesbian and gay studies has been to add a "T" to the LGB acronym. This is likely out of both a desire to be more inclusive and also in recognition of shared oppressions. Adding a T may also increase the political power of this shared social identity. However, recent literature indicates that TGNC people are more stigmatized than gay and lesbian people and as a result, require different types of services and support (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; McGuire & Conover-Williams, 2010; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010). Just as distinguishing characteristics make up individuals and groups who are non-sexual or gender minorities, the same is true for those who *are* sexual and gender minorities. Xavier (2000) strongly recommended that the traditional approach of including the transgender population within MSM categories for prevention planning be critically re-examined, if not abandoned altogether. In some very general ways, the experiences of TGNC young people may parallel the experiences of LGB young people. However, there are also distinct differences that must be examined (Hill,

2005). For example, TGNC identities are pathologized in some communities in ways that LGB identities are not; the fear (and reality) of being labeled mentally ill due to one's experience and expression of gender can be uniquely relevant to TGNC individuals. When TGNC people come out, they may also change their name, pronoun, and identifying documents to align with their gender. These are steps in the coming out process that LGB individuals do not usually face. Likewise, a TGNC individual may seek confirming surgery or hormone treatment as part of their identity development and articulation, creating medical and related financial issues that are not experienced by LGB individuals (Hill, 2005). Though presumably well meaning, simply including a "T" does a disservice to TGNC young people. When advocates and researchers represent LGBT young people as a homogenous group, it is difficult to assess and advocate for their individual needs. The needs vary within each subgroup under the umbrella term LGBT, as demonstrated in the previous discussion regarding varied legal protections for LGB and T populations.

Attributing the results of studies composed primarily of gay male youth to all LGBT youth masks the lack of research and precise needs of transgender young people (Ryan, 2003). Consider the following example: A 2002 study comparing the experiences of homeless LGBT youth to those of homeless heterosexual youth identified 84 "sexual minority" homeless young people to represent the LGBT sample. Of those 84 young people, 8 identified as gay men, 4 identified as lesbian, 71 identified as bisexual and only one young person identified as transgender (Cochran, et al., 2002). This is not to belittle the studies that reflect the needs of the entire group; the existing literature has provided a crucial foundation from which to build knowledge about TGNC young people by providing an understanding of the specific risks they face and highlighting their health and social needs. Including TGNC young people within LGBT

research, rather than allowing them a distinct category of inquiry, replicates the common misreading of transgender people as homosexual (Shelley, 2009). In so doing, they are displaced.

Assessing the Needs of Unstably Housed TGNC Young People

An emerging common theme in the literature is recognition of the need for affirming services specifically designed to meet the needs of unstably housed TGNC young people (Cochran, et al., 2002; Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006; Whitbeck, et al., 2004; Bolas, 2007; Nolan, 2006). Otherwise, this population may not utilize or have access to much needed services due to fear of rejection and harassment (Whitbeck, et al., 2004). Also noted is the need for trans-affirming practices for TGNC identified young people, who make up a disproportionate amount of the unstably housed LGBT youth population (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006; Bolas, 2007).

Service access and acquisition are often complex and sometimes dangerous for TGNC young people. Frequently, TGNC young people are placed in facilities by their birth gender, regardless of their gender identity and presentation (Garofalo et al., 2006). This issue has attracted the attention of transgender advocates. In the words of Dean Spade (2006), the founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project:

> Yes, being trans is real enough to get you falsely arrested and beaten, raped, or killed in prison, but not real enough to get you access to a domestic violence shelter, a drug treatment program that provides an alternate to incarceration, or a homeless shelter that recognizes your gender (p. 70).

Transgender young people who do safely access mainstream shelter services often cannot comply with the program requirements. For example, a program may require that a young person get a job within 30 days. Transgender young people face difficulties obtaining identification and often experience transphobia from employers, leaving them unable to find jobs as quickly as other youth (Bolas, 2007). Anecdotal evidence suggests that unstably housed

young people often lack proper identification. For transgender young people, obtaining proper identification means that the name and gender marker on each piece of identification matches their gender identity. This process is arduous, and can impede their ability to access medical care, employment, education, and social services. TGNC individuals also have fewer legal protections than other sexual minorities and often face housing and employment discrimination (Minter & Keisling, 2010). Therefore, accessing appropriate and affirming care is vitally important, yet often complicated for TGNC young people.

As discussed earlier, it is important to consider the heterosexist and cisnormative context in which LGBT young people exist. TGNC young people experience even more systemic oppression than their LGB counterparts. Regardless of society's view regarding systemic discrimination based on LGB identities, awareness exists of systematic discrimination, or heterosexism/heteronormativity. The same is not true as it relates to systemic discrimination based on gender identity, or cissexism/cisnormativity. Cisnormativity is so pervasive that it is unnoticeable. We live in a gendered world, where the first question asked of an expectant mother is most often "is it a boy or a girl?" Beginning before birth, humans are gendered and with the understanding of gender comes gendered expectations. In the popular media, transgender people have been referred to as "last in the pecking order," and have the most difficulty obtaining employment, housing and benefits (Otis, 2001). Transgenderism is routinely pathologized. This was confirmed when transgender people were categorized as having gender identity disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III* in 1980 (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). LGB people have benefited from their declassification as mentally ill and the decriminalization of homosexual sex acts, as in *Lawrence vs. Texas*

(Wardenski, 2004), however such systemic change has not taken place for transgender individuals.

Gaps in Current Knowledge

Evidence suggests that TGNC young people are likely to be at higher risk of violence and discrimination; however little scholarly material addresses their particular needs and experiences (Stieglitz, 2010; Ryan & Rivers, 2003). In fact, affirming literature on TGNC young people scarcely exists (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force recently referred to LGBT youth homelessness as an epidemic (Ray, 2006). Multiple needs assessments and reports confirm the disproportionate representation of LGBT young people within the population of unstably housed youth (Bolas, 2007; Freeman & Hamilton, 2008; Quintana, Rosenthal & Krehely, 2010; Ray, 2006). New York City Councilmember Lou Fiddler recently stated that youth homelessness is the shame of the city (Lehrer, 2007). A thorough review of the literature confirms the housing crisis facing LGBT/GNC young people. Though the need has been established, available services for unstably housed LGBT/GNC young people are grossly disproportionate to the young people in need of services. Missing from the discourse is a critique of the system that is failing to meet the needs of this population.

Additionally, the paucity of scholarship related to the needs and experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people must be addressed. Most of the literature reviewed here reflected the needs and experiences of LGB youth, with little mention of TGNC young people (Rew et al., 2005; Moon et al., 2000; Dunne, Prendergast & Telford, 2002; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Cochran and colleagues (2002) included transgender young people in their study comparing the experiences of LGBT homeless youth with their heterosexual counterparts. Nonetheless, in this study only one of the eighty-four sexual minority youth participants identified as transgender.

The voices of TGNC young people are routinely absent from research; studies that claim an LGBT sample must include more than one transgender voice. Van Leeuwen and colleagues (2006) chose not to include transgender young people in their study due to the small sample size. The issue of a small sample size was present in all of the reviewed studies that included TGNC young people, as was the consistent assertion that future research is needed to better understand this population. Problems identifying and enumerating unstably housed LGBT young people, especially TGNC young people, pose a serious problem for researchers interested in learning more about the needs and experiences of this population.

Research on the population of unstably housed TGNC young people must continue to examine how the larger social processes and policies impact their lives and experiences (Kidd & Davidson, 2006; Wardenski, 2005), specifically through the examination of systems of cisnormativity and their impact on the accessibility of programs for TGNC young people. Furthermore, those conducting research must be mindful of the ways that transgender communities have been historically disenfranchised and marginalized, and actively engage in research that is anti-oppressive in nature. Davis (2009) states:

> In seeking to understand our own subjugated knowledge, we as practitioners must remain aware that this knowledge is also produced and later interpreted under the oppressive influence of the prevailing and dominant global knowledge – one steeped in an irrational fear or gender difference or cultural transphobia, as well as sexism, racism, classism, bigenderism, and so forth. (p. 2)

Those conducting research within TGNC communities must make conscious efforts to empower these communities (Hill, 2005). This is a relatively new framework for research with TGNC individuals. According to Factor & Rothblum (2008), the majority of articles published about transgender people since the 1950's have focused on individuals in clinical/medical settings. Grossman & D'Augelli (2006) point out that the majority of data concerning TGNC

young people have been collected from those who seek counseling and other services at gender identity clinics. Much of that research is based on drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, and mental health problems. This is problematic because it excludes other aspects of TGNC lives and experiences. Additionally, it provides a limited understanding to social workers and other professionals who may seek additional information in the existing literature to guide their work (Cooper, 2009). Hill (2005) calls on researchers to take a wellness approach rather than conducting pathologizing research.

The absence of non-pathological research endangers societal impressions of TGNC people. More studies are needed that focus on the resiliency and strength of TGNC people. Burdge (2007) emphasized the need for a paradigmatic shift in research into TGNC communities, stating, "There is much to learn from the transgender community about courage, resilience, authenticity, and social justice (p. 249)." Hill (2005) states that future studies should ask questions that will improve the lived experiences of TGNC people in their communities, rather than reiterating their health and social needs. The need exists to also ask questions that will improve the lived experiences of TGNC people with regards to housing status. Minter and Keisling (2010) suggest that "mental and physical health care clinicians, academics, and policymakers have an obligation to advocate for social and legal acceptance of transgender people, because that advocacy is essential to the mental health, and, in fact, the survival, of transgender people" (p. 146). Social workers are bound by the Code of Ethics and the principles therein. Two core principles are to challenge social injustice and to respect the inherent dignity and worth of people (2008). Engaging in non-pathological research is one mechanism for enacting ethical social work practice.

The literature consistently affirms both the lack of empirically based information about the population of unstably housed TGNC young people and also the urgent need to examine their characteristics and experiences (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Van Leeuwen, et al, 2006; Connolly, 2005). One focus group participant in Grossman & D'Augelli's study stated: "there is nothing for transgender youth. Please help us" (2006, p. 125). The proposed inquiry will add to the limited body of knowledge about unstably housed TGNC young people. This research rejects the traditional pathological framework through which TGNC people have historically been viewed; it opens the door to the other side of risk in hopes of identifying, and thus making it possible to build upon, the strengths of an often-silenced population. Unstably housed TGNC young people are displaced from their families of origin and other traditional forms of support, rendering them homeless in a literal/physical sense. Likewise, they may be in the process of developing and articulating their gender identities, rendering them homeless in a gendered/psychological sense. Excluding them from a strengths-based discourse or wellness discourse furthers their displacement and replicates the oppressive societal structures that have led to their displacement. The literature presented above points to a critical gap - the paucity of scholarship reflective of the lived experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people and the negative implications for them in both policy and practice contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

> *That's when I feel homeless. Cuz they ain't no box for me. I'm Isa, ain't no box. Ain't no box for me, you know what I mean. And so that's when I felt homeless. When people will try to categorize me, felt they couldn't. So you're just some thing. Go somewhere. Because I don't want, I don't have the time to think beyond the, the shallow box and the shallow binary bullshit. I don't have time to think deeper. I don't want to think deeper, so stay the fuck away from me. - Isa*

By the very nature of their existence, TGNC young people challenge gendered societal norms. The cisnormative structure of society leaves no space for TGNC young people; rather systems, policies, and practices contribute to the erasure of their voices and their experiences. The same is true for unstably housed young people, often described as an invisible population. In order to engage in effective work to reduce the population of TGNC young people experiencing homelessness, it is imperative to first understand who they are and what their lives are like. This chapter presents the methodological tools that I employ in this dissertation. In this chapter I advance the need for the addition of creative methods that offer additional avenues through which unstably housed TGNC young people may communicate their experiences.

The methodological approach for a study should be in alignment with the research questions. This primary question for study is: What role does the often necessary shift from stability to instability (with regards to housing) play in the reconfiguration of identity among TGNC young people?

Additional guiding questions include:

I. What is the meaning and significance of gender identity and expression for unstably housed TGNC young people?

II. What is the interplay between gender identity and the experience of housing instability among TGNC young people?

Given the research questions, phenomenology provides the most appropriate methodological scaffolding for this study. The goal of this study is to understand the lived experience of unstably housed TGNC young people. The inquiry seeks to describe the participants' journeys related to housing instability and gender identity assertion with as much accuracy as possible. The rationale for this methodological framework follows.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is the study of what people experience and how they understand the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 1983). It assumes the existence of an essence of shared experience, and seeks to explore how humans make sense of their experiences and subsequently transform their experiences into consciousness (Patton, 2002). The proposed study can be situated within the phenomenological tradition. It explores the ways in which unstably housed TGNC young people make sense of their experiences and understand the world through the lenses of gender and housing instability. This study explores the significance that the young people assign to their gender identity and to their housing status, and seeks to understand how they transform their experiences into consciousness. The phenomenological study design will facilitate the emergence of the similarities among the participants' journeys as well as the instances where their journeys diverge.

To date, there are no studies examining the specific experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people as a distinct population. Therefore, minimal knowledge has been cultivated about the process of gender identity assertion among unstably housed TGNC young people, and even less knowledge has been produced regarding the interaction between their identity assertion

trajectories and housing instability. The fact that little information exists about the experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people, and even less about the meaning they assign to their identities and housing status, necessitates qualitative inquiry. This study will lay the groundwork for future examinations into the needs and experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people by providing critical insight into the phenomena as experienced by the young people themselves. Therefore, future instruments, whether they are quantitative or qualitative, can more accurately reflect the lived experiences of the population.

It is important to acknowledge that this inquiry deals with an under-researched population, one that is scarcely represented in the literature. Housing instability among young people is a subject area that is explored in the literature. However, the homeless population, like the TGNC population, also carries a social stigma. It is important to consider the environment in which the respondents of this study conduct their activities of daily living. It is also imperative, in this inquiry, to consider the heteronormative and cisnormative context in which TGNC young people exist. The social invisibility of TGNC young people necessitates inclusive and representative research. Therefore, it is critical to develop and maintain close relationships with the unstably housed TGNC community to avoid misrepresentation and exploitation (Hill, 2005). Furthermore, because little is known about the experiences of gender identity articulation among homeless youth, this study must allow categories to emerge and shift the nature of the inquiry as appropriate. Mintzberg (1983) states "peripheral vision, poking around in relevant places, a good dose of creativity – that is what makes good research" (p. 109). Further, Janesick (1994) likens the qualitative researcher to an artist with regards to the recontextualization process that occurs as the researcher situates the study within the shared experience of herself and the respondents. Both of these statements speak to the nature of exploratory study and to the

importance of design flexibility, again reinforcing the choice of qualitative design.

The examination of homelessness among TGNC young people necessitates proximity, without which an investigator would be unlikely to gain access to authentic information. This need for proximity further supports the phenomenological orientation of this qualitative study design. Without building a rapport with respondents, the likelihood of obtaining an authentic account of their experiences will diminish (Janesick, 1994). In the case of unstably housed TGNC young people, rapport is especially crucial. Unstably housed young people are likely distrustful of adults/outsiders, possibly resulting from the factors leading up to their homelessness or due to experiences of adults/outsiders on the street. Additionally, TGNC identities continue to be pathologized and taboo in American society. Without first establishing trust, it is unlikely that one would speak openly and honestly about their personal process in understanding their identity or about their identity-related experiences on the street.

Additionally, of significant importance is the inclusion and validation of TGNC young people's voices in the research. A population that is misrepresented and silenced in society at large has been treated similarly in the world of research. In a conscious effort to work against the subjugation of their voices, the research utilized two qualitative data collection techniques – semi-structured interviews and the visual method of mapping. A detailed discussion of the data collection techniques is preceded by a detailed description of the target population and sampling procedures.

Target population

The target population for this study was New York City-based young people between the ages of 18 and 25 who self-identified as transgender or gender non-conforming and have experienced housing instability. The decision was made to include young people who are gender

non-conforming in either identity or expression; even if they do not adopt the label transgender, they still must navigate a society that discriminates against those who transgress traditional forms of gender expression and/ or gender role behavior.

Sampling Procedures

This study utilized a criterion snowball sampling technique. The first phase of recruitment involved posting flyers in public spaces such as: bulletin boards at the LGBT community center and drop in centers that serve unstably housed young people. Additionally, the flyer was sent out to the Trans-Academics list serve and the list serve of the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services Runaway and Homeless Youth provider group. Though young people did not have direct access to the list serves, the goal was to reach a broad range of service providers who could make the information available to a diverse population of TGNC young people. Phase two of the sample recruitment plan involved reaching out to NYC organizations that work with TGNC individuals and asking for their assistance in making the information available to their client populations. Organizations that were contacted include the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center, The Ali Forney Center, FIERCE!, the Youth Enrichment Services Program at the LGBT Community Center, The Door, Green Chimneys Children's Services, and the Sylvia Rivera Law Project. Participants were also encouraged to tell their peers about the research project following their individual interviews.

As previously stated, a criterion snowball sampling technique was utilized. The criteria for inclusion included:

1. Participants must be between the ages of 18 – 25. This age group was selected for several reasons. Participants under the age of 18 will not be included due to consent-related issues. The maximum age of 25 was chosen because it is the cut off age for youth

services for agencies that serve young people over the age of 21. Young people between 21-25 have access to less services that are specifically designed for young people.

2. Participants must self-identify as TGNC. Additional terms will be used on the recruitment flyer, as the language that young people use evolves over time and young people might not identify with the terms transgender or gender non-conforming. Additional identifiers found on the recruitment flyer include: genderqueer, bi-gendered, androgynous, boi, AG, drag queen, drag king, MTF, FTM, trans, femme queen, 2 spirit, gender different.
3. Participants must have had an experience of housing instability lasting at least 60 days. Because the study focused on processes related to gender identity assertion and housing instability, the duration of housing instability matters. The experiences of a person who was kicked out of their house and homeless for 3 days will invariably look different than someone who was unstably housed for 60 days. Sixty days was chosen as the minimum length of time because it is the *maximum* length of time a young person is allowed to stay in an emergency shelter funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.
4. Participants must currently live in stable housing. For the purposes of this study, stable housing includes renting a room or apartment, residing in a supportive housing program, living in a transitional living program, or a shelter program with supportive services.
5. Participants must have been living in stable housing for a minimum of 2 months, and their most recent period of housing instability must have occurred within an 18-month period prior to the interview. The rationale for imposing a specific timeframe around the most recent experience of housing instability is two-fold: 1.) to avoid interviewing

individuals whose premature recollection of the experience would cause undue emotional distress and 2.) to limit recall bias.

The above criteria was stated on the recruitment flyer. The criteria for exclusion are:

1. Individuals who are under the age of 18 will not be eligible for the study due to issues related to parental consent.
2. Individuals who are currently living on the street or in a place not meant for human habitation (such as a car, on the subway, in a park) will not be eligible for participation due to the potentially critical nature of their present situations. Additionally, because the participants will be asked to recall potentially triggering events that have occurred in their lives thus far, it is important that they are not currently in a state of crisis that may be further exacerbated by the research.

Recruitment took place from January 2012 to July 2012 and yielded a sample of 27 TGNC young people. All of the participants resided in New York City at the time of the interview, and all of the participants were connected to supportive services.

Human Subjects

The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Graduate Center at the City University of New York. The study protocol was transferred to the Hunter College Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Office and was reviewed and approved for continuing review.

The research participants experienced no direct benefit from their participation in the research, however their contributions will add to the small body of knowledge concerning this underresearched topic and population. Developing a sense of accomplishment or mastery over one's life experiences through the sharing of information may be useful. The act of having one's

story heard and valued may have also be validating experience for the participants. The participants were not exposed to any direct harm through their participation in the research. Just as the interview process may facilitate a sense of mastery over one's experiences, it is also possible that the recollection and sharing of life events may cause emotional distress. The commonly documented experiences related to homelessness, including risk and rejection, may be upsetting for young people to recall. The inclusion/exclusion criteria were developed in an effort to guard against this. The participants were also informed that they could stop the interview at any time, or they could choose not to answer any of the questions they were asked. None of the participants chose to end the interview or to skip any of the interview questions. One participant did opt out of the mapping activity, as the interview took more time than she had planned for. Referrals to mental health and social service providers were made available for the participants (see Appendix D for the referral list). One participant requested a referral to counseling services and was provided with a list of agencies she could access.

Participants were asked to choose a name for use on all written materials related to the study. Digitally recorded interviews were catalogued by the name chosen by the participants. All materials were kept on a usb drive and stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B) detailing confidentiality policies and procedures. The signed consent forms were kept separate from other materials, ensuring that the data are de-identified.

Methods of Data Collection

This project is qualitative, and utilized two techniques for data collection: in person semi-structured interviews and the visual method of mapping. The semi-structured interview guide asked participants to describe their experiences related to both their gender identity and also their

experiences of housing instability. The visual mapping prompt produced visual data that is representative of each participant's unique journey, further building upon the interview responses and introducing new areas for exploration. Taken together, these tools have enabled the expansion of knowledge about the lived experiences of this underresearched population.

Semi-structured interviews. Data were collected in a single in-person interview, using two data collection techniques – semi-structured interviews and the visual method of mapping. Semi-structured interviews allowed TGNC young people to describe their lived experiences, in their own words, rather than having to adapt their narratives to pre-established, fixed categories that may not resonate with their lives. Open-ended questions allowed for a multiplicity of responses, from which themes emerged and variations surfaced. This is an inductive process, allowing categories to materialize from the words of the participants.

One on one interviews were chosen over focus groups in the hopes that TGNC young people would be more forthcoming with their experiences related to two highly stigmatized topics – the process of gender identity assertion and their experiences of homelessness. The choice to conduct interviews in person was based on three primary reasons, each of which is premised on principles of social justice: data quality, the importance of relationship, and the facilitation of the visual component of data collection.

Conducting the interviews in person, rather than via the internet or utilizing a pen and paper method, enhanced the quality of the data collected. The interview questions were designed to produce narrative accounts of lived experiences, to enable people to tell their stories. Giving marginalized people the space in which to tell their stories can be a transformative experience for the speaker and the listener, and is an act of social justice. Because TGNC young people are often invisible, as are unstably housed young people, providing the space for the articulation of

their stories allowed them to both be heard *and* to be seen. Furthermore, conducting the interviews in person allows for a dialogue that serves to deepen the stories of the participants. The researcher was able to utilize prompts and ask clarifying questions in person, whereas internet questionnaires or pen and paper surveys foreclose the opportunity for such exploration and clarification. Accessing the depth of experience is one of the benefits of qualitative research, and collecting data through in person interviews facilitates the gathering of complex, deep data. Additionally, an in person interview takes into account the varying levels of literacy among participants, as well as their access to technology, both of which could be barriers to internet based or pen and paper surveys.

Janesick (1994) emphasizes the importance of establishing rapport in order to obtain accurate accounts of participants' lived experiences. The decision to conduct in person interviews was also based on a recognition of this concept. Building trust and establishing rapport can better occur in person. Furthermore, when asking a TGNC young person for their time, the research will give their own time in exchange. Grounded in principles of social justice, the researcher acknowledges the reciprocal exchange within the research process and demonstrates this in the offering of time and resources. In person interviews also allow for the sharing of resources and referrals should the participants express a need for additional supports. This is important, as unstably housed TGNC young people may be in the midst of crisis.

Finally, in person interviews allow for the utilization of mapping as a data collection technique. This visual method is an important part of the study design, and could not occur in the same way without interpersonal interaction.

Mapping. Mapping is an innovative research method introduced by Denise Jodelet and Stanley Milgram in the 1960s; their inquiry sought to understand the ways in which individuals'

experiences and characteristics shaped their experiences of Paris (Futch & Fine, 2011). Though underutilized, mapping has the potential to produce rich qualitative material about identity and the social, structural, and relational aspects of people's lives that contribute to the shaping of identity (Futch & Fine, in press). Mapping as method suits social work research, especially when considering the person in environment, a key theoretical approach of social work practice that recognizes the relationship between an individual and the macro environment in which they exist (Germain & Gitterman, 2008). The act of generating their own maps enables TGNC young people to illustrate their worlds, as they see them, and themselves within those worlds.

The reasons for adding a visual component to the data collection process are multiple. According to Bagnoli (2009), who has used drawings and visual methods in her investigations into young people's identities, creatively mixing methods has the potential to generate new ways of "interrogating the social" (p. 548). The processes of interest in this study - gender identity assertion and housing instability - are individual processes that are deeply embedded within social constructs. The addition of a creative task encourages non-standard modes of thinking, reducing the potential for "canned" responses and reliance on clichés (Bagnoli, 2009). Additionally, visual forms of research can be effective in "rendering vivid critical social issues" (Powell, 2010, p. 539). Understanding the experiences of TGNC young people is a contemporary, critical social issue.

Furthermore, visual methods can enhance participants' reflexivity in the context of an interview, allowing for the emergence of a more holistic picture of the study's subject (Bagnoli, 2009). Whereas the traditional interview privileges language as the primary mode of knowledge transmission, our daily lives are layered not only with language, but also with visual and sensory meaning. Not all knowing is easily translated into words (Bagnoli, 2009). TGNC young

people's lives may be characterized by experiences that are not easily described through language. This could be for a variety of reasons, either because the language does not exist with which to name their experiences (Shelton, 2008), they are not aware of the language others use to name their experiences, or it is too distressing to assign words to their experiences. Futch and Fine (in press) recognize mapping as having the ability to "resist the hegemony of the written word and draw on the complexities of our interconnected life spaces in a time when individualism is inordinately prioritized amongst psychological theories and methods" (p. 2). Furthermore, participants may have varying expressive styles and differing linguistic capacities. Providing multiple options for communicating takes these stylistic differences into account.

Bagnoli's (2009) studies demonstrate the utility of a visual task for elicitation purposes within the interview. Allowing participants to transcend verbal approaches of thinking, visual tasks capture a breadth of experience that may otherwise be neglected. Therefore, arts-based methods may "encourage a holistic narration of self, and also help overcoming silences, including those aspects of one's life that might for some reason be sensitive and difficult to be related in words" (Bagnoli, 2009, p. 566). Participants in this study were asked to talk about experiences that may be difficult to discuss, such as their experiences with housing instability, their identification with a stigmatized group, and the meaning of their identities. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the study topics, the inclusion of an arts-based method is well suited for the study.

Fine and Sirin (2007) utilized the social-psychological method of personal identity mapping in their work with Muslim-American youth, asking them "simply to draw their selves (i.e., student, daughter/son, athlete, Muslim, American) the way they see it" (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 26). Similarly, in this inquiry, transgender/GNC participants were asked to create visual

representations (text, images, symbols) of their journey from the time they left home until now. The creation of these representations occurred during the interview as indicated on the interview guide (see Appendix C2). The prompt for the mapping component of data collection is simple. Participants were asked to map their journeys from the time they left home until now. If participants asked for clarification about terms such as home or journey or map, they were told that there is no wrong way to think about those words; whatever the words mean to them is right. The loose structure of this question frees the participant from the presumed linear construction of the timeline, a limitation noted by Bagnoli (2009). One might subjectively experience time in nonlinear ways; repetition of events may be more meaningful to individuals than the sequencing of events. Framing this activity as a mapping exercise frees the participants from the confines of the linear sequencing of events, and allows for the possibility of dynamic and reciprocal exchanges between their experiences over time. Powell (2010) suggests that the broadening of the map from its conventional function as a marker of geographic space and place allows it to become a tool for portraying lived experiences of place, time and space in a nonlinear fashion.

These participant created representations generate interpretative material, providing a basis for further communication between the researcher and the participant (Bagnoli, 2009; Fine & Sirin, 2007). In addition to talking about their lives and experiences from memory, the participants could use the map as the focus of conversation and an aid in the telling of their stories. Because the maps were self-created, the participants acted as guides during this part of data collection. The use of simple instructions in the mapping activity were meant to provide a scaffolding for the participants to fill in with what is the most salient for them (Bagnoli, 2009). Because TGNC young people often exist on the periphery of society and are often silenced, it is important for researchers to explicitly include their voices. In line with Powell (2010), allowing

study participants to create their own representations provides them with a sense of agency by giving them full control over the structure and content of what they share. Further, through the creative mapping task, the participants were able to raise subjects of importance not previously considered by the researcher. The discussion of the map was a part of the data collection process and was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed along with the interviews.

Qualitative Data Analysis

This exploratory study captured the spoken and visual narratives of unstably housed TGNC young people. The shared narratives totaled 1,629 recorded minutes, just over twenty-seven hours, and 26 participants generated visual maps of their journeys. As is the nature of the phenomenological study design, themes emerged in the data as information was gathered. By not imposing categories onto the data in an attempt to fit the data into pre-determined classifications, both similarities and great variability between participants' stories emerged. A crucial piece of data analysis was the emergence of categories, from the participants' visual and verbal narratives. Valentine (2007) emphasizes the importance of this process: "In order to reach the people you wish to help, you need to understand and use the categories by which they understand themselves"(p. 134). The following section will review the steps undertaken in the process of data analysis as guided by the heuristic process of phenomenological inquiry described by Moustakas (Patton, 2002). The steps include: immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

Immersion. The goal of the immersion phase is to steep oneself in the experience of the phenomena under study, "contacting the texture, tone, mood, range, and content of the experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 486). Part of this process of "steeping" included the process employed for interview transcription. I transcribed the interviews within a few weeks of each

meeting. The choice to transcribe the interviews myself was purposeful, so that I could immerse myself in the data from this very first stage. Familiarizing myself with the data allowed me to get a sense of the participants' voices firsthand. I did not rely on transcription software for this stage of the analysis. Beginning with data collection and continuing through the transcription and remainder of data analysis, I engaged in the ongoing process of reflexivity. This is a customary and critical component of qualitative data analysis that strengthens the capability of the researcher to effectively make sense of the data (Padgett, 1998). The more I became immersed in the data, the more I became aware of my own role in the research, as a former social work practitioner and also as a formerly unstably housed LGBT young person. The content of the memos included my own reactions to the participants' stories. At times, I identified with a participant's experience, as it mirrored my own. For example, Rebekah described realizing that her parents covered up the truth about her forced departure from home. She says:

> Then I go on my Facebook and my aunt from back home, she messaged me and was like, how could you do this to your family? I was...I was just totally blown under the water. I did not understand and it was, it was kind of like my parents were trying to save their ass by saying, ok, well it was his decision to leave. Instead of being *honest* and telling my family back home that they kicked me out.

Following the interview with Rebekah, I wrote in my journal about my own family's communication about my forced departure from home. It was important for me to process my own feelings and questions about this particular part of Rebekah's experience, and of my experience. This allowed me to remain open to similar narratives emerging from the interviews without predetermining the course of the remaining interviews or presuming the salience of this point based solely on our shared experience. Because the threat of researcher bias is ever present in qualitative research (Padgett, 1998) I wrote memos following each encounter with the data, whether that encounter was an in person interview, a transcription, or any step in the process of

analysis. This act of memoing supported my ability to become aware of personal bias or beliefs carried over from my past experiences, and to gain clarity about any preconceived notions that might impact my ability to conduct an investigation without imposing too much meaning too early on in the process. Active engagement in the process of reflexivity is a tool to increase the trustworthiness of the analysis and lend credibility to the findings (Patton, 2002).

Incubation. The second stage of Moustakas' heuristic process of phenomenological inquiry is incubation. During this phase, the researcher takes pause and refrains from imposing premature meaning onto the data (Patton, 2002). Rather than engaging in active interpretation, Moustakas states that the researcher "must permit the glimmerings and awakenings to form, allow the birth of understanding to take place in its own readiness and completeness" (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 486). In this stage, I conducted an initial read through of the transcripts and a review of the participant generated maps. I recorded my reactions and initial thoughts regarding emergent themes within the transcripts and the maps. The initial themes can be found in table 1. The transcripts, the maps, and the memos were all uploaded into Nvivo9 for data management purposes.

Table 1
Initial themes

Interview transcripts	Maps
Acceptance	Absence of people
Body	Accomplishments
Coming out	Buildings
Community	Future
Conflation of sexual orientation/gender identity	Geography
Connection	Hope
Danger	Identity Assertion
Early awareness	Instability
Family	Relational
Freedom	Self (presence/absence)
Gender ID & homelessness related	
Gender management	

Geography
Identity definitions
Internal processes
Kicked out
Knowledge
Misunderstood
Passing
Process of assertion
Program as home
Program problems
Program recommendations
Rejection
Risk/safety
Self-asserting
Self-sufficiency
Societal perception
Stability/instability
Suicide
Survival
Validation

Illumination. The first two phases of analysis, immersion and incubation, laid the groundwork for a deeper awareness of the phenomena described by the participants. An essence of shared experience began to emerge, which informed the third stage of analysis, referred to as illumination. At this stage in the process, patterns began to emerge within the data and relationships between the initial themes began to emerge (Patton, 2002). The initial themes were grouped based on the participants' shared experiences. From these groupings, codes were produced and data were thematically coded in the third reading of the transcripts. The overarching themes and codes are listed in table 2.

Table 2
Themes and codes

Overarching Themes	Codes
The Journey: Linear Process	Coming out
	Conflation of sexual orientation/gender identity
	Danger
	Early awareness
	Family

	Identity definitions Kicked out Misunderstood Rejection Risk/safety Suicide Survival
Reciprocal Relationships: Gender Identity Assertion & Housing Status	Acceptance Freedom Gender ID & homelessness related Parallel pathways Sophie's choice Gender management Geography Clean Slate Internal processes Misunderstood Process of assertion Risk/safety
The Other Side of Risk	Acceptance Community Connection Freedom Knowledge Risk/safety Self-asserting Self-sufficiency Validation
Programs	Community Knowledge Process of assertion Program as home Program problems Program recommendations Risk/safety Stability/instability Length of stay
Unique Needs of TGNC young people	Body Internal processes Misunderstood Passing Rejection Risk/safety Societal perception

At this stage, the visual data were reviewed and thematically coded using the aforementioned overarching themes. The visual data were examined alongside the participants' narratives to identify places of reinforcement and also of departure. This comparison of visual and spoken data was not only examined based on what was included in one of the other (or both), but also centered around what was left out of the one or the other (or both) forms of data. Fine & Sirin (2007) acknowledge the importance of paying attention not only to what material *is* present, but also that which *is not* present. Important in the analysis will be what the participants say about their identities and about their housing instability, in addition to what they do not focus on.

Explication & Creative Synthesis. In the explication phase, the interview transcripts and the visual data were both further explored and synthesized into primary thematic categories. The themes were reviewed and organized. I then identified quotes that exemplified each of the overarching themes, and selected maps for inclusion based on their support of the text. Decisions were made regarding how the findings would be presented. Chapter 5 presents the results with rich descriptions by the participants of their journeys related to gender identity assertion and housing instability. A discussion of primary themes will follow. Primary themes for review include: the reciprocal relationship of gender identity assertion and housing instability, the other side of risk, and the pivotal role of programs.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE JOURNEY

Introduction

In the following chapters, the depth and breadth of information gained through the data gathering process of this study will be reviewed. The voices of the study participants will be incorporated through the inclusion of direct quotations from the interviews and images from the participants' maps. The quotes and images herein are representative of an overarching linear process that emerged during data analysis. Within this overarching process lie unique individual experiences that are also demonstrated through the selected quotes and images. This chapter will begin with an in-depth review of the interview participants. A description of their journey as it relates to gender identity and housing instability, and as the study participants articulated it will follow.

As often as possible, quotes have been added to bring the young people's experiences to life. The names assigned to the quotes were chosen by the participants at the start of the interview and confirmed upon completion of the interview. In the event that an actual proper name was spoken, brackets [ ] are used to indicate the change in the original transcript.

Participant Information

A total of 27 young people were interviewed for this study. Their ages range from 19 through 24 years of age (mean 21.5; median 22). The majority of participants (89%, N=24) were born in the United States or Puerto Rico. Of those born outside of the United States, two were from Trinidad and one was born in Germany. Participants identified their race as: Mixed race (33%, N=9), Black/African American (37%, N=10), Hispanic (15%, N=4), and White (15%, N=4). All above data can be found in Table 1.

Table 3
Participant Demographic Data – Age, Race, Birthplace

Descriptor	N	%
Age		
18-20	8	30
21-25	19	70
Race		
Black/African American	10	37
Mixed race	9	33
Hispanic	4	15
White	4	15
Birthplace		
New York City	7	26
NY tri-state area (NJ, CT, NY state)	4	15
Other U.S.	13	48
Non-U.S.	3	11

Gender identity. Participants were asked their gender identity as part of the demographic survey. They could choose to identify with one of the provided options (genderqueer, transgender female, transgender male, androgynous, intersex, male, female) or they could write in their own answers. In addition to the demographic survey question, in the interview participants were asked to describe how they identify their gender. This open-ended question allowed the young people to share terminology that resonated with their identities and to utilize language reflective of their experiences. Some of the responses were short verbal statements, such as:

> I identify as a man of trans experience. (Isa, 23)
>
> It's like, I feel like my soul is just neutral. But it's on the feminine side. (Ana Joelle, 20)
>
> Um, well I'm a female. I'm a trans female. (Christie, 23)

Um. Almost like a gender non-conforming transsexual. (Jay, 23)

As evidenced above, young people identified their gender in a variety of ways. The words that some chose are not identity categories commonly included in mainstream documents, applications, or language. Some participants offered more information. In addition to naming their gender identity, these young people discussed why or how they chose their preferred terminology, as illustrated below:

> The reason why I said I identify as, what I said, a female, I said instead of using transgender. I don't like the word trans. Like, you are what you are, like…if you're a transwoman, trans female, you don't have to put the trans, it's like labeling you like, once you like, even if you don't have the surgery if you consider yourself as being a female no matter what you look like, that's who you is, you know what I'm sayin? It ain't no need for you to say I'm a *trans* or I'm a transgender. No, I'm a woman. That's why I….I feel strongly about that. (Honesty, 23)

> Well, I identify myself as a girl that is a girl outside but a boy inside. I think like a boy, I talk like a boy, I act like a boy. I have boy friends, like friends that are boys. Um, and I just have the body of a girl, but insides of a boy. (Omar, 19)

> I like to not just identify as male or female, I mean, just to keep things simple I guess I say male, you know. In like the every day world, but I like that you have like queer and you know, androgynous and I like to use those words as well, descriptors. (Xavier, 21)

Honestly, Omar, and Xavier articulate the meaning behind the words they choose to describe their gender. They describe the constraints of language – the word many use to describe Honesty's experience does not accurately describe how she feels about herself, while Xavier makes choices about how he names his identity to "keep things simple." Several participants rejected the idea of labeling oneself altogether. Two participants specifically stated that they preferred to not identify with a label and four participants reported having no preferences related to pronouns. Japan and TC offered the following explanations for choosing to not identify with a label:

> Well, there's only really one way that I identify myself and that just is just being me. Um, me in particular, I really don't like labels because it really just limits, like, who you are as a person and so I don't consider myself to be gay, bisexual or whatever the case may be, I just...I'm just me. And like, whoever I am, people don't like it, then that's their personal problem. I really don't care, but um…Yeah, I just been…you have to be you because if you're not you, people…if you allow people to take that away from you then who are you? (Japan, 22)

> I was born female. So I'd say female, like if I *had* to choose. But if you call me a guy I'm not gonna correct you. If you call me a female, I'm not gonna be like, oh I'm a guy. So it's not really something that's really important to me. Um, gender just identifies you…gender-wise. And for me it's more, like, mental and who you are as a person, who you feel you are. So…doesn't really…like, if we didn't have to check off gender on all those, like, documents I wouldn't. (TC, 24)

Japan and TC did not wish to be categorized based on gender. It was more important to them that people view them holistically rather than assigning a gender identifier and the subsequent associations that accompany such an identifier. Overall, in the demographic survey participants responded to the question regarding their gender identity in the following ways: Transgender female (10, 37%), Transgender Male (3, 11%), Female (5, 19%), Male (2, 7%), don't care about gender (1, 4%), Boy-Girl (1, 4%), and 19% (5) chose multiple labels to represent their gender identity. Those combinations were:
Genderqueer, Androgynous, and Female; Male and Transgender Male; Androgynous and Male; Genderqueer and Transgender Female; Male and Male genderfuck.

Pronouns. While 33% (9) participants were assigned female at birth and 67% (18) were assigned male at birth, 51% (14) of the young people stated that they use feminine pronouns, such as she/her. Eight young people (30%) used male pronouns, such as he/him, one participant used gender neutral pronouns (ze/they), and 15% (4) said they did not have a pronoun preference.

Sexual orientation. Participants were asked on the demographic survey how they identify their sexual orientation. They could choose to identify with one of the provided options (gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, heterosexual) or they could write in their own answers. The participants identified as heterosexual (8, 30%), gay (5, 19%), lesbian (3, 11%), queer (2, 7%), bisexual (2, 7%), and demisexual (1, 4%). Four participants (15%) chose multiple labels to describe their sexual orientation and 2 participants (7%) responded with "no label" and "just me." The participants who chose multiple labels reported the following: gay and heterosexual; lesbian and queer; gay, queer, and heterosexual; gay and queer. Heterosexual identified participants were the largest subgroup of participants when divided along the lines of sexual orientation. This demographic finding is important in making the point that not all transgender people are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, which is a common stereotype.

Additionally, participants were asked in the interview to share any words they use to identify themselves. Some participants discussed their sexual orientation. As with gender identity, the responses ranged from short statements to more elaborate explanations of one's understanding of their sexual orientation at this particular moment in time.

> I'm a bisexual, African American transgender female. (Berlin, 23)

> I consider myself heterosexual, cuz I'm a straight man. (Nino, 18)

> I can't say I'm ….strictly heterosexual, but I mean, but I can't say I'm bisexual either. It's just, you know, it's a confusing spot for me in my life right now. I'm still exploring my sexuality. I'm 23 and I still haven't figured myself out yet. It's crazy. Um, so … I guess I'm neutral. I guess you could sort of say. (Christie, 23)

> Um…as far as sexual orientation, I prefer women. I identify as a lesbian, but um…I'm involved with a man right now. And…yeah, I don't know. (Miranda, 20)

Table 4
Participant Demographic Data – Gender Identity, Pronouns, Assigned Sex, Sexual Orientation

Descriptor	N	%
Gender Identity		
Transgender Female	10	37
Transgender Male	3	11
Female	5	19
Male	2	7
Chose multiple labels	5	19
Don't care about gender	1	4
Boy-Girl	1	4
Pronouns		
She/Her	14	51
He/Him	8	30
Ze/They	1	4
Don't care	4	15
Assigned Sex		
Female	9	33
Male	18	67
Sexual Orientation		
Queer	2	7
Gay	5	19
Lesbian	3	11
Bisexual	2	7
Heterosexual	8	30
Demisexual	1	4
Multiple labels	4	15
No label	2	7

Home. As part of the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked where their home is. Six participants (22%) responded that they do not have a home yet, and 6 (22%) named the program in which they resided at the time of the interview. Seven participants (26%) referenced a geographic location; the majority of those referencing geographic locations (5) referred to the city in which they were residing at the time of the interview. Two people (7%) answered by saying "I'm homeless," and an additional 2 (7%) chose not to answer the question. The

remaining responses (3/11%) included:

> Good question. Myself. (Jaguar, 24)
>
> My home is any 12-step recovery fellowship. (Isa, 23)
>
> Anywhere where I am located, which is New York. (Alexandra, 22)

Table 5
Summary of Participants

Name	Age	Pronoun	Gender ID	Assigned Sex	Sexual Orientation	Birthplace	Home
Alexandra	22	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Heterosexual	Tampa, FL	Anywhere where I am located, which is NY.
Ana Joelle	20	She/her	Genderqueer, Transgender female	Male	Queer	Philadelphia, PA	[Program name]
Berlin	23	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Bisexual	Jackson, MS	I don't know if I found it yet
Charlie	21	He/him	Male, Male-genderfuck	Male	Demisexual	New York, NY	The future
Chass	23	She/her	Female	Male	Heterosexual	Brooklyn, NY	I'm homeless
Christie	23	Ze/hir/they	Transgender female	Male	Heterosexual	Trinidad & Tobago	I have not made my home yet
Honesty	23	She/her	Female	Male	Gay, heterosexual	Atlanta, GA	[address of drop in center]
Isa	23	He/him	Transgender Male, Male	Female	No label	Bronx, NY	Any 12 step recovery fellowship
Jack	24	He/him	Male	Female	Heterosexual	Long Island, NY	[Program name]
Jaguar	24	He/him	Transgender male	Female	Queer	Pikesville, MD	Good question.

Jaime	21	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Gay	Bronx, NY	Myself. Homeless
Japan	22	He/him	Male	Male	Just me	Westbury, NY	Harlem, NY
Jay	23	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Gay	San Antonio, TX	Don't have one yet
KiKi	19	She/her	Female	Male	Gay	Jackson, MS	Brooklyn, NY
Lareese	21	She/her	Female	Female	Lesbian	Staten Island, NY	In Queens, NY
Miranda	20	Don't care/they	Genderqueer, androgynous, female	Female	Lesbian, queer	Miami, FL	Shelter
Nino	18	He/him	Transgender male	Female	Heterosexual	Brooklyn, NY	No answer
Nikiyah	23	She/her	Female	Male	Heterosexual	Trinidad	New York
Omar	19	He/him	Boy/girl	Female	Lesbian	Puerto Rico	I don't have a home
Rebekah	20	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Heterosexual	Frankfurt, Germany	Indiana
Ryan	22	He/him	Transgender male	Female	Gay	CT	[Program name]
Tara	21	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Gay, queer, heterosexual	NJ	NYC
TC	24	Don't care	Don't care about gender	Female	Lesbian	New York, NY	I have yet to find one
Tiffany	23	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Bisexual	DC	Here, NYC
Xavier	21	Don't care	Androgynous, male	Male	Gay, queer	OR	[Program name]
Zakia	19	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Heterosexual	Orlando, FL	Mississippi
Zariah	19	She/her	Transgender female	Male	Gay	St. Louis, MO	Don't have one yet

The Journey

The following sections of this chapter include the participants' journeys related to their gender identity and their housing instability. The goal of each identified subsection is to illustrate the range of experiences articulated by the young people who participated in this study. While some common themes emerged, the existence of multiple truths became clear as each young person shared their story. The journey is organized chronologically, from the participants' first awareness of difference to coming out, followed by their pathway into homelessness and processes surrounding both their housing instability and their gender identity assertion once they became homeless. The chronological presentation of their journey is based on the common experiences that emerged from the data. The structure is meant to give the reader a sense of an overarching linear course, though within the arc of journey lies individual differences and unique encounters. The information provided here relies primarily on excerpts from the interview transcripts, with little interpretation or commentary from the researcher. The goal of this first results chapter is to provide a clear and comprehensive account of the participants' experiences in their own words, through their own voices. Subsequent chapters will take the reader into an in depth thematic exploration of the participants' experiences, utilizing the interview transcripts and the participant generated maps.

Sense of difference. *I don't know even why, I don't know how, but I always been like this.*

Omar articulates the feelings of many young people interviewed for this project. The participants commonly described an early awareness of difference. For some, like Omar, there was no defining moment or singular memory recollected. Their sense of difference was not attached to specific memories related to stereotypically gendered clothing, toys, or play. Rather,

there was a sense of internal difference that had always existed. Honesty shares a similar experience:

> I don't know when I just realized it, I just always knew. You know how you just always just know?

Others recalled a specific memory in which they realized that something was "amiss." Ryan describes such a time:

> One of the times that I've always kind of pin pointed looking back, is that there was this one time where I was in the bathtub with my twin and my brother, we were like 4 or 5 years old. It's one of my first, like, memories. And I remember…looking at my brothers and being like, oh, that's what I should have…I always go back to that moment being like, you know that's probably one of my first moments that I had some sort of kind of idea that something was amiss.

For Ryan, the moment of recollection revolves around the awareness of anatomy. For some participants, the early awareness of difference was primarily related to stereotypically gendered activities that they either rejected or embraced as children. Examples include participants who were assigned male at birth and wanted to play with Barbie dolls or dreamed of being a mermaid and young people who were assigned female at birth and recall gravitating towards boys' toys and clothing. In thinking about his maleness, Nino says:

> It's always been inside me. Like, I never once picked up a Barbie doll. I see a Barbie doll and an action figure, I'll get the action figure. When I was little, I played with toy cars. I was all with my, my little brothers. The girls would do they own thing. I was the only little girl with the boys, playing cars, beating them up, fighting, with my little basketball shorts, all that, like, I was always that.

Ana Joelle remembers her childhood desire to be a mermaid:

> Like when I, I remember being like 10 and like, pretending to be like, a mermaid, like a little mermaid and I was like, you know like, I was really like, it was really ridiculous. I was like, wow. Now that I think about it it's like really embarrassing, but I would like, I loved mermaids. I wanted to be a mermaid with long hair, and like...look like, just like Ariel.

Chass recalls feeling upset when she was not allowed to participate in activities in which other girls were involved. She explains:

> I remember just being around maybe 4 years old, 3 years old, knowing…I used to get upset when people would call me a boy and stuff like that and not being able to play with dolls and have fun and go to tea parties and do all the other stuff.

Like Chass and Nino, Isa gravitated towards toys and activities that were typically reserved for children assigned male at birth. As a result, he faced persecution for expressing his preference for things traditionally associated with boys. He recalls a poignant memory when he was confronted by his kindergarten classmates for transgressing stereotypical gender norms. He says:

> I just felt out of place. In school, growing up, grade school…felt really isolated. They had a girls line and a boys line and I was this quote/unquote girl that was very boyish so people were like what the heck is, what are you? What is that? You know what I mean, because young people internalize a lot of society's shit at such a young age, you know what I mean? They know that a girl's supposed to have a dress, a girl's supposed to be dainty and shit and the boys supposed to play with the trucks and shit and be rough, you know, so they already getting those messages and acting out on them. So I can remember as far back as kindergarten where they made a line and ...to get toys, because the janitor had brought toys for us. He brought Barbie dolls and he brought a box of trucks. And everyone picked the one that matches what they were supposed to quote/unquote pick. You know, what their gender says that they're supposed to go to, or their sex. You know, if they had a penis, they went and got the truck. If they had a vagina, they got the doll. And I picked the truck, having a female body, having a vagina, I went and got the truck. I was in kindergarten and the kids were yelling at me. What are you doing? What are you doing? You're not supposed to get the truck, you're supposed to take the Barbie doll. You're supposed to take the Barbie doll. And, um...I feel the anger now, coming up a bit, you know, rehashing out that experience. Because I ended up taking the damn Barbie doll. I went on the bus and I started crying. Just crying. I said I'm gonna break this shit. I'm gonna throw it out the fucking window. I don't want it. And so it's just always like that.

Awareness of difference manifested in a variety of ways. Participants like Omar and Honesty's experiences were characterized by an always-existing sense of difference, with no concrete significance recalled. Ryan, on the other hand, specifically recalled an awareness of difference related to his physical body in comparison to his siblings. Others connected feeling

different to gendered play and toys. Thought the tenor of their awareness varied, it was common for the TGNC young people in this study to recall an early awareness of gender difference.

Conflation of sexuality orientation and gender identity. A shared experience among participants was the adoption of the label gay or lesbian. This occurred during adolescence, and was a way that young people made sense of their identities, particularly those who were unaware of the existence of transgender people and the meaning of gender identity. Berlin explains:

> I came out when I was like 14. I identified as a gay male until I was like eighteen, like from like 14 to like 18 I identified as a gay male, simply because I was pressured to. I knew . . .I knew that I was different but society forced me to believe that that's the different that I was, when it was much more serious. It was much more like, I needed to transition and become a woman. It wasn't that I was gay, simply because I appeared to be a feminine boy and just because you're feminine doesn't make you gay nor straight, but you know people, society, as a child, teased, called faggot and this and whatever. And I, I did have an attraction to men so I was like, OK, maybe this is what I am.

Berlin referenced the role of society in her adoption of the term gay. Society did not provide her with the language to accurately name herself, so "gay" was the most readily available descriptor. Rebekah and Tiffany share similar stories:

> For me, it was a mistake of sexual preference versus sexual identity. You know, I leaned more toward ok, well I like boys and I'm a boy because I had, at the time I had never seen a transsexual, I didn't know that it was possible, I was just like, I didn't know....So after that I was like, oh ok, well I guess I'm just gay because I found out about gay before I found out about transgender. So that was just me trying to figure it out. Putting a label on it. Because everyone else is like, oh I'm straight and everything and I'm *not* straight because I was a boy at a time who liked boys, so I had to find out the name for that. -- Rebekah

> I thought I was just a butch queen. I really thought I was just a butch queen! -- Tiffany

Nino explains his confusion when he began to be attracted to girls.

> Like oh…man, girl and boys they're together. Like, and I see myself looking at females different and feeling different inside. Like, I'm like nah, this can't be. Like, you know, I was kind of confused when I was smaller, like,…but...my mother said this can't happen. Like, why am I feeling this way? Why am I looking at females this way? I'm supposed to look at dudes this way.

One way to understand the conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity experienced by the participants is through the lens of cisnormativity, manifesting in the lack of information they received about TGNC people. Rebekah and Berlin both reference claiming the term gay because it was the best available term to describe their burgeoning sexual attractions. Rebekah specifically mentions adopting the term gay to describe her identity at the time that others were declaring their heterosexuality. The participants' adolescence included knowledge of different sexual orientations, mirroring the recognition of diverse sexual orientations within the culture at large. Diverse gender identities were not recognized within the culture at large and the institutions within which the participants spent their childhoods and adolescence. Therefore, their knowledge of difference related to gender identity was limited, whereas they had access to language and information related to sexual orientation.

Managing difference. *And then it got to a certain point where it was like I would have to start hiding things.* -- Jaime

Following the realization of difference, young people were faced with figuring out what to do with this new information. All of the participants in this study discussed various ways that they learned to manage their identities. Very few young people reported talking to their parents or caregivers about their gender as children. One exception was Jay, who said:

> And I remember when I was young telling my mom – I should've been born a girl. And she just kind of gagged at it. She was like, why do you, why would you, why do you feel that way? And I was like, I feel like it would just fit better. Like, it would fit me better and I would fit in the world better. I remember telling her that, I was like 5. And she didn't know what to do. She just left it alone because she didn't know what to do with it. But, that was the first time I can consciously remember thinking about it and then the thought coming out of my mouth.

Chass also remembers asking her mother why she couldn't share the same clothes and hairstyles as her sisters.

> I used to be very upset because I used to have to wear boy clothes, like . . um, pants and shorts and stuff when I would see my sisters, they have their hair done and they have on their little dresses and I'm like ok, I want to do it. Why can't I do it? And, um…I remember my mom saying really hurtful things to me, when I would ask her those questions…and um, she used to get physical, um . . . at times she did. And it got to a point where she would strip away anything from me that she thought was like, super girly and stuff. Yeah.

Though Jay and Chass both shared gender related questions with their parents, neither received support nor affirmation in response. Jay recalls her questioning simply being ignored, while the result of Chass' questioning was physical and emotional abuse. Both of these reactions are forms of rejection, and illustrate their parents' attempts at managing their children's gender.

Even if they did not explicitly discuss their gender identity with their parents or caregivers, almost all of the participants learned at an early age that their experience of their gender was unacceptable. The impact of gendered socialization is evident in Nino's fear of rejection.

> I was…I was scared to tell anybody 'cuz like...and I...I didn't feel like I would be accepted. Even when I was a kid, I was like yo, 'cuz I was born as, like you know, raised as like, not even by my family but like every…my surroundings.

Similarly, Jaime acknowledges the messages she received about normative heterosexual relationships. These early teachings by her family sent Jaime the message that she would not be accepted for who she is. She says:

> It's difficult. Because it's like it's not so accepting in my family. And it's like, that's the people who you would want to…expect to be the first accepting out of everybody and it's like, with my family, it's like, I was raised that men are supposed to be with women and they're supposed to have children with a woman and whatever.

Omar described needing to pretend to be something he wasn't, because his family would not allow him to express himself as a boy.

> My family don't believe it, 'cuz I had to pretend a lot, so they…they'd think that was me. But I was pretending all this time. 'Cuz you know, I was a girl. They wanted to treat me

> as a girl so I couldn't not, I couldn't choose what I wanted because they didn't, they won't let me. So…I always felt like a boy. Always.

Whereas Nino and Jaime referenced societal and familial beliefs and the rejection messages inherent within, TC recalls being explicitly scolded for behavior her family viewed as unacceptable for someone of her assigned sex. TC wanted to wear boy's clothing. She describes going shopping with her family:

> It got to the point where my family member would take me shopping and they would tell me…like, we would go into a store and I'd go to the boy's section. And the last time I tried going shopping with her, she…screamed at me in the store. And told me, "you're not a boy, you're a fucking girl, so dress like one." So I just followed her around the store, let her pick out clothes. I nodded to everything, and I never wore any of it.

The young people managed their awareness of difference in diverse ways. While some participants described trying to find a balance between their lives at home and feeling true to themselves, others managed by developing two different identities – one for home and one for school or social life. Chass describes navigating between her home and school lives:

> When I actually started like, dressing the part of a female was like about age 13. It was on and off again. Um, those were scary years for me. 'Cuz it was like really scary, 'cuz I didn't do it inside the house. I used to do it when I'd go to school. So it was like, really weird. I used to change while I'm at school, and when I come home, I'd have to change back into, like boy clothes and all that good stuff.

Like Chass, Zariah kept her transgender identity expression a secret from her mother. She says:

> I always hid my transgender from my mother. I'd get dressed upstairs and leave out the back door. Put my stuff in a bag and get dressed in the alley behind the dumpster.

KiKi spent several years of her adolescence living in group homes. Though her living environment was different than Zariah's or Chass', KiKi's experience with hiding her authentic gender expression and identity were similar. She explains what it was like to experiment with her gender presentation while living in a group home:

> I would buy girls clothing and I would, like do, it in the bathroom. It was like when I was 15. And I'd go in the bathroom and change into girls clothes, put on me a wig, and make myself up, you know, admire myself in the mirror and then, you know, I'd keep it on for an hour and just strut in the bathroom and then take it all off and go out like nothing happened. "I was just taking a shower"...Because they'd be like, "Why were you in there so long?" "None of your business, ok?"

Coming out to family. Young people described two different kinds of coming out. Some came out as gay, lesbian or bisexual in adolescence and then came out again as transgender. For others, coming out as "gay" served as an umbrella concept that also included their transgender identity. Omar discusses coming out as a lesbian to his family:

> I always felt the same but when I was 13 I decided to came out of the closet. But my family wasn't happy with that. So, they were starting to change their behavior, start like be real mean with me, real rude, so I had to do something. I didn't want to lose my family. So I started dating boys. And for me that was awful. And I never liked 'em…My friends say, oh this, this boy's cute…he likes you. I'm like, (sigh) I don't like him, my god, but I was like yeah, whatever. Give him my number. And then for, to make my family happy, I would go out with him and stuff.

Omar's parents treated him differently after he came out. As a result, he attempted to stifle his identity to please his parents, but he could not keep it up for long. He determined that pretending to be someone he was not was more difficult than dealing with his parents' treatment. He says:

> So then…I had to like, take that…that, whatever, the rudeness, the meanness, whatever. I had to take it. But there was no way I could've taken it anymore. They were just too mean for me. They would say, why do you dress like this? I look ugly. Nobody's gonna like me like this, nobody's gonna hire me like this, I'm…I'm, I'm going to hell, god doesn't love me. How you gonna tell that to your child?

Tiffany described coming out as transgender to parents as "the hardest thing."

> It is truly hard because, one, you gotta, society has to accept you, for one. You have to tell your parents, the second thing. And that's the hardest thing, coming out to your parents. One, my mom thought I was just gay. She didn't know I was transgender. That was a thing. And that was a big ... jack in the box, basically.

Not all of the young people interviewed chose to come out to their parents or caregivers. Some were outed by their schools, and others were "discovered" by their families. Chass did not come out to her family, but was outed to her mother by staff at her school. She explains:

> She got a few phone calls from school, um, saying that I wanted to use the women's bathroom. And I was dressing up. Um, she also found a couple of my clothes, my female clothes, and what really set her off was the, um, my first boyfriend. She caught us making out, yeah. So … it was just too much, my mom grew up, my mom is, um, Jamaican and they're like really strict. And she was Christian also, so it was like, to her it was like an abomination and all this other stuff.

None of the participants reported a coming out experience characterized by acceptance or validation. In fact, they were most often met with explicit criticism, emotionally abusive statements, and rejection. When Jaime talked to her family about her transition, she was met with judgment and criticism.

> A lot of my family, when I basically said that I was taking hormones and going the whole 9 yards or whatever it was like, first thing they said was "Why would you want to do that, that's disgusting." Or a lot of them would make jokes about it and say "Oh, you're gonna be a big bitch and you're gonna be this and that." And it's like, at first it was like I would laugh at them, but I would only laugh because it was sort of like a defense mechanism because it was like if I could laugh with them, then it's like, it wouldn't bother me so much. But after awhile it started to bother because it was like, started building up a bunch of insecurities that I didn't have before.

Similarly, Ana Joelle was not validated by her family. She explains:

> I did tell them, my family. They took it as a joke. They said like, "Oh you're so manly. Stop talking about such nonsense, stop saying stupid things. It's not gonna happen." It's not…they couldn't see it as a, as a possibility. They couldn't see it as like, something. Either that or, if maybe she did see it as a possibility, she would have gotten scared. And, and my sister would make jokes…I would say, you know, I'm taking hormones and like, "Why you taking hormones, you wanna be a tranny?" So, she'll laugh about it.

Nino has not yet come out to his father as transgender. He shares his fears about how his father will react.

> My father still don't know, that's the most important man in my life. The most important person in my whole life. And it's like, coming out to him is gonna be crazy, 'cuz he's like, one of them old fashion dudes that don't fucking, like, they don't…understand, like,

> they're naïve to the fact that in this generation it's accepted…in his generation it was like, it was like, nah, that's not even talked about, you know? So, um…he accepts me for being lesbian, like I *was*...you know, like when I was living in PR and stuff. And he accepts me for that but this is a whole 'nother level, like, you're actually gonna take testosterone. You're actually gonna become a man, like, I don't think he's ready for that, you know? And a lot of people aren't ready for…for that stuff.

Kicked out. Young people were met with severe consequences at the hands of their families for their gender nonconformity. Eighteen of the twenty-seven participants (67%) were ejected from their homes, explicitly because of their identities. If a participant had younger siblings, a parent might cite that as the reason for their ejection. Zakia describes her mother's rationale for kicking her out, a rationale that is transphobic and homophobic and seems to stem from the myth that her other children will be negatively influenced, possibly "turned", by Zakia's identity.

> She was like, I don't want no faggots around my other boys. You're the oldest, you're gonna be…you're a bad example and I don't need that around my kids. And I was like…Ok. So from then until now, we barely ever talk.

Jaime recalls the first time she was kicked out:

> And then um, when I got home I got into a big argument with my dad, my dad kicked my ass in the street . . . cuz he was like, "What are you wearing, what are you doing? This and this and that…dah..dah..dah..dah." He kicked my ass in the street, kicked me out.

Rebekah was kicked out of her home just before her high school graduation. She says:

> Um, my parents were about two weeks away from moving to [a different city], and they had kind of been hinting around to me that I wasn't invited ... to come. And so I guess, how I see it is whenever they got the opportunity and gotten mad enough they were like, oh ok, well you gotta go. Um, I was very hurt by it. It was very out of the blue.

Jay's mother kicked her out when Jay tried to talk to her about wanting to transition.

> About 3 years ago I was sleeping on a bench. In San Antonio, Texas…I'd gotten into this big big deal because I'd spoken to my mother about wanting to make the change and she flipped. She was like , I'm not going to have this, I'm not going to have my child blah blah blah…long sob story later, got kicked out of there. She was like, you can't stay here. Um…And I didn't feel that I could go to my father with this. So I was homeless. I didn't have anyone to turn to. I knew at that point in his life my father wasn't prepared to deal with that. So I didn't even try.

Tara and Lareese both left home following an argument related to their gender expression. Tara explains:

> I … it's just like, it's just like me personally I really couldn't…I couldn't stand the fact that I was a guy and I was, like…being…like, dramatically like, hurt and physically because, all because that I can't express my, my sexuality. So, I had to, I had to leave. I had to leave. I really couldn't stay at my mom's house because…I'm not…It was that first time that me and my mom had a blow out and she told me to get out. And I was like, fine. I left. It felt like I was disowned by my mother. It really did.

KiKi lived in foster group homes during her teen years and was frequently kicked out of programs because of her gender expression. Below, she describes her arrival at a new group home.

> The first thing they said when I went up like, you can't dress like a girl…They had done went out and um, got me a check to buy me some boys clothes…They sent one of the staff with me you know, 'cuz I'm like…I said ok 'cuz I was tired. I was like, I was tired of fighting, you know? And I was getting to the point where I was about to break down and be through. And I was like, you know, I'm…I'm . . I said I will buy the clothes. I will wear the boys clothes. I will get boys clothes. But I don't need nobody coming up there with me, you know, 'cuz I'm not a child. And they gonna make the male staff come with me to go up there and buy my clothes…"He's like, no that's a little too tight, that's a size too small. You need a bigger size" and this and this and that just pissed me off. So I kept all their receipts and went back and returned all those clothes and got my own clothing. They were so upset with me. They threw me out. I was like, well, I mean, if they had a just listen, when I told them I could go buy my own clothing…I was gonna get the boys clothing and I was gonna wear them. But you sent somebody else to tell me what I could and couldn't wear. Come on now. I told you I was going to wear boy's clothes. So get over it and let me go do it myself. I don't need y'all to tell - I'm 18 years old - you know. So, um, in the end they were like ok, ok you gotta go.

KiKi was placed in another group home, and the process started again. She says:

> I stayed there for like a month. Until I put on this black and white skirt (laughs a little). And you know I was going to school. I'm in college, going to Hinds Community College. And you know, I'm like this is college. I refuse to not be myself in college. That's what college is for - its to express yourself and get where you want to be. Learn what you want, you know, and stuff..and finding yourself. This is, in college is where it happens. College is where you find yourself and you know, become who you want to be. And they would not, they wanted me to dress like a boy, they wanted me to wear baggy

> stuff and I was like, noooo, it's not working. And I put on a skirt and the director, he was like, oh you have to take that off. …I didn't say nothing. I just sat there. He was like, oh, um did you not hear me? I said, you're right in my ear, don't you think I heard you? And then he's like, so you're gonna take it off? I'm like, no I'm not gonna take it off. And he's like ok…so he goes and calls the lady over them or whatever. And she's like, you gotta go.

In search of opportunity. Not all participants were forced out of their homes. Some report a pathway into homelessness led by a quest for independence and a need for opportunity. The two participants whose stories of leaving home did not include mention of their gender identity identified as androgynous and genderqueer. Xavier described his decision-making in the following way:

> I, I was depressed in Oregon. I didn't have a job, I wasn't able to find a job. I didn't have a car...I tried school, failed. And I attempted to go to college, that didn't work out. Um, I was living with my grandma. It was two years out of high school, almost three. I wasn't feeling good about myself, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was scared, as well, just to go out there and just...do it, maybe, differently because I didn't have money and just do whatever it takes…So we just took a, you know, a trip here spontaneously in a car, and...we [Xavier and his friend] figured we'll get a job, we'll live in like, my friend's car.

Miranda explains her need to leave home.

> I hated…I was living in Las Vegas for almost 6 years and I hated the city. And I was desperate to get out when I could. So I had several attempts of leaving the city, which absolutely failed. So I became very depressed. And then I decided that I need to make my own life. I don't want to be dependent on anyone. Um...I wanted to have my own roof and put my own food on the table so I just left. Um, my mother wasn't happy, but it's…I'm on good terms with her. Um…I'm on good terms with my immediate family. So it wasn't that they rejected me. I don't share that experience with a lot of homeless youth that their families rejected them. It wasn't like that with me.

Though Miranda and Xavier were the only participants to articulate the above reasons for their departure from their homes, this particular pathway to homelessness warrants mention. Though it was not a common experience among the participants in this study, it demonstrates the diverse causes for housing instability among TGNC young people.

Once on the Street

The participants described various pathways out of their homes. Some were explicitly kicked out of their homes. Others fled following a specifically dangerous interaction. A few had a history of system involvement and care, and had moved from place to place for most of their lives. Others describe a decision making process that revolved around opportunity, and planning for their futures. Circumstances of young people's exit from home vary, as did their experiences once on the street.

A lack of resources, loneliness, and risk are expected characteristics of homelessness. Participants in this project described experiences in line with these characteristics. They had to learn to navigate institutions and negotiate survival without familial support. However, they also described experiences that they experienced as affirming, beneficial, and liberating. For many participants, their home lives were also characterized by a lack of resources, loneliness, and risk – as a direct result of their TGNC identity. The following section will attempt to construct a holistic portrayal of the participants' experiences once on the street.

Ryan articulates the conflicting aspects of his homelessness, the dangers and well as the positive outcomes:

> You know, the streets ...I used to say that the streets stole four years of my life and in a sense, you know, it did 'cuz it did rob me of certain opportunities of certain things that, you know, I at one point, you know, would've wanted. But at the same time it also gave me back my life at the same time. And, yeah it...would've been so much easier if I had never gone through the experience of homelessness but I mean, I'm better for it because you know, now I don't take anything for granted. You know I am stronger than I would've been if I wasn't on the street and I also have had the opportunity where I've experienced both the haves and the chronic have nots. And I'm also in a position where I can use, you know, my...my horrific, horrific stuff that happened on the street to, you know, to the benefit of, you know, of bringing light to that kind of experience and bringing light to...and being able to kind of bring a silent epidemic out of the shadows, you know and...so.

Navigating institutions. All of the participants interviewed for this project engaged with various youth housing and social service programs. Some young people accessed social services in their hometowns, before arriving in New York City. All participants accessed services once they arrived in New York City. Notably, all of the young people interviewed for this project accessed LGBTQ specific services at some point during their homeless experience. Participants' level of knowledge regarding programs and services varied. Christie knew nothing about the landscape of social services when ze was kicked out:

> And, my grandmother just kicked me out. She didn't want me there. My mother didn't want me at home. I didn't have no family here in New York City. Didn't have nowhere to go. I didn't know anybody. And I didn't know any organizations. I didn't know this existed. I didn't know [name of LGBTQ youth shelter] existed. I didn't know there was men's shelters. I didn't know there was women's shelters. I didn't know anything. Um…..so….that was the most vulnerable point in my life.

Finding a supportive program was crucial to the participant's well-being after their departure from home. Some young people were able to research programs before traveling to New York City from other states. Others had no knowledge about shelter programs or social services in general, and much less about LGBTQ specific or affirming programs. Lareese was hesitant to access shelter services, based on information her mother told her about women's shelters:

> So when I was staying with my mother, I didn't know about shelters. Like, LGBQ shelters. I thought, my mother only told me about women's shelters where they steal your stuff and they always fighting.

Rebekah had a negative experience with a youth shelter before moving to New York City, and was unaware that LGBTQ youth shelters existed.

> Um, I didn't know until the day I got here, you know, that there was a specific shelter here for ...people like me. Because back whenever I was in Kansas, the reason why I was on the streets and homeless is because I was *gay* and people didn't ... want that type of person in the shelter. You know because if they put me in the boy's dorm, it's like ...

> what are *you* gonna be doing? So they...you know, it's definitely a lot better here, than it was anywhere else.

Frequent moves. Participants' lives were characterized by frequent moves. Some young people moved from program to program. Their stays were contingent upon their ability to follow program rules or their perceived level of safety. Some left programs in pursuit of other living arrangements, most of which eventually fell through, landing the young people back at one of the programs previously accessed. Others experienced repeated rejection in the form of being kicked out of multiple family members' houses, where they stayed in between stints at shelter programs. Lareese shares her journey, which spans three years and includes sixteen moves. Her narrative is lengthy, mirroring the duration of her homelessness and the frequency of her moves.

> It's a story. Um… I left in July around my birthday, '09. From the end of July to the end of August I was in Staten Island with my sister, with my older sister. That's when I found out I was adopted and I had other sisters…Then I was staying with my sister in Staten Island. Then my mother called me back saying she want me back, so, for school…'cuz I started college, in LaGuardia. So I went to the Bronx at my aunt's house, which my aunt is my mother's sister. So I stayed there from September to December and then she kicked me out…then I went back to my sister's house from January to March. Then I went back to my mother's house 'cuz she got me a job, and I thought she changed and everything. But she didn't. So…that was from, um…March to May. I was in back in Queens with my mother. Then she really kicked me out. Like that was it. That was it. In June. I left June and came here. This is my first time and uh, June of '11, when I came to [name of program]. And they got me housing. Then I stayed housing until August, 'cuz it's 3 months, the emergency. Then I went to my best friend's house, from August to September, October, and October the beginning of November. And me and my best friend mother had a fight. And then I left. Then I, from the middle November to um…December I was staying on the streets and back to my sister's house in Staten Island till we got into a fight. Then, like, that was it. Then I was on the streets for about 3 weeks in December, no, 'cuz December 15th, like the week of December 15th, that week I got into the [name of program]. And I stayed there till February. Then February I had to leave. Then I went to my other sister's house in Staten Island. Which was this...one, my first time living with…and I stayed with her until March and then she was...um…emotionally and mentally abusing me…so I just left like that. I didn't even tell her. I just left. Then I went back to the [name of program]. Then um...March, April, May I was in the program. The beginning, the end of, no – in between May I left the program and I went to my other friend's house. Then I stayed May, June. Then I stayed there…(sighs)…..then I stayed there for a minute. Then um…I left there in June and on my birthday July 5th again, I moved in with my ex girlfriend...yeah. I moved in with my

> ex girlfriend, in a room in Brooklyn. And we…we like, broke up and everything and she got out and moved back to Florida and I stayed. I was living in that room from July all the way to January, like, 31st that just passed…is where I had been staying at. And...ever since then, I've been staying at my, I went back to my sister's house, the one that was mentally…I went back to her house and she kicked me out because...I so called wasn't clean and, but really she wanted money from me that I didn't have. So she kept asking me for money. She was like, oh I always do this for friends and you think I'm gonna get…I'm gonna leave and everything. Yeah, I did leave...like, she kicked me out and then wanted me out, then kicked me out, then wanted me back, then kicked me out then wanted me back so…. then I went back to her house and like…it was so much arguing so…that…ended…then I … then I went to [name of program].

Likewise, Nikiyah endured ten moves in a period of three years. She describes the circumstances surrounding her housing instability:

> I was at [name of program] for about 6 months. I got homesick. This is where the instability comes in. I got homesick, I went back home, ended up coming back to New York. That time I went to job corps. I finished job corps, um, I left…And I had got a room; I had a roommate. We was, I was working two jobs, two jobs. Doing what I got to do, and then my friend got locked up. I couldn't pay the rent. Ended up coming back to the city, 'cuz I was staying upstate, Poughkeepsie. Then I end up coming back to the city and um.....I end up going back in the shelter....and then after that, um...I end up going back home, again, to visit. And then from there, I was talking to this guy, and I moved to California. And I was living with my boyfriend, ex-boyfriend. We broke up. Moved to Texas....from Texas, I was the working, but I couldn't do it, it was boring. You needed a car to get around. The transportation, I hated depending on people to get around. So I came back to New York again. Now I'm here....trying to get back on my feet. So this is the last straw. Gonna get my own apartment, you know. I'm getting older.

Like Nikiyah, Jay describes experiences of housing instability that resulted from living with other people following her ejection from her parents' home:

> They've been several times when I've been paying to stay somewhere. There's several times where, yeah, my bills were covered, but a lot of times because it wasn't *my* bills. I was paying to live at someone else's house, you know. And there were several times I had just get there and a couple of times I had to just pack and leave at the drop of a dime because I wasn't at my house.

For Nino, moving around has been a typical part of his life. He says:

> Raised in, born in Brooklyn, raised in both Brooklyn and Puerto Rico. I go back and forth all the time…In Puerto Rico is my only stable house. I have a house in Puerto Rico. But um…over here it's, it's always been uh…unstable housing. Like, even, even if it was just me going from sister to sister's house. From my sister's house to my

> friend's house and from my friend's house to …to my other, to my brother's house and from my brother's house to my….to my other friend's house, like, it's always been like that. Ever since I've been in Brooklyn I never had that one home to call my own. Like that one place to actually be like, yo, I got the keys to this, I can go in, I can go out, you know? It's always been, oh this my brother's house. Or I can't bring no company in 'cuz it's not my house, um…I have to be back at a certain time 'cuz if I don't, then they're not gonna open the door for me, you know?

In addition to moving between New York and Puerto Rico, Nino moves between family members' houses, friends' houses, and shelter programs when he is in New York. He mentions the difficulty in doing what he "needs to do" while lacking the stability of a residence.

> I must've went from here to PR like, um…like, six times. Six times….Every time I come here, it's… every time I come here it's like a year long period. I've moved like, maybe, like, 8 times in that year long period. Not even, like, even…I don't know, maybe even more. Like...I'm always, I always move...I'm always moving, so like, it's…it's way more moving down here than I would in PR. 'Cuz I…I just have to move to PR and just stay in one spot. Over here I have to move over here and keep on moving around, you know, it's not like I could just be stable and do what I have to need, I have to do. Over there, I could just live in a house, I don't even gotta do nothing. Over here I have to, I have to do my education. I have to worry about the…you know, the um…..where I'm gonna stay, what I need to do.

Although Nino reports that he has a stable residence in Puerto Rico, his family in Puerto Rico remains unaware of his gender identity. He expressed concern that he would not be able to live there safely as a transgender man, nor would he have access to the gender affirming services he is connected to in New York City.

Coming out as homeless. A few of the participants in this study kept their housing status a secret from some of their families and friends. For those who were closeted about their homelessness, this aspect of their experience had a considerable impact on their narrative. Not unlike being closeted about one's sexual orientation or gender identity, these participants discussed the burden of secrecy and shared feelings of invisibility related to their secret. Lareese kept her homelessness a secret from her friends, her girlfriend, and from her mother. She reported "hearing it" from multiple people in her life, in relation to her identity and in relation to

her housing status. She decided to keep her housing status a secret from people in order to stop "hearing it." She says:

> That's why, that's why my girlfriend don't know that I stay in the shelter right now cuz…she would like…(sighs)…she would, she would say something…about it. And I'm just tired of hearing it. A lot of people don't know that so….I'm very unstable. I can't stay...if I…if I can't stay somewhere…if I can't stay somewhere and I don't feel very comfortable, I'm gonna leave. I'm gonna leave. Um….and that's what, that's what I do. And that's what always happens to me. So I'd rather just stay, stay in the shelter.

The only people that knew Lareese was staying in a shelter program were those who were in the program with her. She describes the impact of this secrecy, especially challenging when her peers talk negatively about the program in which she lives.

> I just live a life that nobody knows…Since everybody don't know, it made me feel like…ugh…like I, I didn't want to hear it. I wanted to say something but I couldn't. Yeah, so…I couldn't. I just had to just sit there and be quiet and just shake my head, in the corner.

Lareese described living a life that nobody knows. She kept her housing instability a secret in order to protect herself from judgment, however her secrecy resulted in a feeling of powerlessness. When her peers made fun of the program she lived in, she was unable to defend the program or to stand up for herself, because she was not "out" about her housing status. When we met, Lareese had recently come out to her mother about her housing status. Evident in her explanation for keeping it a secret is fear of further rejection and disappointment at the hands of her mother.

> I told my mother last week that I was in the shelter. 'Cuz she thought I was living in the Bronx. But I wasn't. That I, I had my own place in the Bronx but … I was...she, only thing is like, she wanted to know why I lied to her about staying in the Bronx and I was like, I can never admit to your standards, so I lied.

Like Lareese, Honesty described being afraid to tell her mother about her housing status. She explains:

> I was so scared to tell my mama and them that I was like, up here living on the streets…I was scared to tell my mama, you know. I was like...you know, 'cuz I can go home. I have somewhere to stay, I just came up here with him [my boyfriend]…I came to [shelter program] and I had to survive for myself, do this, try to…lyin' to my mama, saying I wasn't…you know, I was, had a job and we doin' good and you know, just…it was a lot.

Honesty reported that she could return home, however she didn't want to. Lying to her mother was one way for her to avoid possible confrontation with her mother, but also served as a way for her to remain in denial about her housing status.

> My mama was like...she's like, when I finally told her I was homeless, when I finally told her I was homeless up here, she was like, she made little jokes like, why you don't come home? I was like you know, I ain't homeless. Like, that I can come home. She's like, yes you is, in New York, you homeless.

Honesty was in denial about being homeless; other young people did not identify with the term homeless, even if they technically fit the definition of the term. For example, Rebekah says:

> I don't feel, uh, like I'm homeless, you know, because I stay at Sylvia's Place, so I actually have somewhere that I can stay. Homeless is for, um, the girls or the guys who are on the streets and have to sleep on the subway or have to sleep, or sleep in a McDonald's where they can sit down somewhere. You know, that, *that* to me is homeless. People who don't have the opportunities to go and get help and get food and get proper clothing and things like that.

Though temporary, Rebekah had a bed to sleep in, so she did not view herself as homeless. She was not the only participant who made that distinction. At the time of his interview, Nino had been in shelter programs for over a year, and had couch surfed for many months prior to entering the shelter. However, when asked about being homeless, he said:

> One day I was homeless. Just one day. Um, I didn't have nowhere to go, um, I was, I slept on, on…Uh, inside a hallway and I felt like shit. But um, yeah just that, that like…it was maybe like a day or two. That I actually didn't have nowhere. I didn't even have…a penny to call nobody, I was just like…either somebody was like out of town, like I had nowhere to go. So…I was homeless. I didn't have no option at all.

Nino and Rebekah's understanding of what it means to be homeless was further reflected by TC and Tiffany, who prefer to use terms other than homeless to describe themselves and their experiences. TC says:

> Like, I prefer the term – when I originally became homeless, I didn't like people saying I was homeless. So I came up with the term 'home unfortunate.' And my definition for that term is, it's unfortunate I don't have a real home.

Similarly, Tiffany did not adopt the term homeless. She explains:

> See I don't say homeless, I'm just leaseless. I'm just leaseless at the time

Understanding the terminology that TGNC young people use to describe their housing instability is important and has implications for research and programmatic interventions. Phrasing questions around their experiences of homelessness requires young people to identify as homeless. The data demonstrate that this is not a universal conceptualization of their experiences of housing instability. Research recruitment strategies and programmatic outreach strategies that target the "homeless" may leave out the experiences of young people who do not identify as such.

Meaning-making. Participants made positive meaning out of their experiences. Though they described experiences on the street that were often terrifying, isolating, and dangerous, they routinely discussed the benefits of their experiences. For example, Ryan reflects positively not only about the people he met but also the way that meeting these people impacted his own development as a person.

> I would never have met the people, would never met my family, would have never run into the people that I've run into on the street. I really have been able to build up this kind of, like, life around me and build up this, like, a family around me. Build up, like, pretty much, I'm one of the people that pretty much everyone single person knows or knows of or has seen around. Like, I'm...everyone's cool with me and I'm cool with everyone and I've never have had any quote/unquote beef quote/unquote with anyone. And it's just...and you know, I've also blossomed into, you know, into the man I am today.

Nikiyah normalized her experience, and framed her situation as temporary.

> I mean, everybody, I mean a lot of people go through this, the homeless and all of that. But this is not forever. This is just for the time being. You know, you gotta keep the faith and do what you gotta do, so you can get yourself together, and um ... I mean, if I can do it, anybody can do it. You know?

Omar shares his optimistic point of view. Despite the hardships he faced, he held onto the idea that his situation would soon improve. It was this idea of imminent improvement that helped him cope with the present. He said:

> I just, I feel like…it's gonna be hard now, but it's gonna get better, so… that's what I always thought since the day, since the first day I got homeless. I was like, now is bad but it's gonna get better and like, it's not that good, but at least I got something. It's not a lot, but it's something, it's better than nothing. So…that's the way I think about it.

Rebekah was surprised at the support she was able to find in New York City for transgender young people. Though she shared feelings of isolation and had to navigate challenging situations, she does not regret her decision to move to New York City.

> And so, coming here I had absolutely no idea what New York was going to offer me. I really have no regrets after coming here. Because finding out that, especially for people in my situation, not only me being like, without housing but also being transgender, you know, how they take care of us so well, like Medicaid, food stamps and getting your name changed and getting your ID changed and getting this and getting that. It is so great. Because I didn't know about ANY of this before I came down here.

The notion of freedom was repeatedly conveyed in the participants' narratives. The sense of freedom occurred after their departure from their homes. This freedom was often related to no longer needing to hide nor pretend to be someone they were not. KiKi says:

> The happiest times of my life since I have been alive would be the times that I have been homeless....Because I never just have to answer to anybody. I can wear what I want and not have to worry about it. You know and all just the little pic-nac-natty wacks and all that, I didn't have to worry about it. So you know, the homeless times were the best times.

KiKi spent much of her adolescence living in group homes where she was prohibited from expressing her gender identity. She found freedom outside of the group home structure and the gendered regulations they imposed. Her ability to express her gender identity was critical to her well-being, so much so that she referred to her homeless times as her best times. For Omar, the importance of being true to himself in both visual and verbal expression is evident as he shares how he has felt since arriving in New York City.

> I feel real nice since I got here. I been feeling real great 'cuz I can be me. I can say what I feel.

Similarly, Rebekah describes finding a sense of independence and freedom following her departure from home. Even though she is homeless, she reports feeling happier than she has felt in a very long time.

> I'm absolutely independent. I am, it's me, 24/7. It is *me*. Even in Nashville, um, whenever I was in school you know, because whenever I was in school my dad's VA was paying for it. Um, and so I would get 1320 a month for housing and so I was staying in the hotel um, because it was really cheap and I could go and use the rest for groceries and all of that stuff. And so, you know, even then I felt very, um...blocked down because my dad was like - if you screw up I can take away this VA at any moment…Um, and so, coming here and being more independent, it is absolutely....free. Like I feel so much better, um, versus …everywhere else. Like I feel this, this is the most independent and happy that I've felt in a very, very long time. *Very* long time.

For Rebekah, freedom also meant not relying on her parents for financial support. Her happiness is connected to her ability to focus on herself without the constraints she felt when financially tied to her parents.

Impact of housing status on self-perception. The experience of homelessness impacted the participants' sense of self. Some young people internalized the negative messages they had received from their families, friends, and society about homelessness and also about TGNC people. Other young people developed a stronger sense of self and took pride in the

independence they exhibited while homelessness. Ryan shares how societal messages impacted him:

> Basically being told indirectly and directly by society and by politicians and by everyone around you that you're less than human because you're homeless and having to deal with the dehumanization that happens and being looked at like you're scum because you're homeless. Like all of that, to have to try and kind of counteractivate your head and really kinda understand that, you know, believe once again that you are worth something and that no, you're not, that your life isn't disposable. Because when you're on the street like, that's pretty much the only message that you're getting from your surroundings, apart from you know, people that are homeless with you or staff that work at homeless youth programs. Other than that you're pretty much the, the bane of society, you know. You're seen as...like...as...you know, as subservient. People get pissed at you if you're asking for a swipe. People look at you like you're, like you're an annoyance. People look at you like you shouldn't be there, you know, you feel a lot of times that you are undeserving. You start really believing that.

Zariah makes a connection between housing instability and mental instability. She says:

> Unstable...unstable housing will really have your mind going…going crazy. It will bring you into depression, which is what I'm diagnosed with. I'm taking antidepressants for it, you know…it's just, it's much. Unstable housing will have you doing a lot of…things. You know. It's…bad, unstable…it's bad. It's real bad.

Several participants articulated a range of feelings related to their homeless experiences. They discuss both the negative impacts of their experiences and in doing so they also express determination and begin making meaning of their experiences in a positive way. For example, Alexandra reports feeling lost, and also shares techniques she uses in order to "stay strong."

> I …I feel very, like, lost at times, honestly I do. But I try to stay strong, I do my meditation, that's what helps me to kind of be confident in myself, but it's…you know, I feel very like lost, a lot of the times, um …. but I know I have this place and I'm trying to be strong.

Alexandra articulates the duality that characterized housing instability for many of the study participants. While feeling lost and sometimes lonely, they also felt confident and strong. Young people employed a variety of techniques in order to deal with the trauma of life on the

streets. TC shares her technique of laughing at every negative thing that happened, in order to better cope with the reality of her situation.

> It was a very bad time for me, but I always try to make the best out of situations, which I was good at, so…Um, for every…for every negative thing that happened, I would try and laugh about it so that it wasn't as hard to deal with. I think if you just make fun of things, it makes it a little easier to deal with, so that was how I worked around things.

Nikiyah and Nino both describe the negative impact of their housing instability, and at the same time they also begin to integrate their experiences as positively related to learning, enjoying life, and gaining wisdom. Nikiyah says:

> Really like, that's like, I felt real pathetic cuz ... I mean, I'm not stable, I couldn't make up my mind on what to, you know, I should've been, I graduated from high school. I went to college. I don't got my degree but, like, you know, I felt like I coulda done so much better for myself. But you know, you learn from your mistakes. And I was young too, I was enjoying life. I was having fun, too, you know. I like traveling....I really do.

Nino shares his awareness of being alone. With that awareness comes a sense of responsibility and purpose. Though his situation could be interpreted in multiple ways, Nino chose to frame it as an opportunity for growth when he shared it in the interview. He says:

> Um…well….I…that makes me feel…um…that makes me feel bad 'cuz I know like, like I realize that ain't nobody gonna do nothing for you, you know? But it makes me aware that, this shit, like, you have to do shit on yourself 'cuz you're getting older and believe it or not you're gonna have to do shit by yourself. Like, ain't nobody gonna hold your hand while you crossing the street, like, you gotta look both sides, make sure a car is coming or you gonna fucking get hit, you know? And like…that made me open my eyes, like I've had to grow quicker 'cuz I've always had to take care of myself and like, know where I could go and like, you know, stuff like that, so that made me more grown and wiser person.

Similarly, Xavier shares how tough the experience of homelessness is for him, while at the same time envisioning the way this low point will be incorporated into his success story.

> Um...I mean, it's kind of the lowest of the low for me. And I, I feel more confident about it, and myself. And that I've faced a lot of challenges that ...like, I don't care if people will ever get to that point, but ....they will have no idea…You know it's always nice to hear those stories of people who have made it successful and you know, earlier on they didn't

> have it so great. So I want to be one of those people who've experienced the lowest of the lows and maybe…has a successful life later on.

Isolation & connection to community. Isolation was a common theme among the participants, and several reported experiencing. However, many of the young people also shared experiences of connection. They were connected to other young people experiencing homelessness and also to other TGNC young people, sometimes for the first time in their lives. The participants' ability to trust was severely impacted by their rejection experiences, which contributed to their feelings of loneliness and posed challenges for the development of positive connections with peers and program staff. Zakia said the following about trust:

> You think you can trust your family but you really can't. You tell one person, next thing you know the whole family know and everybody looking at you foolish.

Zariah learned from her family that people cannot be trusted. On the other hand, Ryan learned to trust when he was growing up in his family, but learned the importance of not doing so once on the street.

> I learned very quickly, um...like, I was raised to be very, very trusting and so, and but very early on that kind of, that kind of stopped. I was like...people still to this day kind of think that I'm very, very naive and I don't have street smarts but very early on I became very, very street savvy, very street savvy early on.

Ryan acknowledged the importance of developing "street smarts" and learning that he should not trust people. Zariah expressed a desire to trust other young people experiencing homelessness, but found it difficult to do so. She says:

> You trying to trust but you really can't cuz you really don't know. Everybody's in the same position, in need of something, so…

Rebekah shared Zakia's fear of trusting others. She moved to New York City alone, and without any contacts in the city once she arrived. She fears that trusting others with information will result in the eventual use of that information against her.

> So not really knowing anyone here and me being a very guarded person, you know, not trusting a lot of people because people are very, very shady and, you know, especially whenever I they meet someone like me they want to learn all about me so that whenever something goes wrong they can go and speak about everything that I ever told them. And so, um, it is very hard.

Though it's important to her to protect herself, Rebekah also recognizes feelings of loneliness and isolation.

> Um, I feel...very um …lonely sometimes. You know, coming here with no one. I came here with no money. I spent the last of my money on a greyhound ticket, I came here with no money, one bag...and just me…I feel that anyone who was willing to talk to me..I was like, please, come and be my friend because I, I was so alone that I, you know, anyone who was willing to talk to me I was like…Ok, let's be best friends and be together 24/7 because I don't want to be alone.

TC managed relationships differently than Rebekah. Whereas Rebekah did not want to be alone, TC purposely distanced herself from others. She says:

> I became more of a loner than I am already. I distanced myself from people to the max. And these were people that were in shelters also and that were homeless also, but I distanced myself from them.

Creating families. One of the ways young people dealt with the isolation associated with homelessness was to develop street families or gay families. In addition to providing a community of support and connection, street and gay families also provided safety. Ryan explains:

> And only way to kinda go through it is that eventually you know, really quickly on you kind of get out into a street family or a gay family because it's just .... The thing I love about most about the homeless community is that even though we could be sleeping on the street and be hungry and cold, we're still able to have a good time and smile, like.

Nino explains how he found his gay father:

> Um, him and his mom, I used to go over there when I was homeless and stuff when I was, and like, even before I was homeless, like, his mom used to always be like, my mother. And um…like we just…he, he told me one day that he was gay, that he was bisexual, but then ended up being gay and stuff and um, then we were just chillin. He asked me to be my gay father, then…like, that was like another relationship opened, like you know? Like, um, at least somebody's with me now…Cuz I was younger than him,

> and…and I was like, I was a lesbian and stuff and he was like, yo I could like, you know, I could teach you…whatever, I could take you to – he was the first person to actually take me to the village, you know and yeah, so he was like, oh, can…can I be your gay father and I was like…….what do you mean? I didn't know. Like, what do you mean? He's like, you know, in the gay community like, I just want to be like, just kind of like big brother type, you know. And I was like, sure, you're already like my big brother, you know.

The connections young people made with their created families were powerful forces in their lives. Ryan describes the connection that he felt to his street family and the pivotal role they placed in the creation of some of his best memories.

> I've also come to a point where, you know, I realize that even though it was...sucks to be on the street that also some of my best memories are from when I was on the street. Because like, you know you, you get to know people really quickly and you have a, you have this strong bond with people that you just met, you know maybe even like 2 days prior but you already have that bond because you're sharing the same experience of homelessness, you know. And you may meet someone you know one, like one day and then immediately and then you find out that, oh, oh you and I have the same street brother. Oh wow! Ok and then immediately you're siblings, immediately. And so, really bonds that kind of are strong, that last too. You know, the same people that are ... I consider my street family as still my family, you know.

Survival

All of the participants found ways to survive their premature departure from their homes. Their resourcefulness and strength are paramount. Participants discussed their tactics for survival, and the choices they were faced with when needing to procure food, hygiene supplies, or money. Young people had experienced various levels of self-sufficiency prior to their homeless experience; some reported having learned self-sufficiency at an early age. Others had to learn how to be self-sufficient once on the street. For example, Honesty described the safety net her mother's support provided for her before she moved to New York and became homeless.

> I'm so used to my mama just like, I'm so used to having my own and my…and if I don't have it my mama will just pick up the slack or something like that.

On the other hand, TC learned how to fend for herself at an early age. She found this early responsibility for her survival useful once she was kicked out of her home.

> Well…since young I always had to fend for myself, so when I was put out, it wasn't something new to me. But it got to a higher level that I had to fend for myself and survive. Um, one of the things I was taught when I was younger was, all you really need to know how to do in life is survive. And I'm good at surviving. So…um…I guess as far as surviving goes, it's just gotten easier for me now. Um, it started off, it was hard, um…when I first got put out but now it's…it's a piece of cake…and I was trained at a young age to survive. We really didn't have much growing up, so we always had to survive.

The skills young people learned were imperative to their survival, though many times incongruous with mainstream society. Ryan shares his insight into this phenomenon.

> And the, the strange thing is…is that when I was on the street, um, like people would be boasting about how they were good, so good at, at thievery. Really good thievery in the youth community is revered because it's a really useful skill. It's a skill that you *need* in order to survive. And...that's just one of the ways it's complete opposite. In the housed worlds, thievery is looked upon like...as its bad but in our world it's looked at as like, a positive thing because you're able to, you know, acquire things that you need. You can't find food you know without, legally, you just go to a Duane Reade and steal some stuff and go to union square and sell it and get, make money.

Nino's experience acquiring basic needs is similar to Ryan's. Young people were resourceful, finding ways to ensure their basic needs would be met. Nino says:

> Um…getting…necessities every day is so easy over here 'cuz all I have to do is craft, like…it's easy.

In addition to "crafting" – a term used among the participants to refer to stealing - some young people participated in the sex industry. Though they were not specifically asked about their involvement in the sex industry, one-third of the participants raised the topic when discussing their experiences on the street. Among the young people interviewed for this study, female-identified young people were more likely than male-identified young people to engage in the sex industry. Nikiyah shares her experience:

> It became to the point that I had caught myself ...kinda soliciting, like, escorting. And I couldn't do it. I had put my name back on the list for the shelter and I got called. And that's why I'm here now.

Berlin took pride in the fact that for many months she was able to find alternative ways to survive other than participating in the sex industry. When discussing her first experiences on the streets, she said:

> And we had, we were, we were the kind of girls where we were, I can't do sex work, girl I can't do that. Like you know, like. So it's not like, but, so we would just stick it out and like just starve, like, like sharing like potato chips and like a bag of like, and like a soda, like, I'm talking about starving, I was like *girl*, we is *homeless*.

After many months of couch surfing and moving between shelter programs, Berlin ran out of housing options. She had no job, no money, and nowhere to go. She reached a point of desperation that required new tactics for survival. She explains the circumstances leading up to her first time doing sex work:

> My 2010 summer *wore me out*. I'm talking about. So I'm telling [friend's name], oh girl I'm homeless whatever, so I leave my stuff…in there because I had nowhere to put it. And so I'm basically roaming the streets all night. And this is when I…first ever, like, did sex work. Because I was literally *on…the…streets*…like, with nothing. This was the first time I…literally I ever tried doing sex work. And I would be up all night and all day. There was one time I didn't go to sleep for like three days. I was just drinking coffee, I looked horrible.

Zariah shares her feelings about her engagement in sex work. Her experiences illustrate the toll survival can take on one's sense of self. This is further complicated by the negative messages she's received about the position of transgender women in society.

> I don't feel beautiful all the time because of the stuff that I do…I feel like it's downgrading, I'm downgrading myself. You know, like by prostituting. When I have to do that, I feel like, when every man see me they see this ho, or this slut. You know, this transy that knows how to suck a good dick or get fucked real good and, you know, do ho-ish things and just be a ho. And a ho and a ho and a ho. That's how I feel when I feel…feel dirty. You know…I feel like, I…I…I won't be nothing, you know what I'm saying?

Zariah's sense of herself was negatively impacted when she had to engage in sex work. Omar was the one male identified participant who also engaged in the sex industry. He shares his story:

> I don't know if this important, but…um when I was on the street, for me to get money, for eat because I was passing hunger for days, I had to strip. I had to go to a strip, strip club and work there. And like, it was awful. I *hated* it. It was…. I'm a *boy*, boys don't do that…(whispers)…it's awful. Men there, watching me…I hated it. But I had to do it, cuz I was, I was *dying*. I was passing like 3, 4 days without eating. I'm hypoglycemic, no I couldn't take it. So I just, and…it was a bad experience.

Omar felt he had no other choice than to work in the sex industry. Without access to food or the money to buy food, he feared he was dying.

The relative safety of homelessness. The participants were asked to consider how their stories would be different if they never left their homes. Their responses reflect the dire nature of their circumstances. Just over one-third of the participants said that they would kill themselves if they never left. KiKi explains that she would have committed suicide:

> Honestly, if I never left home, I would probably already be dead. Because I probably would've killed myself by now. It would probably been some years already passed my death. 'Cuz I could not have dealed, dealt with that for even a year. I could not. I mean… I'm not taking all that bull crap, and if I *had* to stay there, I probably would've killed myself.

For Zakia, living at home meant fighting who she is. For her, that would have been too much to handle any longer. She says:

> Because if I didn't leave, I never would've ever - I would've killed myself. I would've been…gone. And, if I didn't have enough guts to take the opportunity when it approached me, when she kicked me out…if I didn't take the opportunity to leave, I would've been dead, because I would've killed myself because of fighting …who I am. And now I don't have to fight who I am. I'm who I am 100% free, and can't nobody else tell me no different. That's just the bottom line of it.

Both Kiki and Zakia both said they would have committed suicide if they didn't leave their homes. Likewise, Ryan also believes he would've killed himself if he had remained in his home. He explains how getting kicked out saved his life:

> Honestly I don't think I would be alive today if I wasn't...if I wasn't homeless. If my mom hadn't kicked me out of the house, I wouldn't be alive today. Probably wouldn't have made it past another year before I was...if I wasn't thrown out of my house...so. I probably would've end up, ended up killing myself probably. 'Cuz, just being in that house, 'cuz I wouldn't have the strength to leave on my own. I definitely wouldn't have the strength to leave on my own.

Tara shares that she would also have likely committed suicide if she didn't leave her mother's house:

> It helped me, like, just…it basically just helped me, like, it…I don't…I really…I…sorry. It helped me basically and dramatically. Like, if I didn't left out of my mother's house, god forbid, I probably would've just killed myself there.

Similarly, Miranda says:

> If I didn't leave Las Vegas when I did, I would be dead. I would have killed myself. I was very close. If I didn't leave when I did, I would not be here sharing this.

Charlie echoed the other participants' response, while also making meaning of his experiences as something that was always meant to happen.

> I would be alive outside, dead inside. I would have given up. I would probably have even killed myself, you know. I…I might've, you never know. Like, I think that I was always destined to have run away from that place because I could not have…lived.

The ability to live authentically in line with their gender identity was so critically important to the TGNC young people in this study that many stated they would have committed suicide if they did not leave their physical homes. In addition to suicide as the cause of death, a few participants thought they would be dead due to other factors in their home environments. Nikiyah, who is from Trinidad, shared:

> Oh my god, I think I would've still been a guy. I would've been unhappy still. I woulda, woulda probably woulda been dead if I was still in my island 'cuz.....it's bad out there.

Tiffany's response was:

> Oh shit girl, I'd been dead. No shade, I'd been dead.

The relative safety of homelessness is communicated in the above excerpts. Without their experiences of homelessness, nearly one-third of the participants in this study would have killed themselves. An unsupportive home life had a profound impact on the participants, particularly those who credit homelessness as saving their lives.

This chapter constructed a linear journey from young people's early awareness of difference through to their lives following their departure from home. A common pathway emerged for the process of identity assertion as well as the process of housing instability. The process of identity assertion included an awareness of difference, managing difference, and coming out. The process of housing instability included getting kicked out, seeking opportunity, navigating institutions, finding community, making meaning, and survival.

CHAPTER SIX

RECIRPOCAL RELATIONSHIPS: GENDER IDENTITY ASSERTION AND HOUSING STATUS

> Well, when I first got on the street I was...I felt immensely broken and like, just torn apart to bits. Because after, you know...and also in the same, at the same time that it was you know, really scary and frightening it was also, at the same time like a rebirthing where I was finally able to you know, like, be myself. And I was able at [name of LGBTQ shelter program] I was finally able to be known as Ryan and to really live as who I wanted to be and who as I saw myself as and so I...at one...one…At the same time that it was very frightening, at the same time it was very liberating you know, and I was...finally able to just kind of be myself. And kind of really learn also who I am as a person and as a man…exactly kind of, like, discovered myself again and...I mean...and like it was at the same time that was all good, I was also kind of very stressed early on especially since, you know, I...was a stranger to, you know, this world.

In the above quote, Ryan articulates the contrasting emotions related to many of the participants' experiences with their housing instability and gender identity assertion. Though his experience of homelessness was harrowing in many ways, it was also instrumental in the development and articulation of his gender identity. Through his homeless experience, he was no longer restricted in his ability to express himself. Though he lost his physical home, he found himself through the shift from housing stability to housing instability. He says:

> And it's just.....and you know, I've also blossomed into, you know, into the man I am today.

A salient theme emerged in this research – the participants' gender identities informed their housing instability and their housing instability, in turn, informed the assertion of their gender identities. Gender identity assertion refers to the participants' ability to lay claim to who they are in a gendered sense. The majority of participants described developing an awareness of their TGNC identities prior to their experiences of housing instability. Though their identities may have already been developed, they lacked the ability to assert these identities within the constraints of their environments. This chapter will examine the reciprocal relationship between

housing status and gender identity assertion for the study participants, drawing both on quotations from interview transcripts, as well as the participant-created maps.

The Pathway to Homelessness

For 18 (66%) of the participants in this study, their gender identity or expression was the sole reason they were ejected from their homes. Only two participants described pathways into homelessness that were not related to their gender identity or expression. For the remaining seven participants, their gender identity or expression was a contributing factor in their homelessness, along with familial conflict rooted in other issues. No one pathway into homelessness was identified, however similar themes emerged in the participant narratives. Omar recalls being kicked out by his father:

> So, um...he threw me. He threw me out because I was dressing like a boy and he said he doesn't have lesbian daughters.

Omar was kicked out because of his gender non-conformity, and his father's presumption that he was a lesbian. Similarly, Chass was told her lifestyle was sick when ejected from her home. She shares:

> I remember um, coming home from work and my stuff was packed, the locks were changed and there was a note. Um….there was 200 dollars in an envelope and she told me to find somewhere to go…in the note. She don't care where I go, as long as it's away from her. 'Cuz my lifestyle is sick and she can't have it around her. – Chass

Like Omar and Chass, Jaime's father kicked her out for being transgender. She describes coming home from a night out:

> And then um, when I got home I got into a big argument with my dad, my dad kicked my ass in the street . . . cuz he was like, "What are you wearing, what are you doing? This and this and that…dah..dah..dah..dah." He kicked my ass in the street, kicked me out.

Family rejection related to gender identity was not the only precipitator of homelessness for the study participants. However, even when additional factors such as poverty or parental

mental illness were present, the role of gender nonconformity was evident in the participants' narratives. For example, Alexandra understood the conflicts between she and her mother to be the result of untreated mental illness. When conflict occurred, her mother would use homophobic and transphobic slurs. Alexandra discusses being put out by her mother:

> My mom is mentally ill, so we got into a lot of arguments. We didn't see eye to eye. We'd argue about, um, me, like, not giving her money and um, I was kinda in the streets prostituting with her, but I would come to sleep there… She put me out because the fact that we just wasn't getting along and every time she would get mad at me she would call me a faggot or a punk or man in a wig, that type of thing, so … it just never worked out, you know.

Though Alexandra does not attribute getting kicked out of her home to her gender identity, she does describe her transgender status as a source of conflict within her mother. Like Alexandra, Nino was not explicitly kicked out due to his transgender identity. However, he makes the connection between the behaviors that led to his ejection from home and his internal struggle with his gender identity. He says:

> It's not that I got kicked out for…based on me but I acted out 'cuz I was, you know, I was insecure with myself. Like, not insecure but like, like, I kinda found myself just acting out like, smoking pot, selling it and stuff. 'Cuz I felt not accepted. But I didn't want to tell anybody, you know? So… it was my actions that got me kicked out but it was the actions that I did because of that, you know?

Nino understands his acting out behavior to be a result of his internal conflict surrounding his gender identity. He was keeping a secret that he feared would lead to rejection from those close to him. He was not asserting his transgender identity when kicked out of his home. Rather, he was managing his identity and his fears through the use of substances. In this way, his homelessness is connected to his gender identity. Though Berlin's identity didn't cause her to be ejected from her home, it resulted in her homelessness following her departure from her familial home. She was planning to attend college in New York City following her high school graduation to live with her aunt.

> She said you can come…and the *day* before I was supposed to catch my flight, um, she said "My husband, um, he's not comfortable with you coming." And I knew why. I knew why. Um, he was a West Indian male. A Jamaican man, so I'm, and, uh, the…the guess wasn't hard, you know, like…so I was like, ok but I leave tomorrow.

This sudden withdrawal of her housing was related to her identity (as a gay male at the time) and her gender nonconformity. Even though her housing fell through the day before she was to move, Berlin was determined to continue with her plans to attend college in New York City. She told her aunt she would be living with a friend she met online.

> She was a little concerned but she was like, ok. She was like, I know, because I've always been pretty mature and always pretty much been independent, like, every since I left my mother's house I pretty much had worked, I went to school, did everything on my own. Didn't really *have* to, did it because this is what I wanted to do. Yeah, so she was like, ok. She *trusted* me. And I came here, and I was homeless.

Berlin's story exemplifies the bravery and resourcefulness demonstrated by so many of the participants in this study. In the face of difficult choices, the young people made extraordinary choices given the resources they had at their disposal.

Sophie's Choice

All of the participants engaged in the complimentary processes of searching for a physical home and simultaneously searching for a sense of home within themselves. This sense of home within themselves can be explained as a sort of gender home. I will use the phrase gender home to describe a TGNC young person's understanding of who they are in a gendered sense, as well as their ability to safely articulate this knowing. Safely articulating this knowing refers to the condition of identity assertion that is not met with condemnation, abuse, destruction of property, or the withdrawal of shelter. The concept of a gender home takes contextual factors into account, rather than focusing solely on one's own internal process of identity acceptance and consolidation. This added dimension of finding comfort and safety in the act of aligning one's physical presentation with their authentic gender shifts the focus from the individual alone to the

individual in relation to the environment. While the participants may have had an internal recognition of their TGNC identities for years prior to their experiences of homelessness, very few were able to embody their authentic gender freely and wholly while housed with their parents or guardians. When they were no longer able to regulate their gender to satisfy the demands of their families, TGNC young people found themselves unwelcome in their homes, forced to choose between living authentically as their true gender or remaining a part of their family. In many instances, young people had to choose between the two – home in gender or home in place. Though Ryan continued to live with his mother after coming out as transgender, it was when he expressed the desire to transition – to be more at home in a gendered sense - that he was told to leave.

> I had graduated, um, high school and I had told my mom that, you know, I wanted to transition. 'Cuz she had known that I was trans, I was like, she had known at that point almost two years that point. Um...and it wasn't until it became a reality for her that she kind of flipped out. And so she said to me, "you're fine to do it, you just can't live here."

Ryan was presented with a tragic dilemma; either decision would result in some amount of hardship. To stay in his familial home would mean continued suppression of his true identity. To leave his home would leave him without shelter and potentially other basic needs. In a similar fashion, following an argument with her mother, Lareese was given an ultimatum in which she was forced to choose between being true to herself and staying in her mother's home:

> Then she was like, if you wanna have a lifestyle you want then you can't stay in my house. So I packed my stuff. And then she asked, "Where you going?" And just told her, I'm not ….I'm not changing for you. Like, this is who I am, so I packed my stuff and I left.

Both Lareese and Ryan left home. They were presented with unsolvable options and decided they needed to live as their authentic selves. Zariah also had to choose between her

physical home and her gender home. Loss accompanies this choice. Below, she articulates the results of this choice:

> When I was staying with my mother, I didn't feel as confident. I didn't feel as beautiful, nothing like that. And now when I, when I left like, like now I feel confident and I feel beautiful but…I still feel like I have nothing. You know what I'm saying, but myself. I want to feel like I have something to fall back on. You know what I'm saying, like someone to hold me, you know what I'm saying? Something like that, you know, but ….now I don't.

Zariah conveys what she lost – something to fall back on and someone to hold her – ideas that one may associate with the unconditional love of a parent. She also communicates what she gained in leaving. She gained a sense of herself as a beautiful and confident woman. The pain of rejection remains and is evident in her narrative. She feels like she has nothing left except for herself. She struggles to find value in herself, because her self is the very thing that was rejected by her mother.

TGNC young people are keenly aware that they live in a society that harshly punishes them for their gender transgressions. Several of the participants connected society's disdain for gender diversity with familial judgment. They described feeling unwanted and out of place both within their family systems and also within society at large. Omar was rejected by his parents and also felt like a societal outcast. He says:

> And then, um, society pointing, they don't want you. My family doesn't want me for being...a stud, being this way.

Tara longed for her mother to come to her defense and to protect her from the disapproving society and from her critical extended family. Tara yearned for her mother's support of the outward expression of her identity, but instead she had to choose between her gender expression and her mother's approval.

> I was presenting at the time and my mom didn't like it and she said if I actually wore women's clothing it would embarrass her in front of her whole family and everything.

> But if it would embarrass her in front of the whole family, wouldn't she just speak up and just like, take my side for once.

KiKi not only dealt with the absence of support, but also endured verbal abuse from her mother. When she attempted to find home in both her gender and also in place, living with her mother, she was endangered by her mother's transphobic and abusive behavior.

> See, she can't get the thing down, she don't wants to call me a she and her but that's what I prefers to be called and that's what I am going to be called. You're disrespecting me if you're calling me he and him and using my government name when I asked you not to. And I told you, you know, you're my mother, you know. And she would talk about me and stuff in front of people. She'd be like well sometimes I don't know what he is, I want to pull down his pants and see if he got a dick or a coochie.

Statements such as those made by KiKi's mother are not affirming of her identity. Further, such statements could endanger KiKi, by outing her as transgender to people who otherwise might not have known. Her mother's lack of support and inability to respect KiKi's preferred name and gender pronouns did not allow KiKi to safely occupy her gender home while living in her mother's physical home.

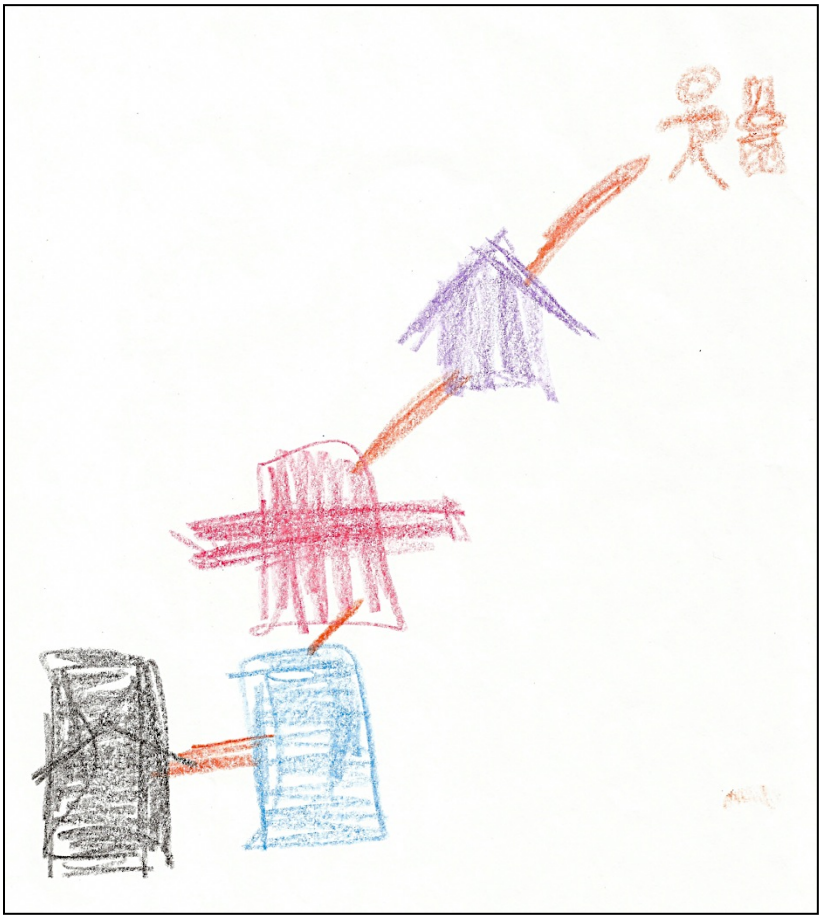
While instability is often associated with homelessness, Jaime's experiences of uncertainty in the stability of her living situation made her feel homeless even though she had a physical place to stay in her dad's house:

> I feel like when I lived at my dad's house I was homeless. 'Cuz it's like, I lived there, but I didn't feel like it was really a home. It's like, that's why going into a shelter I don't feel so much different about, it's like I feel like, I felt homeless while I lived there, cuz it's like any minute I could be kicked out, any minute this could happen, any minute that could happen.

Jaime's map further illustrates the disconnect she experienced between having a physical home and being at home within herself. She depicts the beginning and middle parts of her journey with buildings, devoid of herself or other people. At the time of the interview, when she is physically homeless and no longer living with her father, the buildings are gone and she is

visible. It was only when she no longer had to conform to her father's regulatory gender demands that she was able to be seen, though the cost was her physical home.

Figure 4
Jaime's Journey



Regulatory demands related to gender expression were a routine part of the participants' experiences while living in their parental/familial homes. With Nino's physical home came a lack of consistency and stability in his identity. He was unable to be himself and had to alter his behavior and expression depending on whom he was with. He described a sense of relief resulting from the no longer needing to hide his identity in an LGBTQ affirming shelter program.

> I don't know how to explain it but other…other times, like before this, this housing experience, I feel like...like all this certain things I could do and certain things I can't do.

> I could act a certain way in this time because I'm like this and…there's certain things I can't do in front of my mom that I can do around here 'cuz it's accepted, you know?...I'm just myself and now I don't care about like, like presenting my, portraying myself a different way…in front of other people. Like, I'm more open, like…if...if…everybody in this program will accept me, everybody outside could accept me, you know? And I don't...I don't hide myself anymore.

Nino's statements also emphasize the crucial role of identity-related support and affirmation. It is only through the acceptance of his transgender identity he found within a program that he is able to imagine being accepted within the broader society. Like other young people in this study, Nino's exit from his physical home facilitated his self-acceptance and further articulation of his identity.

Like Nino, Tara moved into an LGBTQ affirming shelter program following her ejection from her mother's house. The shift from housing stability to instability left her with a more secure sense of self, as she articulates below:

> I would say coming here really made me feel at home because I can get a lot of information. I can do anything. I can be whoever I want to be. There's nobody saying you can't be this, you can't be that. You have a right to be whoever you want to be.

The difficult choices participants were forced to make continued after leaving or being ejected from their homes. For young people who wanted to maintain connections with their families, they were repeatedly forced to choose between erasing themselves or erasing their familial relationships. Tara's story illustrates the choices that young people often have to make when navigating relationships with their families of origin. Should Tara want to visit her mother, she would need to present physically as male, thereby erasing her self. Her mother's rejection led to her lack of a physical home, and the fear of further rejection from her mother inhibits her from finding home in a gendered sense.

> If I start on hormones right now, if I start on hormones, even just thinking about that, if I start on hormones, becoming a woman, just get everything done….my mom doesn't even know what to do with me. She doesn't know if I can…if I, I don't…I…I don't know if

> she might disown me or not. So…like, cuz that's what I want to do. I want to start on hormones, I want to, like...I really, like, I just want to be me and do me and see how my life goes.

Rebekah shares a similar story. In order to visit her family, she has to hide her true identity.

> Coming home and...like not being able to dress the way that I *need* to you know, I mean, I'm on hormones so I have all of *this* going on and so going home it's very hard to hide all of that and so um, the last time that I saw them was Christmas and um, I had all of my hair up in, in this hat actually, and then I was wearing big, saggy clothes...I was, I was so pissed off because my parents, like they just were being so rude and their excuse is…is that they don't want my brother to know. And they don't want my brother to find out because it might influence him.

She struggled with the impact of her parents' rejection.

> I kind of felt like I was losing myself, um, and I was losing my mind, you know. I, I was, you know like, what is going on, like? You know, what makes me such a bad person, that I'm trying to be myself ... That I can't be my, you know, I can't be myself and my parents can't accept this.

Rebekah made the difficult decision that she would no longer visit her family. The psychological burden of erasure was too great for her to continue. She said:

> You know my family is my family, but I am me. They don't live my life, I do. So...I'm not going to be unhappy because they want me to be. Because then I'll end up on channel 4 news for killing myself.

Rebekah framed her decision to stop visiting her family as necessary to her well-being and, ultimately, to her ability to stay alive. She recalled feeling like she was "losing her mind" trying to understand why her parents couldn't accept her, and she tried to temper her gender expression around her family in order to continue her visits. As she moved closer to finding her gender home and began gender affirming hormone therapy, it became both physically and emotionally harder for her to hide her identity. She feared she would kill herself if she continued

to hide to make her parents happy. For Rebekah, occupying her gender home was a matter of life or death.

Reciprocal Pathways

As previously discussed, the participants' gender identity and expression was often directly related to their pathway into homelessness. Likewise, some young people related their homelessness to their pathway into a gender home; gender identity and homelessness were reciprocal in nature. Their gender identity and expression informed their homelessness, and their homelessness informed their gender identity and expression. Berlin says:

> I feel like, honestly, I don't know if I would've , um…I would've transitioned. I would've. But I don't know if I would've done it as soon. I probably would've left and went somewhere else to do it.

Implicit in the above quote by Berlin is the need to leave one's physical home in order to find one's gender home. Had she not left home and become physically homeless, Berlin is not sure that she would've begun her gender transition. Similarly, Ana Joelle connects her homeless experiences with her acceptance of her gender identity. She illustrated her process of self-acceptance in her map (figure 5):

> It's like this part, part of like me becoming homeless was it became a part of me...accepting who I was and like the process, I wouldn't have had been transitioning if I wasn't like, away from my family because they wouldn't have let me. It wouldn't have been as easy as it is now.

Figure 4
Ana
Joelle's Journey

In her map, Ana Joelle illustrates the journey towards her gender home. Her journey begins as a small, hiding person surrounded by darkness and continues into the future self she envisions. Her future self appears feminine and stands tall, surrounded by light. Ana Joelle offered the following explanation of her map:

> So this is like the past, I'm like a dark area, like, hiding and you see like my short hair, just like, slowly in the process, of like mid transition. This is like I can be myself now…this is like the moment that...the moment that I got like…the, the um…the moment of like, acceptance and like...and um, I get...it's like right here's like, where I kind of accepted myself for who I was and like, accepted my femininity…I'm being kissed by like, feminine spirit. And it's like my future goal where I come, I come out as radiant and...who I see myself as.

Ana Joelle's process of gender identity assertion was the focus of her map. The participants were asked to simply map their journeys from the time they left home until the present day, without specification as to which journey they should map. Though she had experienced housing instability and lacked a physical home, occupying her gender home was the

journey to which she was drawn, suggesting the importance of gender identity assertion, even in the midst of a housing crisis.

Charlie, like Ana Joelle, was unable to find a gender home until he was away from his physical/familial home. The process of searching for home(s) was conveyed in both Charlie's spoken narrative and also in his map. His map, below, illustrates his journey from a physical home to a gendered home.

Figure 6
Charlie's Journey

He explained his journey as follows:

> I guess it's pretty much like explaining 3 phases of life that I went through like, um, there's like grass…um…uh, I made the flowers heart shaped at the center because that's pretty much as a kid where I'd find...love. And then there's like fire and pretty much just like, representing my aunt's place where all that stuff happened. You know, these

> pictures of violence, someone crying, the razor blade because that's when I had my self-mutilation phase. And then right at the end there's this like, someone in a power pose wearing pants, because even though it was tough I guess like, through the fire gold is furnished, so that is…where I begin to have my core sense of where I am. This pretty much represents where I am now. I pretty much portrayed it as water because you can either drown, or choose to float. So. … I'm choosing pretty much to float and that there is me. I drew myself with flames reaching up to grab the sun because I'm still headed up.

Charlie mapped a journey that included aspects of his search for a gender home as well as symbols of his past physical home. He acknowledges the turmoil and pain he experienced while living at home with his aunt, and he depicts himself rising above it. In explaining his drawing, he identifies a specific time when he began to have "a core sense" of where he was, represented by a person standing strong and wearing pants. He has found his gender home.

Zakia's homelessness enabled the expression of her gender identity in ways she had been unable to outwardly articulate while in her familial home. Though Zakia experienced an internal recognition of her transgender identity at age 12 and experimented with an outward expression of her identity, she did not begin living full time as a woman until several years later, after leaving home. She says:

> At 12 I did, but I didn't branch off and start doing it until I left home at 15. I've been on my own since 15.

It wasn't until she was on her own that she was able to begin living full time as a woman. When asked how it felt to express her authentic gender outwardly, she stated:

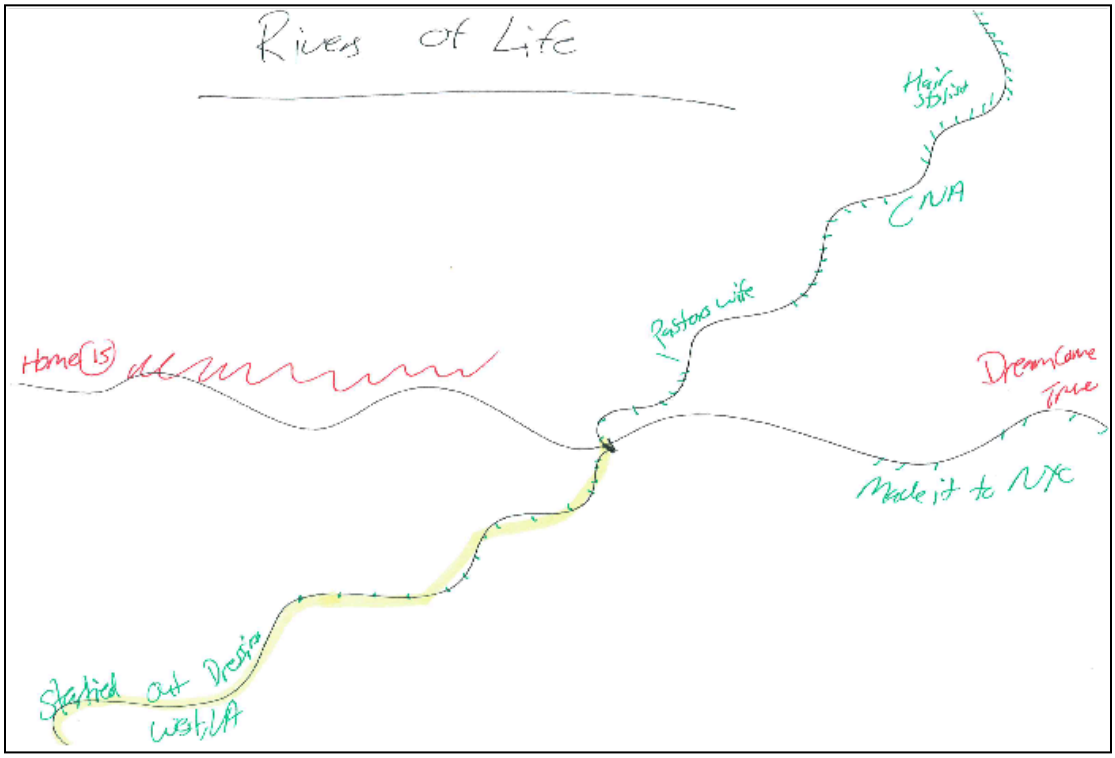
> A relief. It's like I had took a dump in the toilet and *everything* came out. It was…it was just exciting the very first time because when I left home, I went and told my mom good-bye 'cuz she had kicked me out so I went and spoke to her one last time. I had on a skirt and some stockings. She was like, you're going to hell and all this…I'm like, if I'm going to hell, you're going with me so…and I got on the Greyhound and…it's been life, joyous, ever since.

Even though she describes a joyous life, Zakia also acknowledged the struggles of being away from her home. At the same time, she knows that returning home would necessitate an erasure of her identity. She says:

> It gets, it gets hard to the point, like make up your mind, ok…should I go back home and just be a guy? You know, that's what I think sometimes.

Zakia entitled her map (figure 7) "Rivers of Life." One river represents the journey related to her gender home, beginning with the time she "started dressing" and detailing her subsequent accomplishments. The other represents the journey related her physical home, with home on one side and New York City on the opposite end.

Figure 7
Zakia's Journey



She explains her map below:

> For all the trouble I went through, I left there and I started out dressing…and from there the line goes up and it comes back and I made it to New York. Started out

> dressing in West Virginia, became a pastor's wife, got CNA license, hair stylist. Come back down, I made it to New York and that's finally a dream come true. That's the way I look at it.

Similar to Zakia, Berlin experienced internal recognition of her authentic gender several years before she began to outwardly articulate her identity. She says:

> It happened when I was about 15. When I first had the realization, I was like 15. But I really paid it no mind, simply because where I grew up and where I was it was like, girl you can't do that. You know, like, you can't do that. But it was always in the back of my mind.

Though Berlin said she "paid it no mind," and she was not identifying as a woman, she took the steps that she could take at that time, given the constraints of her environment. She describes the shift in her gender presentation as it relates to clothing:

> And by the time I was in like 9th grade, no my sophomore year, I had thrown out every piece of boy clothing I had and I was wearing all girl clothing. So there was a *whole* big deal, like, I didn't own a piece, a article of men's clothing. From like, from 15 to, 15 on. Like and even some of the things that I did wear, and I…I was still identifying as a guy at the time so it was a really, really like…really, really big deal.

Berlin considered her housing stability when making the decision to begin her gender transition. As she articulates below, she reached a breaking point at which time she felt she could no longer delay taking concrete steps to find her gender home.

> So, I was like, I was working up to transitioning, though, 'cuz like, I didn't know if this was the perfect time to do it. Am I stable? But it got to the point I couldn't take it no more…couldn't take it no more and then I was moved to [longer term housing program]. And that's when I began to transition. When I moved to [longer term housing program].

Berlin ultimately made the choice to move towards her gender home, finding stability within her identity even though she did not yet have stability in the form of a physical home. Alexandra's sense of home in her transgender identity is a source of strength for her while she continues to search for a physical home. Though the lack of a physical home produces feelings of instability, she is able to remain grounded within her sense of self as a transgender woman.

> The fact that I am transgender…I think that's the only thing that keeps me strong in who I am, you know. Um, but my living situation's made me insecure, you know, cuz I know I could be doing better, I know I could be working. I just feel like I've been misguided and I've fell off my tracks a little bit and I don't feellike I'm a bad person – I know that I'm not a bad person. I just…didn't have a support system and I put myself around the wrong people, you know, and because of that I feel very unstable.

Many of the participants, including Alexandra, Berlin, Zakia, Ana Joelle, and Charlie shared a common experience of engaging in a simultaneous quest for home in place and home in gender. For one participant, this simultaneous quest was too much to manage. For Miranda, finding ways to articulate her gender was not feasible while homeless. She felt that she needed to "get herself together" first, and that to associate gender identity exploration with her homeless experience would somehow taint her identity. Her discomfort with homelessness was greater than her discomfort with her gender expression and she did not want to conflate the two.

> There's no need to talk about it because I'm not in that position right now. To really, you know, explore myself. So it's just more about, I guess, inside until I get more of myself together. Cuz I have too much on my plate right now to worry about that too. Because I don't want to associate how uncomfortable I am now with trying to experiment with that because I know that will put me off forever.

Role of Geography

The majority of study participants came to New York City after leaving or being ejected from their homes (n=16/59%). New York City became a vehicle for finding home in gender and home in place, albeit temporary in the form of emergency shelter for most of the participants. Berlin explains the significance of geographic location in her ability to move towards finding her gender home.

> I feel like the difference is the surroundings I lived in. I feel like maybe, if I lived in New York earlier, or early in life…I probably woulda had different, a different route, a different approach or life, but I know I woulda been my true self when I wanted to be my true self. And then I feel like maybe at that point, I woulda been able to make the steps that I needed to make…for my future so I coulda been more stable. 'Cuz you're able to *do* something like that in New York. Versus me feeling, being in Mississippi not feeling

> like I'm able to do something like that. You know? Yeah. You have the resources to be able to be like, ok so I'm transitioning. Your parents kick you out, you'll be like, ok I can find somewhere to go…It's not *like* that, like…where I'm from it's like, where you gone go, you know?

Berlin associates New York City with her gender home. She believes that being in the city facilitated the embodiment of her true self. Knowing that she could not safely articulate her true identity in her home state of Mississippi delayed her process of identity assertion for several years. For Berlin, her home state of Mississippi stood in stark contrast to New York City, where TGNC young people could have access to supportive services and shelter programs should their families reject them. Similarly, the accessibility of resources was an important part of Tiffany's decision to move to New York City from Virginia. She explains:

> Virginia is so narrow-minded. And when it comes to LGBT youth, they're just like ok, you're a nigga. They don't care. They don't care at all. Because they see us as being men trying to be women. And they think we're trying to trick people. We're *not*. We're really not. We just wanna express who we are. And in order for you to get a job...pshh...they're not gonna take you lookin' like…they're not gonna take you being transgender. So that was out of the question, Virginia was not the place for me. It wasn't. They don't have the resources. New York has more resources. And more…it's more accepting to LGBT youth.

In addition to resource availability, Tiffany also emphasized the importance of an accepting environment. Acceptance was a key component of Alexandra's choice to leave Florida, as she describes below.

> In Florida, I had people judge me a lot down there. People down there are very judgmental. People here in New York are a lot more accepting, um, still judgmental but not as nearly as much as what I went through in Tampa, you know? Um, so I'm glad that I'm away from that and I'm somewhere – it's why I came here because I feel like New York is a better place for transgender people.

The participants' narratives demonstrate the connection between gender identity and geographic location. When asked if her gender identity was related to her decision to move to New York, Berlin said:

> Oh, of course! Because I had seen, I pictured New York in a certain way. Like, I knew nothing about…I didn't know anything about LGBT history, or anything like that, but I knew people were liberated in New York. I knew that there were tons and tons of people who were different, from all walks of life. And I knew…I couldn't, I wouldn't feel so much like an outcast here. And I still don't. I don't. And I, and so I don't feel like outcasted, outcasted here…I do feel different, I do feel like I am oppressed, being a trans woman, but I don't feel like, outcast, per se. Not in New York. Not in this setting. I don't. Like, because everybody's so different. Everybody is. And it's like expected. People expect people to be different from them here, like...like, so it's like…that affected…it had a big…my gender identity had a lot to do with the reason why I came here. It is.

Omar describes what it was like to live in Puerto Rico as a TGNC young person, compared to his experiences in New York thus far. He has found acceptance in New York City, whereas his life in Puerto Rico was tinged with disrespect and judgment.

> So it's like, where I come from, it's hard. If you're gay, you either gotta be quiet and don't say at all or just say it but willing to get anything that's coming at you 'cuz what's coming at you is not gonna be easy. 'Cuz people gonna be mean, people are gonna be disrespectful… …Since I got to New York …um, everybody's been nice...since I got here people have just been you know, just whatever, like, you're normal.

In addition to the feelings of acceptance and normalcy described above, a sense of possibility emerged for participants once they arrived in New York City. For Rebekah, moving to New York City exposed her to people of transgender experience engaged in the world in a variety of ways. Prior to her move, she had not been exposed to a range of possibilities for who she could be. She only knew two variations of transgender women, as she describes below:

> Um, before I came here I didn't know anything about Sylvia Rivera…I knew about Stonewall and all that but I didn't know specifically about her, um ...whenever I lived in Nashville all the transgender people that I knew, they worked at Play and they were showgirls and they were all glitz and glamour, get tipsy and get your silicone tomorrow, you know? But here, it's like, the activism that [name of staff member at specific program] does, it's just, it is absolutely amazing…you know, she's trying to make ...Trans known to everybody. And let them know we're not the people that you see on Jerry Springer. We're not the people on there, we're not the people on there. We're just people. Like how I am, we're just people who are trying to live.

Similarly, Berlin attributes both the expansion of possibility and also her empowerment to living in New York City. She says:

> I probably wouldn't gain as much experience as I have, within working, within non-profit, within fashion, within activism, within . . . anything. I probably would've been a prostitute (laughs)…um, escort, whatever. And I probably would've lived the transsexual lifestyle. I probably would've. I probably...wholesale the hotel. Just worried about getting my work. Because I…I wouldn't have knew no better. I could honestly say that I got educated here. And I got *empowered* here. It liberated me. It feels good.

Feeling empowered was a new experience for Berlin as she was more able to articulate her identity. In thinking about how she feels now compared to her first internal recognition of her transgender identity, Berlin says:

> I feel, like, so powerful. I didn't used to feel like that. I felt like, I felt capable. I've always felt capable, but…being like 15 and trying to figure out who I was and questioning myself and living in the surroundings I lived in, not really being accepted as who I was – people loved me, they did. People did love me, I can say that. People did, they always loved me. But they didn't, they, they never got it. And I've accepted the fact that they probably never will…get it…But…I'm so, like now, I'm just a well-rounded, I feel powerful, I'm empowered. Like, it's like, I have to say thanks to New York.

Berlin understands her empowerment as related to being understood and accepted as a transgender woman. Even though she recalls being loved and feeling capable, she does not believe she would have been able to feel powerful if she did not move to New York. She saw the geographic location of her physical home as a barrier to finding her gender home.

Clean Slate

Related to their geographic location is the notion of starting anew. For those participants who relocated to New York City, this geographic shift provided them with a clean slate, absent of those who knew them before and the ideas they possessed. Leaving homes that were unsupportive of their identities provided the young people in this study with an opportunity to remake themselves and settle into their gender home. Without the pressure to conform to the

norms associated with their assigned sex at birth or the need to justify their gender expression to people who knew them and had power over them before, TGNC youth were able to find acceptance more easily. One of the first times Charlie recalls being able to freely express his gender outwardly was during his first year of college, when he was no longer living at home. Like many of the young people in this study, expressing himself through clothing was meaningful to Charlie, and was something he was unable to do before leaving home. In addition to feelings of autonomy and freedom that resulted from being able to make his own decisions about his gender expression, Charlie describes also receiving validation from newly made peers. This validation was in sharp contrast to the regulatory actions that previously accompanied his gender expression. He says:

> I was accepted. Not just accepted, but I was well-liked…and not like, as a freak show, but as a person…it's just like having people who like you and care about you not just because of your expression but like, because of more than your expression. They like you…you.

Charlie emphasized being like "as a person." The clean slate he found at college enabled him to experience attention that was unrelated to his experience as an intersex person. Like Charlie, the fresh start provided by going away to college was beneficial for Isa. Being away at college gave him the opportunity to explore and define himself, free from judgment or harassment from his family. He explains how being away was helpful to his process of gender identity assertion:

> Being away gave me a buffer. I didn't have to deal with my family, you know what I mean? I was in college; I was doing my thing. I didn't have to deal with them, like, head on. So I think I probably would've done it later, or maybe not at all. I would've been stuck with my grandmother, stuck feeling like I had to give up my life for her. Give up being who I wanted for her.

For Ana Joelle, it was important that the people in her life knew her only as her authentic gender. To accomplish this, she distanced herself from people who knew her during the previous

period in her life within which she was unable to articulate her true gender identity and lived as the sex she was assigned at birth. She explains:

> I tell my friends, from here, like people who know me as now as opposed to people who knew me before then...who, who people who knew me before have this mentality of who I...have this belief of who I am and they don't wanna change that, they don't wanna…But people who see me now are easier to accept the fact that I'm trans, you know I'm transgender or I'm transitioning or I'm doing, you know, or I'm just gender queer. They accept that easier because that's all they know me by.

Likewise, Nino feels more comfortable accessing support from people he believes better comprehend his gender transition, as opposed to the family within which he never felt understood.

> I don't have no communication with my family that much 'cuz I'm basically focused on me and they, they never really understood me, like you know…I feel more secure talking to people who are focused on this LGBT, like the staff in here and stuff like that, then going to my real family, then going to my actual family.

For Rebekah, having a clean slate in a new city means that she isn't faced with constant reminders of who she used to be.

> Um, I don't talk to anyone from my high school anymore. A lot of them, even if I were to tell them my transition, some of them might be ok with it and some of them might know, but it's more along the lines of they've known me as [name given at birth] for so many years...That um, just coming out being like, hey my name is Rebekah now and all this, it's very hard because people always slip and say [name given at birth] and so I'll always be *reminded* and...I don't want to be reminded with my friends.

Rebekah sees her homelessness experiences as directly linked to her development as a person. Without the clean slate she created upon moving to New York City, it was unclear to her who she would actually be today. She says:

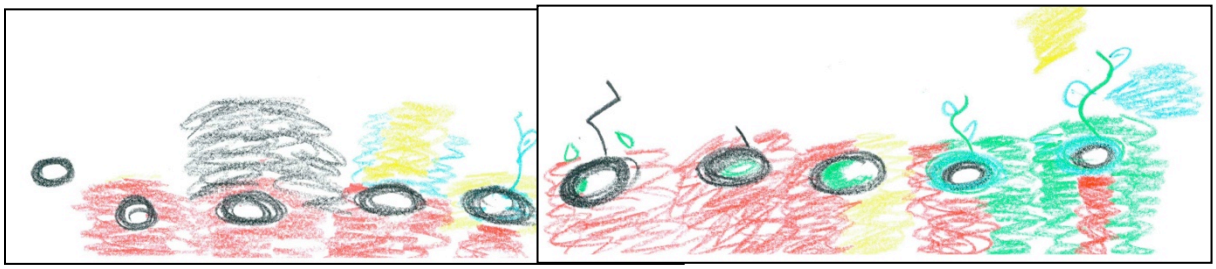
> Um, so I, I think that if I were to still have everything together with my parents, um, I wouldn't be where I am today. Like, not in New York, but just me as a person.

Likewise, leaving home allowed Xavier to assert his authentic gender. Though he describes always being the same person, even when living at home, he believes that it was the move from his physical home that enabled him to fully embrace himself and his identity.

> I think, I mean I've always been that person...yeah I've always been like, been that person, it's always been a part of me. And I guess coming here, I can embrace it more.

Zariah found confidence and hope in moving to a place where she was unknown. She had experienced harassment, violence and discrimination in her physical home and in her hometown. Leaving her physical home gave her a new start, though it also posed challenges. Her map (figure 8) integrates her processes of searching for both a gender home and a physical home. She uses a metaphor of a plant growing to illustrate her journey.

Figure 8
Zariah's Journey



Zariah provided the following explanation of her journey.

> That is a hollow seed. Um, feel instantly like I'm missing a part of me, it's not full because I'm not full, you know what I'm saying? I'm not done. Um, this seed is how I felt when I was like nothing, when I left my mother's house. I was in so much pain. I was raped, start doing drugs, and some more shit. Moved from house to house, it was just…horrible. Then, went to St. Charles. And started feeling a little better, 'cuz I started getting help. And then got a job, like started getting a job and like started my hormones. So, absolutely amazing, but still have pain. I'm still hollow, you know. But I felt beautiful. Then, yeah. My job said I couldn't work there being what I was, dressed up as a female and everything like that. So I went, so…my world start crushing down. Everything start dying. I move to Belleville. Used to have a little money, that's why I have the green. I still had a little, good feeling because I was still cute. But everything else was crushing. I started escorting and stuff like that. That's why it's black, because I

started back hurting. A lot. Start going out of town and stuff like that. Had fun going out of town 'cuz I was getting out of St. Louis and stuff, and…I still felt cute and beautiful but…I start having pain and stuff like that. And then, this also was like the last day that I left St. Louis. I mean the day that I left St. Louis and…I was happy. Then, when I made it to here I felt confident, because don't nobody know me here. You know what I'm saying, I can do whatever I feel like doing. I can become something. So I had confidence in myself. And as you see, it's growing and stuff like that. But the homeless part is the red…and the black. But I still kept strong, I still was striving. That's why there's so much green and stuff like that because I'm, like I'm not giving up. And I'm here…and this is me now, you know. I'm progressing and I'm growing. You know, I'm getting a lot of sunlight and a lot of water, a lot of support from others. And I do still have a little of pain, you know, and it's still a little black because I'm still missing…something. A good home and stuff like that. But...I'm confident all around, that I'm going to get it, that I'm gonna survive, and I'm gonna…you know what I'm saying so that's why the green. That's it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE OTHER SIDE OF RISK

The dominant discourse related to youth homelessness is characterized by instability, danger, and risk. These are expected aspects of homelessness. Participants in this project described experiences in line with these characteristics. In describing what being homeless is like, Zariah says:

> Horrible…pain…stress…stressful…painful. Um…just a lot. It's just a lot of hurtful words. It's painful because…it's painful for me because I have to, you have to work…harder, twice as harder…to get just a bed, to get just something to eat. You have to do stuff that you probably thought you would never do in your life. Ugh. Stuff you thought you would never do, that you haven't been trained on doing…just to get something, just to get some food. Just to get an hour's rest. Homeless is dangerous. Especially for a transgender person.

Similarly, Japan articulates the dangers and isolation he associates with homelessness:

> I mean...being homeless is not fun. It's a very serious issue. Because if you have nowhere to go, you know, you don't have no family, you don't have no friends or whatever the case may be, this is a big city. Things can happen. People do take advantage of people. Especially like younger people, stuff like that. You just never know…what may happen to you.

Like Zariah and Japan, TC experienced isolation, hardship, and depression when she was first on the street. With the isolation, hardship, and depression came the additional risk factor of substance use as a coping strategy. She says:

> I was very out of my element. I wasn't comfortable. I didn't like having nothing. And not being able to say, ok, I know I'm sleeping here tonight. And if I said that, it was about a park bench or something. So it wasn't something joyful to look forward to. Um…I was very depressed, um…I started drinking more…just to try and escape everything.

While the risks related to homelessness are indeed tangible and noteworthy, young people discussed other aspects of their experiences. In addition to confirming the dominant discourse related to homelessness, the participants in this study also described instances of

affirmation and growth. These instances were related to the articulation of their gender identity and involved an expanding sense of self, connection to community, and access to information. Examining these aspects of the homeless experience for TGNC young people is crucial to the development of prevention and intervention strategies. To ignore these parts of their realities provides a limited understanding of their lives and confines interventions to risk reduction rather than strength building. Understanding what experiences were positive for TGNC young people, when these experiences occurred, and what they felt like enables the creation of programs and services that may better meet their needs. This chapter will examine the other side of risk, beginning with an examination of risk within the familial homes of the participants, followed by aspects of their homeless experiences that the participants felt were positive, empowering, or beneficial.

Where Does Risk Reside? Home is Risky

While the ideas of homelessness and risk often go hand in hand, risk was also present within the familial homes of the TGNC young people in this study. For many participants, their lives prior to housing instability were characterized by the same attributes ascribed to homelessness - instability, danger, and risk. These were often intimately connected to their TGNC identity. Though not explicitly asked in the interview, 52% of the study participants discussed violence and instability within the context of their home lives. For example, Zariah experienced violence in her mother's home due to her identity. She says:

> I never ran away from my mother until she brung another man in the house and he beat me. Because of what I wanted to be.

For Charlie, who is intersex, living at home meant undergoing involuntary medical intervention to treat his late onset androgyn sensitivity syndrome. While he was born with the

physical outward characteristics of a typical male, he began to grow breasts around age 9 and was subsequently forced to present outwardly as a girl. He says:

> I got transferred to the custody of my aunt, who was all – you are now a woman. Grrrr, argh. So, me expressing any kind of maleness was just like, awful and wrong and horrid and so I was literally physically assaulted, I was…psychologically abused, medications were used to like, screw with my brain. I was put on hormones… my diagnosis was gender identity disorder, not otherwise specified, which pretty much was like – this intersex person is not being the gender we want them to be so we're gonna make them be the gender we want them to be and call it a disorder when they identify as the gender we don't want them to be. Which is like really fucked up.

Though the specific circumstances surrounding the suppression of his identity were different than the other participants in this study, the impact was the same. Charlie was unable to safely express his authentic gender while living in his Aunt's house.

KiKi was also prohibited from expressing her authentic gender within her physical home. She spent the majority of her adolescence in group homes in Mississippi, where she was subjected to mistreatment related to her gender identity and expression. For her, the risks were greater when she was housed than when she fled these gender-restricting environments. The regulations placed upon her gender expression resulted in feelings of depression and isolation. She explains:

> I guess you could say about the housing and all the places I stayed, I could've cut down a little more on something and kind of just sat back but the main thing was, you know, you were taking a part of me away. So the only thing I could do to compensate with it was to act out. …you know be a little louder, little more obnoxious, you know? And I could have, I could have not been those things, but you know, I couldn't dress the way I wanted to. And it depressed me.

The emotional climate of Isa's familial home was volatile and unpredictable. Though he was able to express his authentic gender, he experienced judgment and hostility from his family. He explains:

> They're very unpredictable. So, like, my grandmother one day, she's like, 'Yo, you can stay. I love you no matter what.' The other day she'll go completely opposite. 'Get the

> fuck out, you know, you don't love yourself. You're a low life.' You know what I mean. And it can flip, flip-flop.

Whereas instability is often associated with homelessness, Isa experienced instability within his home. In addition to the instability and unpredictability of his environment, he was also subjected to verbal harassment and abuse surrounding his gender identity. The stories of Isa, KiKi, Charlie, and Zariah provide examples of the risk, instability, and danger faced within homes. Charlie actually stated that he believed he was less at risk after leaving his physical home and entering into a shelter program:

> I'd say that even now I'm in a better place than I was when I was with my aunt…I don't feel that pressure to conform, I don't feel like…anything about me is at risk anymore. Like, I don't feel like that stress that comes with living in a hostile environment. I don't feel that anymore.

Charlie experienced the pressure and stress within his home as risky, and experienced that risk as greater than the risks associated with housing instability.

Access to Information

One of the positive aspects of their homeless experiences involved increased access to information. Participants had varying levels of knowledge related to TGNC people and communities prior to their own internal realization of their gender identity. Often having learned early on that their burgeoning TGNC identities were unacceptable in their homes, young people were isolated in their experiences. Without the language with which to name themselves, accompanied by the understanding that they were somehow bad or wrong, young people were limited in their ability to access information. Ryan says:

> I didn't have words to kind of describe how I felt for the longest time until I was one night watching Logo and watching Trans Generation, a documentary. And that's when I was like, oh...wow. I felt like that my whole entire life. Maybe there's something to this. And so I started, like researching gender, gender stuff and I ... And I was like oh, wow, this definitely describes me. Holy fuck. Wow. Alright. It was like, kind of like, life affirming in some ways…Now I started to actually kind of feel whole. And I was like,

> wow. This explains so much. And there's, and this can be, this can be corrected. You know? I ... I...there are steps I can take to kind of get myself to a point where I kind of feel more comfortable.

Ryan describes first learning about the transgender experience as life affirming. Prior to his exposure to this knowledge, he described periods of confusion, anger, and frustration. It wasn't until he gained access to information about others like him that he began to "kind of feel whole." Like Ryan, Zakia lacked the language with which to describe herself. She describes searching for information that would answer her questions about how she was feeling and who she was:

> I did my research, because I was figuring, trying to figure out why do a man, biological man, think, walk, talk like a woman? And so, um, I did my research and that's when I found out about transgender, transsexual, hermaphrodite. So, I got to Florida. The church I was going to in Florida thought I was a biological woman. So I told them I was a hermaphrodite. I…that's what I thought I was. Until I really, really did some more research. And I found out, wait a minute, I'm not a hermaphrodite. I'm a woman born within a man. So what is that? That's transgender.

The ability to name themselves was a positive experience for both Ryan and Zakia. Access to language and information provided them with a sense of comfort and hope for a future in which they could take active steps towards becoming who they knew themselves to be. One of the positive aspects of their out of home experiences was gaining access to knowledge of which they had previously been unaware. The kind of information ranged from knowledge related to gender transitioning, to available supports and services, to language, to awareness of community and transgender history. The new knowledge was transmitted via transactions with TGNC identified individuals, internet searches, and LGBTQ social service programs.

During adolescence, neither Chass nor Tiffany knew what transgender meant, not did they know that there were other people who felt like they did. Chass says:

> No. No, um I didn't know what it was. Um, I didn't know the correct term to use because I knew… for me, I just always said I was a girl, so I just never knew. I thought basically it was just me going crazy 'cuz that's what everybody was just telling me.

Tiffany's experience is similar to Chass':

> I never, actually, honestly truthfully, I thought like, when I was 14 I...that I could just ... I didn't know nothing about hormones. Really, I did not look up transgender, I never felt like a...I never felt like a male, really honestly truthfully.

Similarly, Nikiyah was unaware of the existence of transgender people until she left home and moved to New York City. She discusses the process of finding herself and beginning to transition:

> I guess I had to find myself when I first moved to New York. I had to, um, I was….a guy, of course, dressed regular and stuff. And then, I don't know if I, I never knew what a transgender was until I moved to New York, actually. And I saw what it was and I was like, wow. Never had a clue I would do it, though. But I think the day my transition started, when I put on a bra I never took it off. You know, when I actually dressed up.

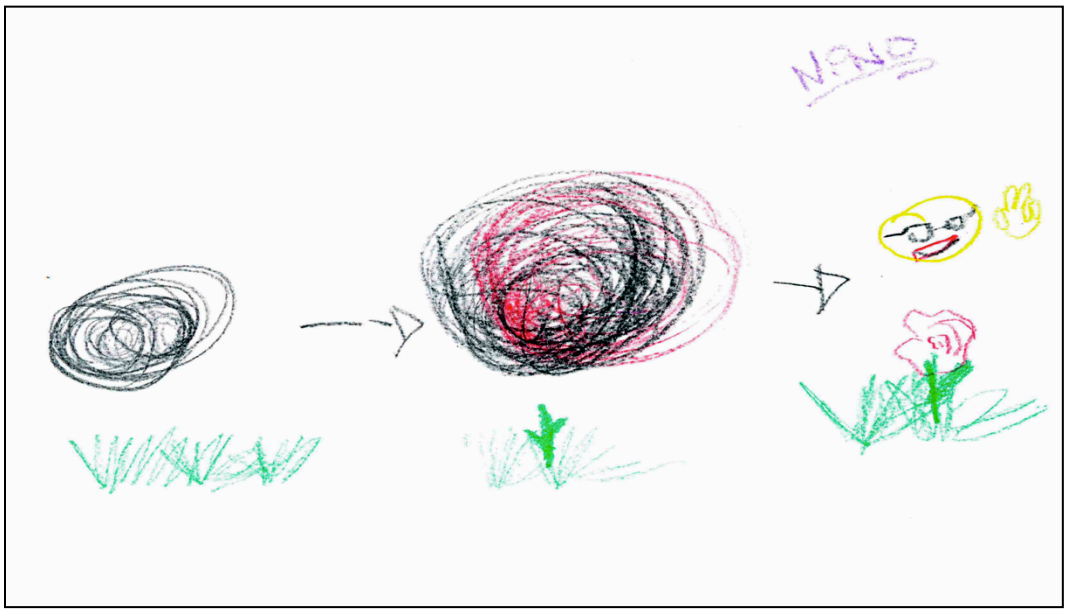
Part of Nikiyah's finding herself was coming to an understanding of her gender identity. When she learned what it meant to be transgender, the possibility for her own understanding expanded. In addition to learning language through which they could articulate their experiences, participants also gained access to transition-related information. Through his engagement with LGBTQ shelter programs, Nino gained access to transition related information of which he was previously unaware:

> I didn't just wake up and say oh, I want to be transman. But um, when I just, like, I always looked into options, like, for T and stuff but now that I have the options and could actually go forth with it? I'm…I'm doing it, you know? 'Cuz it's always, I always wanted to do it. Now that I know the hook-ups and all that. Yeah. The only thing stopping me, earlier, not that I didn't know that I wanted to be a man, but it's the, the, the um, options of like, how to become this. And I finally got it, so….I'm doing it.

Nino described wanting to be a man, but not knowing what how to begin the process. Through information he received at a program, he learned about the process to accessing gender affirming hormones. For Nino, who stated multiple times in his interview that he had always felt

like a man, this new knowledge enabled him to begin aligning his physical presentation with his gender identity. Nino's map (figure 9) provides a visual representation of his journey depicts the emotional experience associated with the acquisition of this new knowledge.

Figure 9
Nino's Journey



Nino offered the following explanation of the journey represented in his map:

> Ok. There's me. I was…I was stuck in a black hole. Confused. And there was just…that's just a patch of grass with nothing growing. You know, just that life. Right here I was…I was still stuck in that black hole but I…I realized, like I kind of was open, you know. Open to telling people about me, and, you know, but I'm still in that predicament like not having a house and stuff. Then I come here and…I'm, I'm open to everything. I'm...like, um…I'm certain about myself and stuff. I'm cool, I'm peaceful. Chillin'. That's the peace sign.

What is striking about Nino's map and his explanation of it is how he represents the present time. The importance of his gender home is evident; though he is without stable housing at the time of the interview, he represents his present as "cool, peaceful and chillin'." These feelings are directly related to his certainty of his identity and his ability to outwardly articulate his identity. For Nino, finding his gender home was more important to his sense of stability than

finding a physical home. Though having both may lead to an even greater sense of peace and "chillin.'"

TC was unaware that people shared her experience of gender until she became engaged with an LGBTQ shelter program. TC said that she "doesn't care" about gender, and though she had previously met people who identified as transgender, she had not before met another person who was gender nonconforming, genderqueer, or "didn't care" about gender. It was within the program that she was first exposed to the idea of preferred gender pronouns and also to other GNC young people.

> I didn't know what a PGP was. I didn't know what it stood for. So when she [the group facilitator] told me it was preferred gender pronoun, I was like, well…I'm listening to everybody and one person had said, oh you know, it doesn't matter to me. And I was like…oh, ok, I'm not the only one that feels like this.

Understanding that others shared her experiences was an affirming event for TC and removed some of the isolation she felt regarding her identity. Until he became involved in an LGBTQ shelter program, Jack was unaware that he could "do anything" about the way he felt:

> Well I've always really felt like that. But I, I didn't think that I could do anything about it. I didn't really have that much knowledge about it.

Like Nino and TC, Jack lacked specific knowledge related to his gender identity prior to his engagement with an LGBTQ shelter program. This lack of knowledge regarding how to become the person one knows himself to be could inhibit one's ability to find their gender home.

The Role of Like Others

Finding other people who shared their identity propelled participants to a deeper understanding of themselves. TGNC people are not routinely visible in mainstream media, leaving TGNC young people without accurate visual representations of who they themselves are, or who they could potentially come to be. Therefore, seeing another TGNC individual in person

had a profound impact on the young people who participated in this study. Berlin describes how she felt following the first time she saw a transgender woman:

> I never really seen, like a *trans* woman… Like, I always had a love for women, like, always. Didn't really understand *why*, it's because I longed to be one so badly. But I always *loved* them, like, so much…Then I saw a transgender woman, who actually performed, um, this song by Ava Marie called "This One Thing." She came out …and …she…I *knew* she was a trans woman, but I didn't *know* she was a trans woman, like…it's like I knew but I didn't know, like… She came out and she had like, she had this dress on, she performed this song called "If I Was Your Girlfriend" by this artist named Nicole Ray. With this dress on, it was this like, a sweetheart bodice silhouette and she just looked, her hair was super long. Her hair was super, super long. It was like 20 inches long, was straight, with a part. And she was performing, and she ripped the dress off and she had diamond pasties on and a diamond thong and like, diamond, like stiletto shoes on, and the fan thing on, her hair blew back and she started performing "This One Thing" by Ava Marie. (sings) "This one thing and I got me trippin', this one thing and I want ya…" And I looked at her and I said – I can't believe you can look like that.

Berlin recalled vivid details her first encounter with another transgender woman. The occurrence facilitated an opening in her own awareness of self and of possibility that she had not before considered. This was a pivotal moment in her life, as she articulates below.

> I said now *that*. Ever since then I was like, I was like…I could *do that*. Like I could, I could do that. Like I could…this…I would feel comfortable like that. That's exactly what I said to myself, I'm looking and I'm like, mind, it was mind-boggling to me, like, I was like *woooow,* that is so beautiful. That's exactly what I said. I was like, oh my god. I can do that. I will feel comfortable, like.

Similarly, Zakia had never seen another person she believed to be like her. She describes the importance of like others in developing an understanding of who she is.

> I had never experienced you know, being around transgender people. I thought I was the only one in the world until I left home. You have to leave somewhere in order to understand what you are. Be around people that think like you, walk like you, talk like you so they can help you. And when I got out there, when I got around those people that's like me, with a mind like, mindset like mine, they helped me the most. Now I…heterosexual people didn't help me 2 cents worth. But those people that got a mind like mines, think like me and helped me the most with resources on where to go.

Like Zakia, Rebekah first learned about the TGNC community after being kicked out of her parents' house. She had previously been unaware of the term transgender and had never

before seen a transgender person. She applied for work at a bar that often featured drag performers. She describes her process of discovery:

> I went and I just watched and I saw the shows and I was like ...why does that boy have really great boobs? And really great bodies? And then I found out, you know I talked to them and they were like, well you know, this is how it is and I was like oh my god.....

For the first time, Rebekah felt understood and supported in her identity as a transgender woman.

> You *get* me, you know, and so I got the job there and um, I got like, here they call them gay mothers, like, people who help them through, I just call them friends, who helped me through, um...helped me get on hormones, um, laser hair removal, all of the stuff that I could and um, I came here...and here I am, with you.

The validation and assistance offered by other people like her facilitated Rebekah's journey of finding a gender home. Connecting to other TGNC individuals and communities was a crucial part of the participants' experiences. Young people described developing surrogate families, sometimes referred to as "gay families," which aided in both their well-being while homeless and also in their process of identity assertion. Of the 27 participants, five (19%) young people emphasized their gay families when discussing the process of identity assertion. Nino discusses forming a gay family:

> He asked me to be my gay father, then…like, that was like another relationship opened, like, you know? Like, um, at least somebody's with me now. And, um … like I always felt this way and I just wanted to talk to somebody about it.

The importance of his gay family is evident in Nino's statement "at least somebody's with me now." His gay father not only validated his burgeoning identity, but also helped Nino access transition-related information.

> I actually told him…told him, "yo, I actually want to become a man. Like, I'm gay right now but I want to become a man, like…" He actually helped me, like, look for information. He's like, "yo, you know what that could do, right?" Cuz he was already involved in gay community and stuff. And then, um, he told me like, he started looking

> up stuff and he's like, oh if you're really serious then let me look up stuff for you. And that's when I started just, really reading about seeing, like, what it can do to you and stuff like that.

Nino's "gay father" was the first person to whom he disclosed his gender identity. Not only was his gay father supportive, he also helped Nino access important information and subsequent services. Gay families replaced biological families as sources of support in relation to TGNC identities and they were of vital importance to the participants in this study.

An excerpt from Rebekah's map (figure 10) provides a visual representation of her gender articulation, made possible by the support and information she obtained from her "gay mothers."

Figure 10
Rebekah's Journey

Young people in this study readily identified peers who imparted valuable lessons related to their TGNC identities. These peers and the lessons they taught were central to the participants' narratives of identity assertion. Tiffany and Chass discuss the importance of their peers and the information they shared:

> Maya was the *bombest*, dopest transsexual you *ever* would know. You never could clock her T. And she taught me everything I knew. About my bras, how to tuck, how to do this, how to do that, how to it put on my make up, how to do my hair. - Tiffany

> I um, had a MySpace page and I bumped into another transfemale. I didn't know how to approach her at first so I…I spoke to her and she became like more of a friend to me and she gave me information about um, where to go to get my name changed, how to go about getting my Medicaid, um, gender marker changed. Stuff like that…She helped me so much, also. So…I appreciate it, because it put me on this path towards finding myself. - Chass

Young people not only received support and information from their peers, they also received validation. Such validation was a vital part of their well-being. Ryan says:

> My first kind of, like surrogate gay family type thing…really kind of were there for me. And I kind of ended up in a way, kinda entering into their family. And that was really kind of helpful in a lot of ways, and…for the first time I was being told, you know, that you know this is ok you know, and you know, like you still can do anything you want to do. It's…possibly a transition, you know, it's not…and so I had like someone kind of, kind of was there for me who kind of validated my experience. Kind of validated, you know, who I was and who wasn't constantly, you know, tearing me down.

Belonging to a gay family provided Ryan with a sense of belonging and validated his experiences in ways that he had not before experienced. His gay family helped him consider different ways of being himself. Zariah's gay mother helped her to articulate her gender outwardly. Zariah connected her gay mother to the physical articulation of her identity, and she connected the physical articulation of her identity to feeling beautiful and confident.

> I met my, my gay mother. She's, she's a little older than me…And we start, um, like dressing up together and one thing led to another, she put tracks in my hair, lashes on my eyes and fingernail polish and make up on my face and girl, I was out there. I was…yes. I am beautiful, honey, I am beautiful. And everybody used to say, oh my god you're beautiful, you're beautiful.

The confidence and validation Ryan and Zariah found within their gay families served as life-lines in an otherwise harsh world. Both Ryan and Zariah experienced identity-related harassment and abuse within their families of origin. Their gay families allowed them to see themselves, and to articulate their identities.

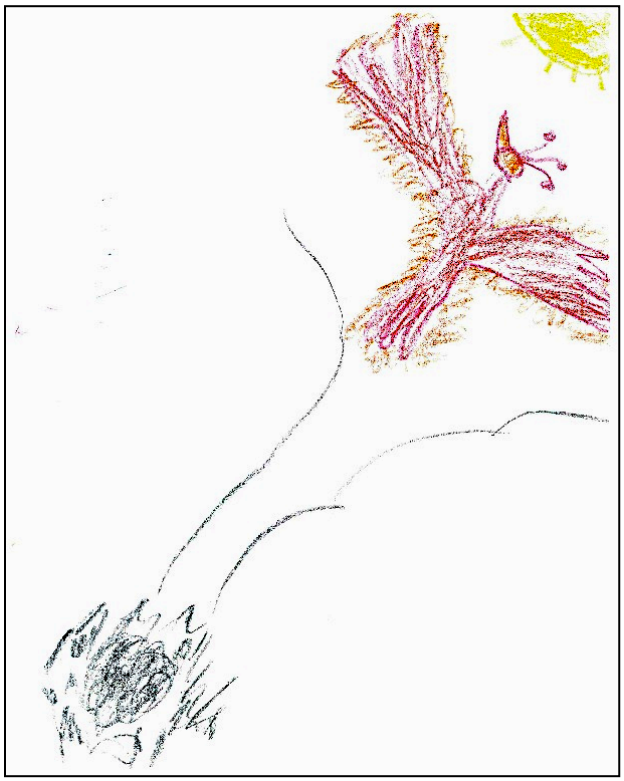
For Chass, meeting another transgender woman helped her to better understand her own identity. She explains:

> How did I come to that understanding? Um…I guess with, like due time and going around places. Oh I remember I met this trans woman. And, um, she basically asked me if I was transgender also. And I denied it. I denied it. Um, up and down. But, she um, she didn't pay it any mind 'cuz she, she, she already know and um, we spoke and she basically gave me some really good advice. And it changed my life. It changed my life. [She said] Remember who you are and what you came from. You cannot deny certain things about yourself, and if that's what you feel, I'm not gonna push you to say what you are from what you're not, but…that did get to me, it had me thinking.

Chass' narrative illustrates the significant role of a shared identity. Meeting another person like her expanded her sense of self and in her own words, changed her life. When asked to map her journey, Chass drew a phoenix (figure 11) and offered the following statement:

> Um…this is ashes. This is my starting point, which was nothing. And from the ashes, I rose. As a beautiful phoenix. And I'm soaring.

Figure 11
Chass's Journey



Skill Development

In addition to knowledge acquisition and connection to like others, participants in this study described the development of skills resulting from their housing instability. Young people took pride in their independence, embraced their autonomy, and made positive meaning out of their experiences by focusing on skill development. TC said that she became more goal-oriented as a result of her homelessness, stating "I try and set goals and I try and meet them to the best of my ability now."

Implied in becoming more goal-oriented is the act of taking responsibility for one's own actions and well-being. As Ana Joelle said:

> The last two, three years of my life have been like the most...growth. Cuz the most ..real things, like really, real things have happened… I had to wake up and start living, start doing something. Because I can't depend on my mother. I'm not a kid anymore.

In describing how she feels now, Tiffany said:

> I feel more stronger and more independent.

Honesty emphasized gaining independence as well as developing concrete skills. She shares:

> It (being homeless) made me grow a lot…It's teaching me survival skills and how to be independent, um, independent a lot, it's teaching me a lot. It's teaching me a lot. I'm not saying it's good to be homeless but you learn a lot, like, resources, everything…like, everything.

Skill development was also a part of Jaguar's homeless experience. While Honesty celebrated her independence and her ability to identify and access resources to assist her on her

path to housing stability, for Jaguar, housing instability facilitated the fine-tuning of skills that not everyone possesses. He said:

> I've got a lot of skills people don't have. Like, my gut is so finely tuned that within minutes of meeting someone I know whether or not, like they're gonna harm me or have a mental disability or like…whether or not it's ok to trust them with certain things.

Miranda focused on her development as a person and the resolution of past conflict. She explains:

> I've developed a lot as a person. I've developed a lot of, a lot more empathy. A lot more. The only thing I can say is just…to me everything is 'so it goes.' I'm a lot less conflicted about things that happened, it's just…I have to accept what I can't change and make something better for what I can do.

Part of Miranda's internal development is an acceptance of things she cannot change, and the motivation to do better with the things she can control. Her map (figure 12) provides a visual representation of the ways she has changed since leaving home. She listed the following key areas: leaving home, more time with animals (pigeons), support system of peers, solid coping mechanisms, progressing, relaxed/passive & calm, empathy.

Figure 12
Miranda's Journey

Miranda explained her map in the following way:

> I'm not gonna do a linear thing, because it's…I don't think anything is linear, so this is just more of a cycle of things that could happen, maybe at once or together or…during the same time. Leaving home, I've still left home. I'm not at home. So this is…I'm still in a cycle…I've been able to spend more time with animals. I feed pigeons in Washington Square all the time. I've created bonds and relationships with animals that trust me and I can be compassionate towards them…Um, I have a support system, a much more tangible support system here than I've had other places. I made good friendships. I've been able to speak to people and not feel as alone. Um…I've been able to have better coping mechanisms. Um…I've been progressing. I'm always progressing now. I've…I used to have bad anger, bad anger issues when I was a lot younger. And now I've, uh, become a lot more relaxed and passive and calm and that's very important to me…I have a lot of patience. I don't like getting angry because I get very tired when I do…I've got a lot more empathy, for a lot of people, for a lot of situations.

Of great import in her narrative is Miranda's ability to become the person that she wants to be. For her, this is a person with patience and empathy. Though her map is cyclical, her explanation of it begins with "leaving home" and she specifically states that she has been able to create a stronger support system here (while homeless in New York City) than in other times in her life.

Like Miranda, Charlie credited his housing instability with strengthening his motivation, his internal sense of who he is, and who he would like to be. He was able to separate events that occurred outside of himself from his internal processes, and he found strength in his ability to maintain a strong sense of self through periods of chaos. He explains:

> I guess you'd say that I'm more driven now. 'Cuz like, I'd say more driven to make a bright future for myself. It may have made me more peaceful inside because pretty much through all that time there was just like all this stuff going on around me, a constant whirlwind of horrid stuff going on, so it's like, I one day woke up and I'm like, I'm not gonna let my circumstances dictate what I've got going on here (motions to self/internal).

> So I pretty much just like, hold on to my sense of self, hold on to who I am as a person. I'm like, no. I'm not going to let this get to me. I'm not going to let what one person said or did ruin my day because I'm better than that.

Charlie learned how to maintain a sense of inner peace in the midst of his tumultuous surroundings. Similarly, Xavier discussed learning how to remain positive when faced with the disorder associated with homelessness. In turn, he found strength in his ability to survive, and that strength propels him forward. He says:

> I'm learning how to stay positive through you know, all the turmoil and stuff. Um...I guess I'm finding myself...I'm just learning how to deal with the hardest part of the world. Like, I'm sure there'll be more you know, lows in my life but, not everyone can say they've dealt with this. And came out of it.

A sense of mastery is evident in Xavier's statement above. Likewise, Zakia emphasized the importance of mastery over her environment as well as autonomy. She found satisfaction in taking care of herself and reaching her goals as an independent person. She explains:

> Moving around is like my #1 thing I love to do…It makes me feel good, to go to places by myself, to get on my feet by myself, to find a job by myself, so I can say I did this, by myself. Without my family. And I…I'm the type of person that wants to throw it back in they face, I didn't have to ask you for nothing. I did it by myself. And so that's why I tend to do a lot, like, move. I'm always busy…because I want to be the person that says I did this. I didn't have to ask nobody. I did it. I accomplished this by myself. I didn't have to call mama, nobody. I did it.

This chapter has presented an expansive view of the homeless experience for the TGNC young people in this study. Whereas conventional understandings of homelessness revolve solely around associated risks, this chapter sought to illustrate some of the unanticipated benefits of housing instability for the study participants. Among those were access to knowledge, connection to community, skill development, and an expressed sense of peace resulting from their often newfound ability to freely articulate their gender. Understanding their experiences holistically allows service providers to take into account the perceived positive aspects of homelessness, and to craft prevention and intervention strategies that built upon the positive

aspects of their experiences rather than focusing their efforts entirely on risk reduction. Such strategies may engage young people in ways that risk prevention programs are unable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF PROGRAMS

Connection to a supportive and LGBT identity-affirming program for young people experiencing homelessness was crucial to the safety and well-being of the study participants. An LGBT identity-affirming program can be understood as one that is supportive of identity exploration and assertion. Such a program does not pathologize transgender or gender non-conforming identities or expressions. Within this type of program, affirming the identities of program members is an integrated part of the program structure, from the language used for speaking and documentation, to the types of services offered. All of the young people in this study experienced such a connection to an LGBT identity-affirming program at some point during their homeless experiences. Within these programs, young people were not only able to have their basic needs met, they also found safety from the risks associated with street-living, respite from the stigma associated with diverse gender identities, and for some, the violence they encountered within their homes. Ana Joelle emphasized the importance of her program as a place of healing, without which she would not have been able to begin her gender transition. After her repeated rejection experiences, she describes the role of an identity affirming program as restoring her belief in humanity.

> I wouldn't have been where I am now and healing, helping healing myself and transitioning and doing all these wonderful things if I hadn't had this place to go to. I don't know where I would've been. I don't think it would've been a nice place…I'm really grateful for it, and programs like this is the reason like...the reason like people, like...I think it shows that humanity still has some good.

Institutions were ever present in the young people's narratives. In fact, related to their

homelessness, young people talked more about their experiences with programs rather than their experiences with individual people. This speaks to the critical need for programs to provide inclusive and safe spaces for young people experiencing homelessness. When the individuals in their lives failed to provide them with shelter, they sought out programs that could help ensure their basic needs were met. Conversely, when discussing their gender identity, participants talked more about their experiences with individual people. Whereas participants learned to count on programs for their basic needs, they did not count on programs or institutions for guidance related to their gender identity. Rather, they identified individual people as helping them understand and assert their gender identities. Within LGBT identity-affirming programs, young people were able to take advantage of critical services while interacting with individuals that supported their identities. Despite the positive outcomes that some young people were able to find within these institutional settings, shelter programs also contributed to the participants' instability. TGNC young people struggled with program structures, policies, and processes that were designed to help young people experiencing homelessness.

This chapter will examine the role of programs in the lives of the participants, using interview transcripts and the participant generated maps. Additionally, program policies will be analyzed for their applicability to TGNC young people. This analysis will include an examination of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), which is the key piece of legislation meant to address the needs of young people experiencing homelessness and which dictates the basic structure for individual shelter program policies. The chapter will conclude with recommendations from the project participants. To further protect the identity of the participants and to safeguard the organizations, program names have been omitted and programs have been assigned a letter name (program A, B, C, etc.).

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act

"The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) provides a broad framework for the provision of shelter and support services to runaway and homeless youth in New York State." [Executive Law, Article 19-H §532-e(d)]." (Runaway and Homeless Youth Annual Report 2010). Three types of programs are provided under the RHYA: street outreach programs, basic center programs, and transitional living programs. The basic center and transitional living programs are of primary interest in this chapter, which focuses on participants' experiences within housing programs. Emergency shelters are included under the RHYA basic center programs. Emergency shelter programs in New York that receive RHYA funding must adhere to the state's guidelines for approved programs. The guidelines are meant to ensure the safety of young people experiencing homelessness and to provide them with support as they transition into adulthood. While the RHYA regulations may provide an effective mechanism for some young people to safely and successfully transition out of homelessness, a number of these guidelines have an adverse affect on TGNC young people experiencing homelessness. With no mention of TGNC (or LGB) young people within the policy or its regulations, these guidelines function as both overt and covert means of erasing individual TGNC young people and their experiences within homeless youth programs. Funding/bed limitations, age restrictions, length of stay policies, and gender segregated living arrangements are components of the legislation that create systemic barriers to care for TGNC young people. Each of these barriers will be discussed below.

Lack of beds. You don't know where you're gonna stay tonight and it's like, right now I have nowhere to stay at all and it's like, sucks that I have to be hopping from train to

> train, from shelter to shelter because nobody has a bed for me to sleep in. - Jaime

A striking reality for the participants in this study was the lack of shelter beds in New York City. This experience is not unique to New York City, and is not unique to TGNC young people. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2010), over 7,500 youth across the country were denied shelter in 2009 due to a lack of resources. In 2011, RHYA funded programs reported nearly 700,000 street outreach contacts to unstably housed youth, however less than 40,000 (>6%) of those young people secured access to RHYA funded shelter beds (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012). The financial resources allocated to RHYA programs is not sufficient to provide services to the quantity of young people in need of housing. A notable number of participants in this study found themselves unable to access a safe shelter bed on at least one occasion while homeless. For young people over the age of 21, the inability to access a safe shelter bed was not an exception, it was the norm. In 2007, the Empire State Coalition for Youth and Family Services (ESC) conducted the first ever count of unaccompanied homeless youth in New York City, and estimated approximately 3,800 young people to be homeless on any given night in the city. At present, the city funds a total of 249 emergency shelter beds, with a 30-day length of stay (Bolas, 2012). An additional 23 beds exist for young people 21 and over. Based on current estimates, this number of beds would house only 7% of the city's homeless youth population. Ana Joelle shared one particularly challenging time, when she was unable to access a shelter bed and had to beg for a place to sleep:

> And I would walk to, like, the shelters…the shelters that are in Manhattan and stuff, like there's one on 42nd street, in that area. I would walk in there, they would never have a bed, ever available for me and one time I was so tired and sick and like, depressed, I just burst out crying there. I said please, let me sleep at least in the chair or something.

When unable to find a youth shelter bed, some young people sought emergency shelter within the adult shelter system. Chass describes her experience:

> I went to a shelter. And that was, it was a men's shelter and it was like, really horrible. Um, the guys there were very, very like, I couldn't live with them. They stole my things, they callin' me names. I got into fights while I was there also.

When unable to access a youth shelter bed, some young people reported sleeping on subway trains, outdoors, or someone with whom they exchanged sex for a place to sleep. When unable to access a safe shelter bed, young people encountered high levels of danger, as evidenced by Zariah's story:

> Was sleeping on…slept on the pier…one time…well, wasn't really sleeping 'cuz the police came and kept me awake, to leave. Um…slept on the train. Then…got robbed, when I was sleeping on the train. For all my identification and my cell phone. Um, got held up on the train by a man with a gun.

Each of the aforementioned sleeping arrangements that young people utilized in the absence of safe shelter beds puts them at increased risk for victimization and interaction with the criminal legal system.

Age restrictions. The RHYA puts forth the following definition of homeless youth: "'Homeless youth' shall mean a person under the age of 21 years who is in need of services and is without a place of shelter where supervision and care are available." (Subpart 182-1 Runaway and Homeless Youth Regulations for Approved Runaway Programs). The majority of study participants were between the ages of 21 and 25 (19, 70%). When TGNC young people turn 21, they lose access to *all* of the mainstream youth shelter beds and over half of the LGBT specific shelter beds available in NYC. A total of 23 emergency shelter beds are reserved for LGBTQ youth between the ages of 21-25 in NYC. Because these programs serve young people 21 years of age and older, these beds are not funded by RHYA dollars and therefore, are not required to follow the same operational regulations. An additional 40 beds are available in transitional living programs for this age category. However, TGNC young people have difficulty meeting

the employment requirements for entry into transitional living programs, an issue to be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Participants in the study were aware of the impending decline in their options for assistance. During Jaime's interview, she said she wished that her father had kicked her out earlier, so she would have had more time to make progress before her 21st birthday.

> It's like right now I'm about to turn 21 in April and it's like your options get thinner as you get older. So it's like I felt like I would've had a lot more choices and would've done a lot better with myself, getting out of this.

Tara's time ran out at the emergency shelter program and because she wasn't working, she did not qualify for a bed in a transitional living program. While she was couch surfing and sleeping on the streets, her 21st birthday came, which further limited her access to shelter.

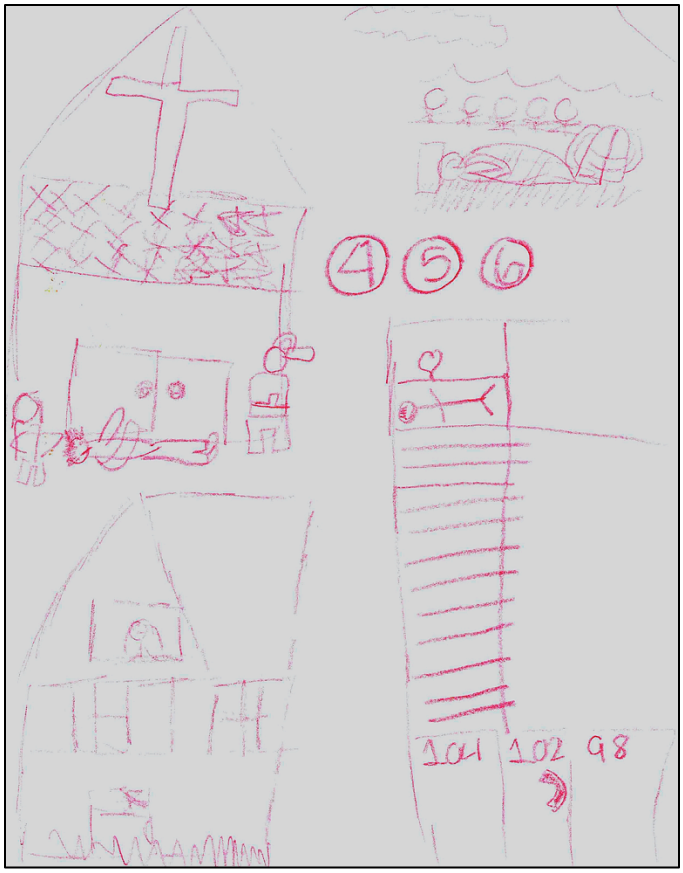
> My time was up. 'Cuz you can only get, like, 'cuz I was 20 at the time and I was staying at, um, [2 sites in program B] and there's like a 3 month period and everything that I can live there. So...so in total of those two 3 months, it was close to 6 months and…I had to get another housing.

Jack's age made him ineligible for any of the youth shelter beds in New York City. As a result, he found other places to sleep for the year and a half he was not involved with a shelter program. When asked why he didn't seek shelter within the city's adult shelter program, he said:

> I didn't want to go to a public shelter. 'Cuz it was, like, I just heard really bad things about it.

In the top right corner of Jack's map (Figure 13), he portrays himself sleeping outdoors.

Figure 13
Jack's Journey



As a result of his time on the street, Jack now has a criminal record that directly impacts every part of his life, including his ability to obtain a legal name change that would be representative of his authentic gender. Jack attributes his criminal record to the time he spent actively on the street. Of that time period, he says:

> That's when I started getting in trouble, like, with the police and everything. And I was with the wrong people and I was like, stealing things and getting caught. It's like, it's a whole thing where I'm trying to get my name change but they're preventing me from doing that.

Jack's inability to access a youth shelter bed, combined with his fear of entering the adult shelter system, put him at increased risk for involvement in the criminal legal system.

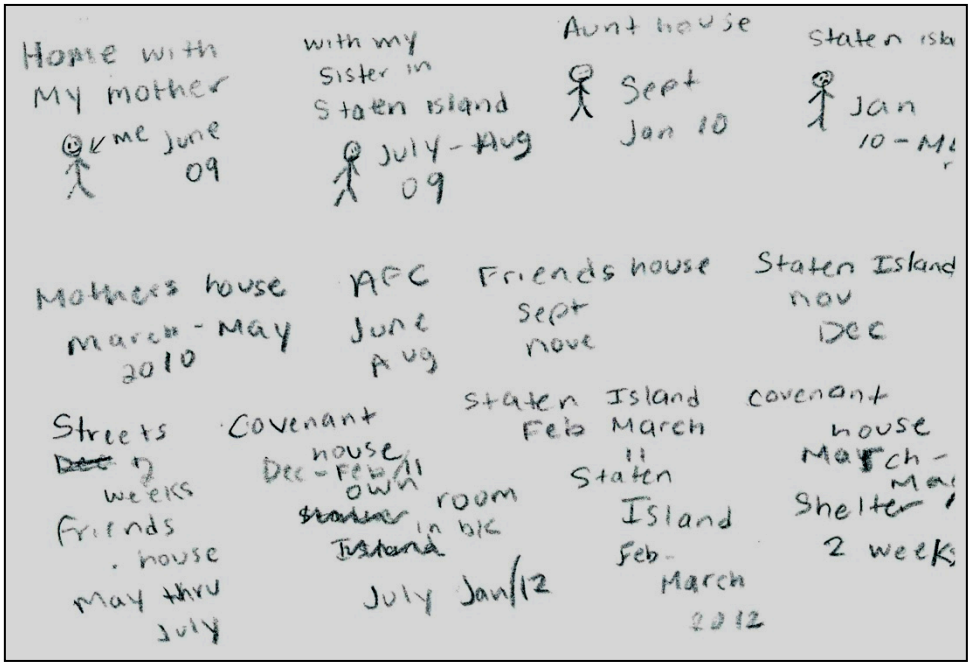
Length of stay requirements. Most youth serving emergency shelter programs in New York City are funded through the RHYA, and therefore must follow the prescribed length of stay requirements. The maximum length of stay for these programs is 30 days, with a possible 30-day extension, for a total of 60 days. This is an insufficient amount of time for a young person to position themselves for independent living or in many cases, to meet the requirements for entry into a longer-term transitional living program.

Lareese described a period of housing instability in which she accessed two different emergency shelter programs, but had to leave when she reached the maximum amount of time allowed. In between her time in the shelter programs, she stayed with a friend for a brief period of time, with a sister, and on the streets twice. Throughout her time of housing instability, Lareese continued to work towards accomplishing vocational goals that would grant her access to a longer-term transitional bed. However she was unsuccessful and has still been unable to accomplish what she needs in order to obtain a transitional living bed. She explains the multiple obstacles she faced:

> The first time I was in [program A] and got my 8 and 16 hour [security license], but they lost my license. I started school…but I stopped going because of all the stuff I was going through. I started construction training, the women's construction training. I did that in October, but I started having panic attacks and I had my first panic attack and they let me go because they were scared of the health problems I had because I had a seizure in the school. So I couldn't do that. Um, I had an internship, a year-long internship…I started that and…um…uh what is it? October. And I ended that in February because when I was in Staten Island with my older sister she got me a nurse, nursing training but I only stayed there one time because I failed my drug test. So I had to quit CHAT to do the nursing training so now…I'm left off with nothing now 'cuz I had to do the drug, the drug…I failed the test and I didn't even smoke since the month before like, before Valentine's. Well I quit smoking now, so…I'm done with that. Then I can't even go back to my old job because I told them that I was leaving to do the training. So they think that I'm doin' that. So…yeah. I'm gonna keep going. Trying to do something. I did the National Guard. I failed the test two times. So, I'm gonna keep goin'. I consider myself persistent. I am.

Lareese cites "all the stuff" she was going through as the reason she dropped out of school, and also described mental health symptoms that she believed to be exacerbated by her housing instability. She describes great effort towards goals that would enable her to be more self-sufficient – various training programs, school, an internship. However, her housing instability, mental health issues, and substance use derailed her efforts. Part of her housing instability was a result of her time running out in RHY funded shelter programs, and her inability to meet the requirements for a longer term transitional living bed. Her housing instability is reflected in her map (figure 14), which depicts the multiple places she lived over the course of several years. When she began mapping her journey, she included a small drawing of herself, in addition to the name of the place she stayed and the dates during which she stayed there. As time passed, however, she no longer included herself. Rather, her portrayal included only names of places and dates; she literally disappeared from the page.

Figure 14
Lareese's Journey



Length of stay restrictions are also of great concern to Alexandra. She fears that she will not be able to accomplish the things she needs to within the month she is allotted in her bed - including finding employment and a room that she could afford to rent - and that she will have to go back to living and surviving on the streets.

> And so after that month I'm worried about what's next for me, um…but they told me if I'm doing everything I'm supposed to be doing they might give me another month…I don't want to go back to the streets, you know, or go back to…prostituting, you know like, no…What if the month comes around and they say, ok you have to go and I have no other place to go but to a women's shelter and that scares me, you know but I like being at [program C] because it's GLBT friendly, LGBT friendly and I, you know, I have a couple people that are supportive there, you know.

Alexandra not only expresses concern over where she will stay and what she will do should she have to leave her shelter bed, she also articulates the importance of an identity affirming program and the support it offers her. Because she is over 21 years of age, her access to youth shelter beds is limited and she would be referred to an adult women's shelter when her time runs out. Even though Alexandra identifies as a transgender woman, she feared the treatment she might receive in an adult women's shelter.

For young people who are new to New York City, the length of stay regulations are even more limiting. The young people in the study from outside of the New York City area most often arrived in the city without any existing supports. For example, Omar knew no one and had no money or source of income upon his arrival. In a new city, without a support network or safety net, Omar fears what will happen when his time is up in the emergency shelter. Omar's family, who kicked him out of their home, lives in Puerto Rico. Family reunification is not an option for him at this time.

> Now I'm a little concerned because I only got 30 more days and that's it and I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know nothing about New York, so I don't know. I'm faithful. I'm like, hopeful. I know god's gonna put me in the right place. And I'm

> just going through the days. See what's happening. Maybe I'm gonna find a job fast, maybe…I don't know. I'm just going through the days and see what happens.

Quality of shelters. New York State regulations for Approved Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Programs provide standards for ensuring the quality of shelters, both with regards to the physical space and also the supportive services offered therein. These standards include regulations for program capacity, the size and quality of the physical space, the provision of services, and staffing patterns. Most, but not all youth shelter programs receive RHYA funding. Therefore, not all youth shelter programs follow these regulations. The programs that do not follow the regulations can offer young people shelter through the age of 24, and can also offer an extended length of stay beyond the RHYA limited 60 days. However, these programs are not held to the same standards regarding physical space and cleanliness. This proved problematic for some of the study participants. In assessing the quality of programs, the following themes emerged: cleanliness, emotional safety, and physical safety. Jaguar shares the conditions of one of the programs in which he lived:

> There's rats that eat through your stuff. They poop everywhere. I understand that that's consistent with New York City, but this is something that you could call an exterminator about. We had bed bugs, nobody did anything about them until they got really bad.

In addition to his frustration in the physical state of the program, Jaguar also felt the program's inattention to the seriousness of the conditions was negligent.

Lareese describes a particularly difficult period of trying to find safe and sanitary shelter. She had been staying on the streets and sleeping on the subway train. When it got too cold, she decided to try to access emergency shelter. Though she was able to secure a bed for one night, the conditions were so poor that she left.

> I did go to one night at [program C]. That's when they had bed bugs and I was with my friend and she slept on the floor and I slept on the counter and I caught bed bugs and I,

> and we, both us left that night. We left, we…that was our first night, so…we were just walking around, the cold. Um...kept getting, trying get admitted to the hospital. Sneaking in my friend's house while their parents don't know. That's...I been through all that. The worst was sleeping on the train.

Berlin's experiences were similar in a different program. She reveals what it was like when she first entered the program:

> But at [program C], is, was, um...this is when I, this is when I cried. I walk into [program C], I see rats. I had to sleep on the floor and at this time I was like, very, I've always been kinda high maintenance. So I need like, a stable environment…so, I just suck it up but I would cry.

Berlin moved to New York City to attend college. When her housing plans fell through at the last minute (due to her gender non-conformity and perceived gayness), she was able to access a shelter bed. However, the conditions she describes were not conducive to her need for stability and safety while attending school. She says:

> I was going to school in this environment…I was going to school for fashion design and merchandising so I had this big thing of like, art supplies, for, like, school. Um, colored pencils, and like expensive, prisma color colored pencils and sketch books and tracing paper and all this stuff 'cuz…it was fashion….My supplies were coming up missing. People were stealing my colored pencils. Colored pencils! My clothes were leaving day by the day, like, by they were just lessening and less and less. I came there with like 15 pairs of shoes, I left with like 2… And then I dropped out of school…it was like, oh my god.

Berlin's experience highlights not only the substandard quality of the physical space, but also the impact of those conditions on her ability to accomplish her goals while residing in the shelter. In addition to not having a bed to sleep in and managing her emotions related to her environmental conditions, there was no place for her to keep her school supplies safe. Eventually, the stress of living in an unstable environment was too much for her to manage while attending school and she dropped out. Dropping out of school may impact Berlin's life far into the future, affecting her economic security, and consequently her housing stability.

As Berlin's story demonstrates, poor shelter conditions can have a deleterious effect on

young people's ability to achieve their goals. Additionally, substandard shelter conditions impact young people's sense of self-worth. The TGNC young people in this study had already been told both directly and indirectly that they did not deserve to live in a home. When faced with the conditions found in some shelters, young people felt further displaced and undeserving. The lack of safe and sanitary shelter for TGNC individuals communicated the message to the participants that they were undeserving of anything better, and that they should take what they could get. From a scarcity standpoint, some participants shared the sentiment that any bed is better than no bed. While this may be true for some, the young people in this study internalized the damaging message that they were undeserving of access to safe and sanitary shelter. They even reinforced these deprecating messages when their peers complained about the state of the programs. Rebekah justifies her programs conditions in this way:

> Um, I've I've definitely, um, learned to conform to the places around me. Um, [program C] isn't the best place, I don't know if you've ever been inside, but it's it's it's not the best place in the world and, you know, I get a lot of slack for it…um, you know, we all sleep on, I sleep on a cot but there's people who sleep on mats, um there's, I, you know thank god now there's not, but I've heard that there's been rats and cockroaches and things like that and, I, you know, it's not the best living situation, but ...

As Rebekah learned to conform to the places around her, one of the things she was learning is that she and others like her do not deserve access to the same living arrangements as other people. Not only had this message been explicitly communicated to her by her family when they ejected her from their home, but it was also being reinforced by the substandard condition of her housing program. She says:

> There's a lot of people who have came through in these last 3 weeks who only stayed for like 2 days, like "I cannot stay there." And acting like they're like they deserve to go to the rich, like the Ritz and the Sheraton, like, who ARE you, you know we're NOT ... we can't afford that, do you wanna sleep in here or do you wanna sleep on the streets?

Rebekah was not the only participant who expressed this sentiment. Similarly, when TC

was asked what it's like to live in her program, she said:

> I mean, beggars can't be choosey. And right now I'm considered a beggar, so…it's better than sleeping on the streets in the cold. I'll tell you that much.

When discussing the conditions of her shelter program, Berlin said:

> I might as well go outside. But it was somewhere to sleep in at least. It wasn't like visibly like homelessness, like on the street, on the bench, like you know?

Whereas many of the participants seemed to adopt the belief that "beggars can't be choosey," and incorporated that idea into their narratives, Jaguar recognized how the systemic marginalization of homeless young peoples' voices reinforces these beliefs of unworthiness. He explains:

> As soon as you're seen as homeless, you're seen as someone who's not able to collaborate. Whose voice doesn't count. And that is absolutely regardless of any kind of background that you might've come from.

With the knowledge that his voice may not be valued, Jaguar reported his concerns about the quality of his program to other service providers. What follows is his understanding of the lack of subsequent actions on the part of other service providers.

> No one wants you to whistle blow on a shelter…No one… No one can call. No one can say anything. No one can report anything. It's terrifying. You tell somebody you're homeless, they go, oh you're a piece of shit, and you have to take whatever you want so why are you complaining about these systems? It's isolating and not transparent at all.

Jaguar makes connections between the substandard conditions he experienced, the devaluing of his voice, and his sense of safety.

Safety

While program cleanliness and quality services were important to the young people in this study, safety was the most important thing a program could provide. For the participants in this study, the idea of safety included both physical safety and emotional safety. Physical safety can be understood as being without the danger of experiencing bodily harm. Emotional safety

can be understood as being free from emotional attack or harm; it means to be accepted for who one is. The notion of safety was directly related to their TGNC identity, as many had experienced consistent and persistent identity related discrimination and mistreatment. According to the ESC Unaccompanied Youth Count (2007), up to 40% of young people experiencing homelessness in New York City are LGBTQ identified, and only 55 shelter beds exist specifically for this population. Five percent of youth experiencing homelessness in NYC self-identified as transgender, and an additional 18% did not identify their gender. Currently no emergency shelter beds or programs exist that are specifically designed for TGNC young people. Ideally, all youth shelter programs would be able to provide affirming care for TGNC young people. Unfortunately, this is not the reality. Both real and perceived safety issues prevented some of the TGNC young people in this study from accessing shelter beds within particular programs. For example, his perception of where he would be safe limited the number of shelter programs Nino was willing to access. He says:

> People are still gonna ask...all this stuff and like, wonder. But other shelters I was like, nah. First of all, too much questions. They gonna single me out…out of everybody. I don't want to be in that predicament. I'm gonna end up fighting 'cuz I don't like getting singled out, like, and especially if you saying, like, like, if you trying to dis me about who I am…like, I just felt a whole bunch of confrontations gonna happen over there… that was like, kinda something that, it didn't make me homeless, but it made me not have a bed to sleep in.

In the above quote, Nino describes the impact of constant questioning and being singled out. In fact, his desire to keep himself safe from both emotional harm ("trying to dis me about who I am") and physical harm ("I'm gonna end up fighting") kept him from being involved with particular shelter programs.

The study participants reported challenges not only in mainstream shelter programs, but also in LGBTQ-specific shelter programs. Participants reported feeling unsafe or experiencing

anxiety about their safety as it related to their cisgender peers within the programs, the program staff, and the procedures of some programs. Christie talked at length about the identity affirming services offered at an LGBTQ shelter program, expressing appreciation for legal clinics that help with name changes, social workers that enroll young people in Medicaid, and medical services that provide access to hormone therapy. However, ze also expressed concern over hir emotional safety. Ze highlights the threat that other shelter users may pose for TGNC young people:

> Like...anyone can walk through the door and be like, I'm bisexual. And you're straight as a bone. But they'll give you housing. With a transfemale. And a queer kid, lesbian, a gay boy and they have this one straight man in here, talking crap about transfemales, in the housing making us feel low, dirty, disrespectful, disrespected, I should say.

In addition to the threats emanating from other young people, the study participants also perceived the program staff and the procedures they enact as threats to their emotional safety. For example, the questions that are asked upon intake into programs can be triggering for young people, and can contribute to feelings of anxiety and/or impending danger. Jaguar recounts his experience of an intake into a shelter program:

> He set me down in that room. And then like, immediately like, opens up this computer. He's not even looking at me. And I'm like, this is gonna be terrible. And then we went through all these series of questions and like, most of them I was like, I don't understand why you need to know this. I just met you. That's weird…And I was like, ok, well I guess this is part of the procedure then I like, let him know like, hey this is probably going to be difficult for me 'cuz it's kind of triggering 'cuz I mean…like my parents…and then he was like, being such a prick and like, started bringing up all those things over and over again and I was like man, fuck you.

Similarly, Isa points out the ways in which some intake questionnaires are not considerate of his unique experiences as a transman. Because programs are not developed with the particular needs and experiences of TGNC young people in mind, intake questionnaires replicate the cisnormative ideology of society at large. This results in intake procedures that may alienate TNGC young people. Isa says:

> There was one document I filled out, as a trans man and it asked me questions about pregnancy. And that may be something they want to think about. Should you have something about pregnancy there? Should you have something about menstrual shit there? Cuz that may trigger a transguy. You know what I mean, like, should you have that? Is, is it really necessary? You know, so that would be something to think about.

In addition to emotional safety concerns related to TNGC identity, young people whose home lives and/or street experiences were characterized by violence may be especially perceptive of safety concerns and feel threatened by behaviors exhibited by staff when enforcing program policies. Miranda shares the following example of her experiences in a program that was unable to provide her with the sense of safety she desired:

> The staff there are intimidating and they practice a lot of the same…um….steps of domestic violence…it involves a lot of intimidation, a lot of manipulation. Even though there's not…um…physical violence. They will try to intimidate you out of your own housing. They discharged two people last night for speaking their minds. And for doing this gesture (demonstrates) which is a cultural gesture. And they don't fucking understand it. They took it as a sign of aggression. So they discharged them. To set an example for the rest, rest of the people there.

Miranda also described feeling a lack of control over what happens to her in the program, which led to a concern over her emotional safety. Young people are dependent on programs for the maintenance of their basic needs and for their safety. She didn't experience either of these within the context of this particular program. Her statement below communicates her resultant feelings of powerlessness.

> They're not ordering food. You leave the fridge barren of anything. There's no oil, there's no nothing. You intimidate people. You treat people like crap. And the best judge of character for a person is seeing how they treat someone who is in a vulnerable position and can't do anything to stop them.

Conversely, Miranda describes a program in which she felt safe and respected.

> They weren't manipulative. They didn't try to intimidate people. There was…none of that sort of thing. And even when I didn't like a staff member, I still respected them. Because they didn't do things out of spite towards me. Because I can still not like someone at all, but I can still treat them with respect. If they treat me with respect. And they always have.

As evidenced by the participant narratives above, young people did not always feel safe within programs. While housing programs were able to provide an alternative to the dangers of sleeping on the streets, they were not able to consistently provide TGNC young people with a sense of safety or freedom from the threat or perceived threat of identity related violence and discrimination.

Housing Instability within Programs

Instances related to safety, such as those described above, contributed to participants' frequent moves between programs. Additional reasons for frequent movement included: an inability to follow program rules, a program structure that was unsupportive of their unique needs, the opportunity of another living arrangement, or simply their time being "up" in a particular program. Though the reasons varied, the theme of frequent moves was universal among the participants in this study. They were not able to find stability in housing programs. Ryan shared the multiple places he lived, including both programs as well as places not meant for habitation.

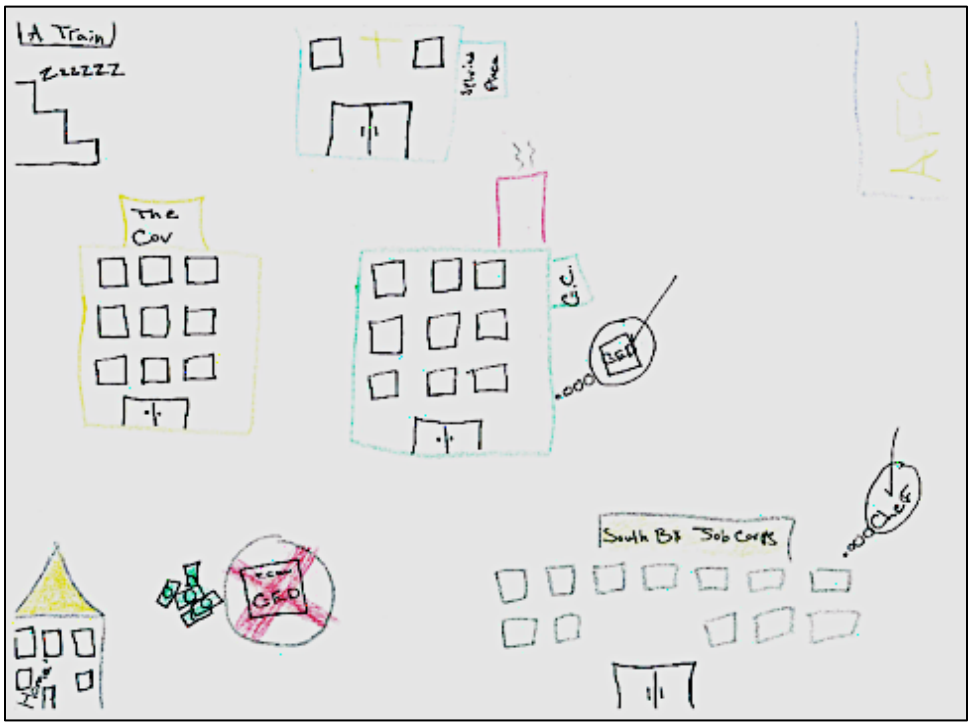
> Well, I was at [program C), um....I had lived at, I've lived at [program D] twice. Um .... I've almost been in [program B] a couple of times and I've almost been at the emergency shelters for [program B] a couple of times. But I, for the most part I was either on the streets, um abandoned house, um, train, [program C] or [program E] and [program A], and [program A] twice.

Ryan's experience is not unique. From the time he left home, Japan moved a total of 12 times, between 4 different programs and in and out of his mother's house.

> It's from the [program A], to [program B], then I stayed at [program C] like for two weeks, then ... Back to [program B] then, um . . I went back to my mother's house, and back to [program B] then back to my mother's house, back to [program B], back to my mother's house, then I went to [program D] . . . Then back to my mother's house…back to [program B]. Then it's like once I left [program B]... the last time, I moved into my apartment.

TC was able to gain access to a longer-term bed in a transitional living program, where she was able to stay for 2 years, until her 21st birthday. Despite this fact, at the age of 24 TC was living in an emergency shelter program following a series of precarious living situations spanning the three years after aging out of the transitional living program. Her map (figure 15) focuses on the institutions in which she lived since leaving her parents' house. In turn, it illustrates the absence of individual people throughout her journey, and reinforces the importance of institutional support.

Figure 15
TC's Journey



TC associates her achievements with the programs she was involved in when they were accomplished. For her, the programmatic focus on educational and vocational goals was effective. Notably, the two programs with which she credits her primary vocational and

educational successes are longer-term housing programs. She did not identify any accomplishments in association with the emergency shelter programs in which she stayed, suggesting that emergency shelter programs do not provide young people a sufficient length of stay to facilitate the accomplishment of ongoing goals.

In addition to the instability related to the issues discussed above, a pervasive threat of being kicked out of their living situations characterized shelter living and created another layer of uncertainty for the study participants. In addition to the maximum length of stay regulations and the age restrictions, young people feared "messing up" and being kicked out. This omnipresent fear led to a continued sense of instability in place. Alexandra articulates this feeling of instability:

> I feel like anything could happen, like I could easily get kicked out of [program C] you know, I…even though I'm not, you know what I'm saying.

Even though she knew she was not going to be kicked out of the program, Alexandra still felt as if she had no control over her residential security. Zariah shared that she was afraid to confront a roommate who took some of her clothing, for fear that it might progress into a situation that would result in her discharge from the program.

> And I feel like if I say something to them then I'm gonna get a write up, know what I'm saying? And eventually I'm gonna get discharged.

Jaguar describes his intention to follow program rules, but reported a lack of clarity and enforcement of the rules in his program. This lack of clarity and inconsistent enforcement contributed to a heightened sense of instability and lack of control.

> I kind of approached it as like, ok, I'm gonna all the terms of this agreement. It's like, ok, the shelter rules are the terms of this agreement. This is what I do in exchange for housing here. So I will abide by these to a T and then the rest, fuck off. Which has not happened. Has not happened. The rules are being changed every week.

In addition to inconsistent and unclear rule application, Jaguar spoke of a the power differential between shelter residents and staff. This power differential led to a fear of the staff misusing their power. This is another example of the programmatic culture of "waiting for the other shoe to drop." Study participants described being on high alert for potentially dangerous situations and they *expected* to be made to leave. Jaguar provides the following two examples:

> Like I started doing push ups in the space to do some kind of exercise. Immediately I could sense that (says name) was terrified of me, so I stopped doing them. 'Cuz I knew if she's terrified of me, she'd want to find more things wrong with what I was doing so that she could kick me out.

> One of the social workers there was like, you should break up with your girlfriend because she's depressed and depressed people don't function well. Meanwhile, I was talking to her 'cuz I thought hey, social worker, right? No. Then I felt pressured to break up with her because I felt like if I didn't, she would do something to punish me about it. So we ended up breaking up. 'Cuz of like, so many things, but like, that played a *huge* role in it. 'Cuz she could pressure my housing. All the sudden she has this information, she could just pressure everything.

The ability to abide by program rules is attached to one's ability to keep their bed. Even when rules were clear and consistent, participants struggled to follow them. Curfews proved to be especially challenging for some participants. Lareese describes how the act of missing curfew could result in the loss of her bed:

> In [program C] you don't have a steady place to stay because if you come home, like Monday I came…from, from my mother's house. She live on Long Island and I got there 11:30 and the curfew's actually at 10. But their final curfew's at 11, and the door was locked. So that was my first time and I'm just…I was so upset. I was really upset. I was like, and I was banging on the door. Luckily the lady heard me and she opened the door for me. And all I wanted to do was just go to sleep.

For young people like Honesty who never had to follow a curfew, these restrictions were a difficult adjustment. Enough curfew violations can accumulate to result in a young person being discharged from their program.

> I mean, they got like a few, uh, a few rules that could be adjusted, you know what I'm sayin, 'cuz like the curfew, I don't like the curfew. You know, I'm grown I don't like no curfew. I never had a curfew since I came to New York (laughs). I *never* had a curfew…a curfew. Shit. I be late a lot. But um…like, the curfews could really change a little bit.

Curfews provide a concrete example of the ways young people in shelter programs are unable to experience the same opportunities for social interaction and growth as their housed counterparts. For TGNC young people, for whom community connections are vital, overly restrictive curfew policies pose barriers for engagement and retention in shelter programs. Zariah explains::

> You have these curfews and stuff like that so when you wanna have some fun late at night you can't because you have to come in or you get write up and discharge and you gotta come back on the street, try to find another bed to sleep in…with anybody.

Unique needs of TGNC Young People in Shelter Programs

> I have more of a struggle as to doing stuff, like…um, like a normal teen, all they gotta worry about is school. All they gotta worry about is whatever, what clothes they gonna wear, something. Me? I worry about, um…going to appointments to try to be…what I want, what I, I am, you know? Going to like, having special centers where to go to feel secure and, and to be with people like me…Like I think there's more of a...of…of…more of a weight on my back, that I'm like this, you know? -Nino

As they discussed their involvement in shelter programs, the study participants articulated numerous needs unique to TGNC young people experiencing homelessness. As Nino describes above, TGNC young people may be engaged with a variety of medical and mental health providers and must be responsible for ensuring their compliance with hormone protocols if they are undergoing a physical gender transition. Additionally, due to unequal treatment within mainstream systems of care, TGNC young people often have to seek out specific centers or programs where they will have access to culturally competent care and support. These concerns are not common for their straight and cisgender counterparts. The commonly communicated needs were related to privacy, emotional stability, and physical presentation. Their narratives

also conveyed a need for affirmation and validation related to their gender identity. Youth shelter programs are a product of cisnormative society and are not designed with the particular needs of TGNC young people in mind. As such, they inherently limit the ability of TGNC young people to succeed. Nino says:

> I just feel like, I have, like, more of a, of a struggle. Because I'm, cuz I'm not a label. If you're a female, you're just a female. If you're a man, you're just a man. Like, whatever. I'm a transgender male, you know? It's like, that's even *more.*

TGNC young people are capable of achieving the same goals as their non-TGNC counterparts, however they often must complete additional steps to do so and may require additional supports. Programs must be examined for structural barriers to their success.

Cisnormativity. Although needs assessments and research studies have consistently documented the harassment and discrimination experiences of TGNC young people and their difficulty accessing services, an analysis of the production and maintenance of their marginalization is virtually absent (Bauer, et al., 2009). The RHYA act and resulting program regulations must be examined through the lens of cisnormativity in order to better understand the ways in which it systematically limits the potential success and stability of TGNC young people. To review, cisnormativity is the belief system that underlies transphobia (Pyne, 2011). It describes the presumption that all people are cissexual, meaning that all people identify with and live as the sex they were assigned at birth. Cisnormativity contributes to the erasure of TGNC people. It shapes our entire social context, from the individual practices of human interaction to the establishment of organizations and the procedures of institutions (Bauer, et al., 2009). As a result, the arrival of a TGNC person within systems such as youth shelters creates an emergent crisis for which program staff and established systems are ill prepared. Pyne (2011) says "Normalized experiences often go unnamed until challenged (p.30)." The normative pathway

out of homelessness for young people has been family reunification or the development of self-sufficiency leading to independent living. RHYA funded programs are designed to facilitate these pathways. Understanding length of stay and age restrictions, program guidelines regarding gender segregated living arrangements, and employment requirements through a lens of cisnormativity illuminates the challenges for TGNC young people.

In Transition. Transgender young people who are in the process of gender transition during their stay in a program face challenges that their cisgender and non-transitioning counterparts do not. Rebekah sums up her experience this way:

> The worst part of our transition is the transition. You know. Um, whenever the surgery is done and all of that I can just go and live my life. But until then, it's going to be a struggle.

Berlin began transitioning once she gained access to a longer-term bed in a transitional living program. She describes some of her struggles related her gender transition, which were compounded by her homelessness.

> And I really took off and then got the hormones and all that type of stuff and that was difficult because I was dealing with homelessness and then I had to, like, learn myself all over again and then dealing with society, being trans and…that was just a whole big, that was hard. I got through it but that was so hard. Like, the actual steps of transitioning and what comes a long with that, period.

Participants in this study were not only challenged by the stresses associated with their homeless experiences, but also dealt with the psychological stress of navigating a world highly critical of their very existence. Christie's struggle, like many of the young people in this study, includes uncertainty in hir physical appearance.

> A lot of people say I'm feminine in the face and I look like a girl in the face, but when I see myself in the mirror. I don't see that. At all. And trust me, I look. Every car I walk past, I'm always looking at it.

Christie was hypercritical of hir physical appearance, mirroring the disparaging

interactions that characterized hir everyday interactions with the world around hir. Ze not only articulated this experience verbally, but also depicted it in hir map (figure 16). An excerpt from Christie's map is below:

Figure 16
Christie's Journey

After creating a representation of hirself at the present time, Christie disclosed hir discontent with the image ze holds of hirself. The weight of "needing to fix so many things" comes through in hir final statement, "sometimes life seems lost." In addition to an understanding of the quality of their daily interactions and the subsequent impact those interactions have on their self esteem, programs should also recognize that young people who are engaged in hormone therapy may need additional supports as they undergo both emotional and physical changes. When asked what it's like to live in her program, Nikiyah says:

> I mean, it's been, um, it's kind of stressful sometimes. You know, 'cuz it's like, I take hormones, and the mood swings are crazy. I be feeling like I'm going nuts sometimes.

In addition to managing the emotional changes she experiences as a result of hormone therapy, Chass also has to deal with facial hair, a grooming ritual which requires time and privacy to carry out, and which directly impacts her sense of self. She says:

> The emotions. I am very emotional. Um, the fact that the, well for me, I still kind of grow a beard and that's annoying. Like, the whole facial hair thing, because...it's just, that's just kills my confidence. It really does.

As the primary source of support for young people experiencing homelessness, it is imperative that programs are aware of the challenges associated with gender transitions. While all TGNC young people will not choose medical intervention, some young people will. In addition to understanding the challenges young people may face and supporting them through those challenges, it is also important that program staff are aware of the joys TGNC young people may experience as their bodies become more aligned with their identities. For example, Nikiyah shares:

> I guess as my transition progressed, like...I got pretty, like I'm getting, my body is changing and everything. Like people tend to just notice me, you know what I mean?

As her transition progressed, Nikiyah began to feel more confident. Having that reflected back to her by an identity affirming program staff would validate her experiences and help to solidify her emerging stronger sense of self.

Privacy. The ability to physically articulate their gender identity was crucial to the overall functioning of the study participants, and the process of physically articulating their gender identity was also time-consuming for some young people. Emergency shelter programs are overnight programs; the residents must exit the program for the day by 8:00am in most cases. The morning routines usually include breakfast, chores, and making preparations for the day ahead. Though privacy is not only a concern of TGNC young people, the participants related

privacy to their need to assert their gender identity. Jay expressed the need for private space and also discussed needing more time to prepare for her day than her cisgender peers might need.

> There's no private space. I'm sorry, I have to wake up and tape in the morning, I'm not trying to do that in front of 15 people. Um. Even things like this, like being able to do my make up and stuff like that. I…I paint. So I need some time to be able to paint my face…can't do it. That kind of stuff…that is where it's really hard 'cuz it's really getting sore on me.

A lack of privacy within shelter program was one of the primary complaints of TGNC young people. Chass says:

> It sucks. There's no privacy, basically…….there's no privacy.

Privacy concerns were not only in relation to the preparation for one's physical presentation, concerns also revolved around previous experiences of trauma. For example, a lack of privacy further complicated Zariah's ability to trust other people.

> It's hard, especially in New York, 'cuz it's so many people, you know what I'm saying, and the housing I'm staying in now…um…six people, you know what I'm saying? Including the staff is seven, you know what I'm saying? And…it's not much privacy, you know...you trying to trust but you really can't 'cuz you really don't know.

Due to privacy concerns, dormitory style living proved to be challenging for the study participants. In the housing programs within which study participants were involved, anywhere from 6 to 15 young people shared a large living space. Rebekah explains why privacy is important for her:

> You know, I was up every morning and I, you know, I live at [program C], which is a very open area, we all get dressed in the same room and...I mean, I'm very...private, you know, especially during my transition. There's one other trans girl there that kind of just takes off her clothes and this and that. She's not as conservative as I am. Like, I don't want people to see me. Um, so, I mean it's very difficult, you know.

When navigating a lack of private space and shared bathrooms, in a limited amount of time, preparing for one's day was increasingly difficult. Time and privacy to conduct grooming rituals was essential to the well-being of the study participants. For example, putting on make up

is not only critical to Nikiyah's self concept, it is also critical to her ability to navigate a world that would otherwise harshly judge her based on her appearance.

> And when I put on my make up, like everyday I feel, like a change...and then hearing from people, oh you look different. Like, a lot of people tell me I look totally different from before...more feminine.

If not given time and space required to prepare for their day, TGNC young people must exit their shelter programs for the day feeling less confident, and more prone to experiencing continued rejection and harassment. Several study participants discussed a constant fear of being "clocked," or being recognized as a person of transgender experience. Nikiyah shares:

> It's kind of difficult, you know. Like, being in society, you gotta worry about getting clocked and spooked, and um...I mean, just fitting in, basically. In society. Which I am, I don't have a problem with now…I mean, they notice me in a positive way and then a negative way, too. 'Cuz they're like oh she's pretty, but then they get on to me...And they be like, oh that's a man, so….

Pervasive judgment and discrimination had a profound impact on the young people in this study, evident in their depictions of daily living. TGNC young people reported having to contend with frequent questioning related to their identity. Young people describe feeling misunderstood. Omar shares:

> People who ask you why you dress like that, why you cut your hair? Why you say this, why, like, they don't, even though if you explain, they won't get it.

Constant questioning and misapprehension from the world around him were widespread and potent, creating such a level of internal discomfort that Nino began to second-guess his identity.

> I'm comfortable within myself but sometimes I feel like…iffy, like…damn, another day. More explanations as to why I…I am me, you know? And I feel the need, that I shouldn't have to explain that all the time.

TGNC young people had to provide a steady stream of explanations about who they are and why. Whether they were being questioned by their families or peers, or those working within

systems that were meant to help them, the relentless questioning they were faced with took a toll on their sense of self and on their confidence. Nino goes on to explain:

> It's like, I want I want people to acknowledge me as…like as I feel as I present myself, not having to say it, you know? It's like, it's like common sense basically, you know. If you see someone present – if they walk like a duck, talk like a duck – they a duck, you know?

In addition to questioning, TGNC young people are frequent targets of verbal harassment. TGNC young people who are homeless are more susceptible to a steady stream of maltreatment due to their increased exposure on the street. Jaime has experienced such persecution that she felt under constant judgment and scrutiny. She describes her experiences navigating society on a daily basis:

> It's like when I'm wearing my make up and everything, I feel like, if somebody stares at me the first thought is – like, what is that person thinking? What are they saying about me in their head or whatever? And some people just don't say anything they just stare at you and some people stare and they go 'huh huh' like little chuckles or whatever.

Likewise, Alexandra asserts:

> Um, I think it's very, um, difficult. I think people just look at the fact that we're transgender, you know? And they don't look at the fact that I'm a person. You know, that I'm an individual, so…um, it can be really difficult. A lot of times I feel like, um, I'm misjudged because I'm transgender.

Christie questions whether or not transitioning within such a discriminatory society is worth it:

> It's difficult. Especially here in New York City, even though you have all these organizations and all these things to help, help out with, um, our transition and all these law firms to get name changes and sex/gender changed and, all that is great, but if society and you know, the people around you can't accept it, it's really hard. It's not, it's not worth it. It's not worth the struggle. It's really not…being um…assaulted, physically assaulted and being verbally abused on the street.

The participants' experiences managing a contemptuous society resulted in feelings of fear, frustration, and uncertainty. Having an environment in which they are supported, both

individually and also within program processes plays a critical role in their well-being. However, program structures were frequently unable to accommodate their needs. Zariah conveys the lack of knowledge she believes programs possess about the needs of transgender young people, including the need for bathroom access, adequate rest, and respite from the harassment she experiences throughout the day.

> It's really a lot that they should know about transgender people. I know I need time to myself. I need some rest. Um…you know what I'm saying? It be times where I can't handle stuff outside and I need to come back inside to try to calm myself or get myself together and then…I can't be able to do that because the house open up at a certain time or, you know what I'm saying or, it's…you know what I'm saying, or somebody in the bathroom. It's one bathroom, it's somebody else in the bathroom. I have to sign the list and I have to wait. Everything like that, you know.

Some young people found respite in shelter programs that were specifically for LGBTQ young people. For example, Nino felt that he would only have his unique needs met in LGBTQ-specific shelter programs.

> Like, me going, like [program B] I thought was the only shelter I could go in cuz me going to another shelter is like, is…they not there for, for what you need, you know, like, as a LGBT youth.

However, LGBTQ specific environments were not void of difficulty for all TGNC young people. Just because a program is inclusive of gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people does not mean they are inclusive of TGNC young people. Isa describes his experience accessing services at LGBTQ organizations:

> Trans is still very new to some people. They don't quite understand it yet. So you just encounter ignorance. You know, about the, the transgender stuff, um….the like, the um, the vocabulary involved with the transgender like, post op, pre op, what does that mean, you know that type thing. You know, um…sometimes, um…like incorrect information regarding that. But…and sometimes, like being misunderstood by people on a like, peer to peer level, or patient to patient, client to client level.

Isa touches upon multiple facets of a program: the role of program systems, the role of program staff, and the role of program clients. Even when staying in LGBTQ specific housing

programs, some of the TGNC young people were harassed by their cisgender and gender conforming roommates. Zariah explains:

> There's certain stuff, when you're staying in the house with um, gay, gay males or gay boys and everything like that, and…Most gay males don't get along with transies, you know what I'm saying. And…will try little stuff you, know what I'm saying, or say little things, 'oh well, you this and you that. You still got this and you still got that.' You know what I'm saying, it will tick a tranny, I mean a transsexual, off.

Young people who identify as TGNC may also be hyper-critical of one another. One of the by products of living within an oppressive society and navigating discriminatory systems is internalized oppression. TGNC young people internalize the negative messages they consume every day. Berlin explains:

> Around any social setting, like, even with people that are like yourselves because naturally we programmed to be so critical because everyone is so critical of us. Naturally we were very critical around each other so we always want to present as a certain way, act as a certain way and it just seems very shady and it was just…ugh. Everywhere I went I was facing some bull crap.

When programs are designed with the unique needs of TGNC young people in mind, they can become a respite from the persecution described by the participants. Such a reprieve is uncommon. Rather, as Berlin stated, TGNC young people experiencing homelessness are "facing some bull crap" everywhere they go, in addition to navigating the articulation of their gender.

Employment related program requirements. Young people are often required to either be employed or enrolled in school in order to gain access to a bed in a longer-term transitional living program. These program requirements are meant to guide young people onto a path of independence; staying in school makes one better suited for a competitive job market and obtaining employment allows young people to save for independent living. These program goals make good sense. However, these processes are especially difficult for TGNC young people, for

whom 1.) no federal employment protections exist and 2.) have limited access to resources necessary for authentic gender presentation. Additionally, a young person's success on the job market is also highly contingent upon where they are staying. If they are in a shelter, they have access to a shower (though they may not have ample time or privacy to complete their required grooming rituals). If they are couch surfing or sleeping on the subways, parks, or street, their ability to be presentable for an interview or a job is likely to be severely compromised. When TGNC young people are able to secure employment, they face higher rates of discrimination and mistreatment than their cisgender counterparts. Zariah explains an instance of employment discrimination that she faced:

> But at my job they told me that I couldn't come in wearing female attire, so…I had felt discriminated. And I felt discriminated. They told me I could still work, I just couldn't come in there with hair on my head, a bra on, or make up or eyelashes and stuff like that.

Jaime arrived at the emergency shelter with only the clothes she wore. Her father destroyed all of her feminine clothing and products. She says:

> Due to my age, they're like you should be working you should be able to support yourself and it's like not easy when you don't have a place to stay, you don't have clothing, you don't have this, you don't have that. And then people try to make it seem like if it's the easiest thing in the world.

With no feminine clothing or grooming products, and no means to acquire these things, Jaime was unable to actively seek employment. Rather than prioritizing job interviews, an alternative, identity affirming approach would be to assist Jaime in procuring the items that are critical to her well-being.

The pervasive judgment Alexandra has experienced impacts her on a daily basis. Her experience of searching for work was common among the participants.

> Um, it's, like I said, like being judged. You know, going inside like a restaurant or a job and filling out an application and have people judge you. Um, you know like, having

> people um…Ask me if I'm a male, or girl or a boy if I'm walking down the street um, getting asked that or you know, people, you can hear people saying certain stuff.

TC and Berlin share similar stories about their challenges finding employment:

> I went to jobs where people have been, like under qualified. I guess my appearance is one of the things that holds me back from looking for work. 'Cuz I don't, I don't want to be judged on my appearance. Like, take my experience, cuz I've done a lot and I've done a lot of volunteer work and I've worked for free for years… - TC

> I was trying to get through but it's like *girl* and I'm trans on top of it, girl. And, I, and it would be times when like, I would go, like, so I would go to interviews. I was presenting myself well. I didn't do too much, I was very presentable. And I feel like, I was corporate ready, like, and there would be times when I wouldn't get a response…I feel like it had a lot to do with being trans. And they didn't want a transgender individual, like, a transgender representation within their company. – Berlin

When able to find employment, some TGNC young people experienced degrees of harassment that necessitated they resign. This was the case for Berlin, who found work at a telemarketing company. She says:

> I faced so much discrimination where I was working at. Basically anybody could get the job. And so, with that being said, you know what came along with it? *Discrimination*, I mean, from the co-workers, from the bosses, from…it was just a mess. So I was like, you know what I can't do this no more.

In addition to facing harassment and discrimination in the employment sector, TGNC young people often experiences high rates of harassment and discrimination in educational settings. According to a recent report by GLSEN, 80% of transgender students reported feeling unsafe at school (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen & Palmer, 2012). Several of the TGNC study participants dropped out of high school due to violence and harassment placing them at an even greater disadvantage on the job market. Like many other TGNC young people, Chass left high school due to pervasive bullying.

> School, junior high school was ok, but then I went to high school and those were like some of the worst years of my life. It caused me to drop out of high school because I, it was, I couldn't go there. Um, as….as I should, because I was being teased. I was getting

> into fights with people and it seemed like, like the principals and all the other, everybody else that was there wasn't really too trans friendly or ok with it.

Similarly, Zariah shares her experiences of rejection in school:

> And, um, getting cut out of school because of what I wanted to be. And stuff like that, couldn't finish school because all the problems and the fights that I had to…rejection. That's the main part. Because so many people doesn't like it.

Increased identity-related victimization is related to decreased levels of self-esteem and higher rates of depression (Kosciw et al., 2012). The victimization that TNGC young people experiencing homelessness have faced is multi-faceted and should be considered in the development of housing programs. For example, obtaining a job may be nearly impossible for a young person who has experienced identity-related victimization in their homes, has experienced identity-related victimization in their schools, has experienced identity-related victimization on the streets, has inadequate time to properly prepare for their day, does not have access to appropriate grooming items or who cannot afford items crucial to their presentation, and who has inaccurate identification.

Identification and employment. One additional step that TGNC young people must undertake when seeking employment revolves around the acquisition of identification. Some of the study participants arrived at shelter programs with documents identifying them with their assigned sex at birth and their government names. Others arrived with no identification at all. For a TGNC young person to obtain employment, they must have proper identification that reflects their authentic gender. There are two indicators of gender identity on identification documents – the gender maker, which marks one as male or female (with the letter F or M), and the first name, which may or may not be associated with a particular gender. Without identification documents that match their gender identity and presentation, TGNC young people face harassment and discrimination when applying for jobs. Some young people would not seek employment without

these documents. They should not be required to subject themselves to the discrimination and victimization that results when showing identification with an incorrect gender marker and/or name. Therefore, TGNC young people may need additional time to complete this process.

The process for obtaining documents that accurately reflect a young person's name and gender can take more than the 30 days they are allotted in an emergency shelter program. If they are granted an additional 30 days in the program, they still must find a job in order to be eligible for a bed in a transitional living program. Even with appropriate identification, obtaining employment posed significant challenges for the study participants. Issues related to gender based discrimination and harassment were widespread in the lives of the study participants as they navigated institutions of education and employment. The well-intentioned policies often caused insurmountable barriers for TGNC young people.

TGNC Young People's Recommendations

TGNC young people shared not only their frustrations with shelter programs, but also offered insightful recommendations for improving services. When asked what she thought service providers should know about transgender young people experiencing homelessness, Alexandra spoke to the insufficient quantity of available beds for TGNC young people:

> And they need more shelters for, I think, especially when it comes to transgender woman and you know, trans men and stuff like that because we, you know, have it hard. We all struggle and they need more for trans women, you know…it's just not, not enough.

Jaguar suggested addressing one's basic needs first, and not presuming the existence of underlying pathology when first working with TGNC young people.

> Instead of jumping to a clinical, like decision, there should be like, some kind of questionnaire about basic needs being met and strategizing about how to meet those basic needs. Instead of saying, oh you might be bipolar. It's like no, I'm just really angry today, because I didn't eat. If you give me food, guess what? I'm gonna feel better. All the sudden you're not having a psychopharmacological discussion.

Chass and Nikiyah, who were living in transitional living programs at the time of their interviews, said that programs could be even more supportive by providing transportation to the residents. When asked how programs could be improved, Chass said:

> I would say a monthly metrocard. 'Cuz you need, I can't….I need to go away sometimes and I can't stay in 24/7. And sometimes, like working and trying to save money in this program is ridiculous because um, if we're trying to save money, we still have, and we still, technically we're still in the shelter, I think they should actually still continue to give us metrocards because it takes off a big strain and with, um, the money that we have to spend and we could put it away. Into our savings. 'Cuz it's 104 dollars for a monthly metrocard…plus other expenses like, dental and other stuff that you have to take care of.

Nikiyah shared the same sentiments as Chass:

> I think they should still give the metro cards, you know that's the only thing, 'cuz like they want us to save but that's just money, that's just this unnecessary money we have to come out our pocket, too, for metro cards and...you know?

Isa's recommendations centered around ways to make programs safer for TGNC young people. He offered the following for programs to consider:

> The main thing's the bathroom stuff, being sensitive to that type of stuff. Um, when you have clients fill out documents --- like this is really good, you have transgender male, transgender female, making sure that that's there. Um…and of course the rooming situations, I guess, like, who they with. You know, are the clients that you bringing in, you know, um...safe? Is it a safe environment in that realm because it can be very anxiety provoking, the bathroom situations and showers and shit like that. You know, if that's not taken care of properly.

Zariah draws attention to the needs of TGNC young people engaged in hormone therapy:

> I think they should know that um...transgender people are going through tough times, you know. The first…they taking hormones. So they have…hormones have side effects, you know what I'm saying? You're having mood swings. You're this and you're that. You're hot and you're cold…The hormones and then…transgender people need privacy, too.

Rebekah also discussed hormone treatment. She believes that programs need to understand the importance of access to hormones for young people who are in the process of transitioning. She explains:

> For transgender people whenever we first, um, decide to go through with this process or transition and if we're homeless, we'll do anything to do it and so a lot of the girls that I know, and myself included, we would go online and buy our hormones, or we would go on the streets and buy our hormones…if we could find something to do about that...you know, because every, you know everyone's talking about go to [name of health clinic], go to [name of health clinic], they can get you on hormones. Hormones there are 80 dollars. Some of the girls here, they don't haves jobs, so they can't afford 80 dollars. So, I mean, if…if we could find a way to make that easier, accessible, or, that…that would be really great.

Rebekah charges people in positions of power within program with the task of figuring out how to make hormone treatment more accessible. As she states, it can literally be a matter of life and death for some people. When hormones are obtained in an unregulated manner, they can be dangerous. Rebekah says:

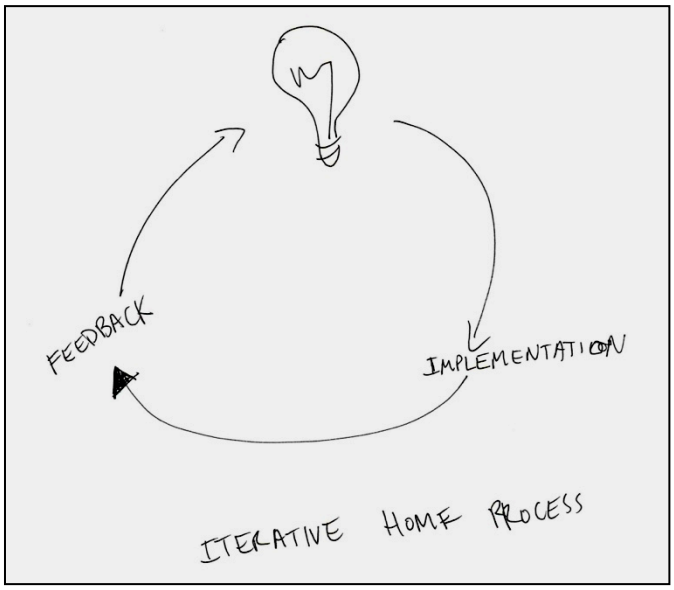
> It's not ok. It's, you don't knew the dosage, you know, you know they can say that it's 25 milligram, but it could really be a 60 milligram and you could take four of them and *die*. So you need to just wait. And I know...I hate saying the word wait...to girls like me because I'm like, I don't *want* to wait, I just want it to happen. But…you're going through this so that you can live your life. You don't wanna mess up and kill yourself before you can live your life, you know?

Jaguar expressed the need for the voice of consumers to be more present within organizations and to be more valued. He offers a customer service model as an option for the delivery of social services:

> There should be like, the best consultants and customer service people working at these day centers. So then you could have it be like, ok, this is what you wanted. This didn't work out logistically, ok, how else can we do this? Like, you don't call Zappos and be like, I got a shitty pair of shoes and they go, "keep 'em." They go, "send them back, we're gonna give you new ones. We're sorry that happened." That doesn't happen in social services. That just doesn't happen. They're like oh, well you fucked up.

He further communicated his ideas through the mapping activity, in which he produced the following model (figure 17):

Figure 17
Jaguar's Journey



He termed the suggested model an "iterative home process" and offered this explanation:

> It's a design process. You get an idea it's right here – you get feedback from whatever system you're working with, then you go ok, shit, then you reincorporate, do another idea, test it out, see what works and you get feedback.

Finding Home in a Program

Equally important as the recommendations the study participants made are the instances in which they described feeling at home within programs. Though the physical home of a shelter or housing program is not permanent, programs can provide a space in which TGNC young people are able to be at home in both gender and also in place. Acknowledging what is working for young people within programs can provide a starting point for programs wishing to create a more home-like environment. Of an emergency shelter program in which she stayed, Chass says:

> I felt at home, um, the first three weeks of [program B]. Because I actually was in [name of site] and um…we would all sit and watch movies together, have dinner together and

> um, just talk. And it was just like, really, I never had that experience, like being around gay, the whole LGBT thing. It was just really incredible for me. 'Cuz it was just like I had a second family.

Honesty described finding joy in her living situation, despite the physical conditions of the space.

> I just felt like home, like, even though it was a shelter and they had rats and it was...I just liked…I get joy just going up in there. Like, oh my god, I'm gonna meet this person, you know. I got joy.

TC recounts feeling at home during her transitional living program's Thanksgiving celebration. Part of the celebration included each person present sharing something they were thankful for. TC says:

> When they got to me I started getting all teary-eyed and um…the only thing that really came out my mouth was that this was the first time I felt at home and [program F] has been the first family I've had in a while and I want to say thank you for that and I'm thankful for being here 'cuz if I was with my family I'd feel like shit right now.

When discussing moments that felt like home within programs, young people talked about having their emotional needs met. They talked about moments of connection. In Honesty's earlier statement about finding joy within the program, she related that joy to the people she was going to meet, regardless of the unsanitary conditions of the physical place where she was staying. Below, Honesty describes not only having her basic needs met, but also experiencing a level of support from the staff that led her to feel cared for.

> They like, they ask us what we like, you know? Like what we like to eat, they always like, what we like to eat like, fruits, vegetables, chicken, hot pockets, you know? They feed us, you know what I'm sayin'. Whatever we want, they order it. Like, they cater to us, you know they look after us. They want us to do good. We have house meetings. They ask us like, what's going on. They care, you know, seem like they care about us, you know what I'm sayin'.

Honesty says that the staff "feeds us." Though she is talking about the food they are provided, implicit in her narrative is much more. She is describing the way that staff members

provide nourishment beyond the food they serve. The actions that Honesty describes the staff participating in include actively listening to the young people in the program, seeing and acknowledging them and their stated needs, and following through with what they say they will do.

CHAPTER NINE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this study, I have examined the experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people ages 18-25. Twenty-seven TGNC young people shared their life narratives as they relate to gender identity assertion and experiences of housing instability. Using data from semi-structured interviews and participant generated maps, this study has produced a more holistic conceptualization of the unique needs and experiences of TGNC young people experiencing homelessness. In this final chapter, I will summarize the study findings and the implications of these findings to social work practice. The chapter will conclude with a review of the study limitations and directions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Unstably housed TGNC young people face unique challenges that their LGB and cisgender counterparts do not encounter. Sanger (2008) communicates the necessity to recognize that TGNC people are not merely another sexual minority group that can be easily included within existing frameworks for LGB development. The same is true from a programmatic perspective - TGNC people are not merely another sexual minority group that can be easily included within existing programmatic models for LGB youth. TGNC young people may undergo a process of social and physical transition that their LGB counterparts do not. These processes may include changing their names and the pronouns that others previously used to reference them, replacing their identification documents so they are accurate reflections of their identities, and/or engaging in gender confirming medical interventions such as hormone treatment or surgeries. It is important to note that not all TGNC-identified people take part in

these processes. While some TGNC people identify fully as a gender different from their birth sex, some identify as cross gender or genderqueer, often presenting ambiguous gender expressions (Grossman et al., 2005). Such expressions provide the greatest threat to the binary gender system, to which our culture is so committed. This system either renders TGNC people invisible, or uniquely visible as violators of the gender system.

Two key concepts that emerged from the data are gender identity assertion and the notion of a gender home. The majority of participants in this study described an early awareness of their gender identities. Though their identities may have already been developed, they lacked the ability to assert these identities within the constraints of their home environments. Gender identity assertion refers to the participants' ability to lay claim to who they are in a gendered sense. Gender identity assertion was an aspect of finding one's gender home. I use the term gender home to describe a TGNC young person's understanding of who they are in a gendered sense, as well as their ability to safely articulate this knowing. The concept of a gender home takes contextual factors into account, rather than focusing solely on one's own internal process of identity acceptance and consolidation. This added dimension of finding comfort and safety in the act of aligning one's physical presentation with their authentic gender shifts the focus from the individual alone to the individual in relation to the environment.

Many of the unique challenges TGNC young people face are the direct result of violating the binary gender system that is paramount in our cisnormative society, and that does not support the creation of a gender home for TGNC people. Notably, more than one-third of the participants stated they would have committed suicide if they never left their physical homes. This finding illuminates the critical nature of gender identity assertion for many TGNC young people.

In addition to the challenges related to discrimination and harassment, TGNC young people faced systemic barriers within the programs that were meant to help facilitate their paths to independence. Because such programs are influenced by a cisnormative ideology, they were not designed with the specific needs of TGNC young people in mind. As such, institutional barriers exist that make the successful navigation of homeless youth programs difficult for TGNC young people. The notion of cisnormativity as producer and maintainer of TGNC people's oppression is a relatively new concept within the social science literature (Ansara & Hegerty, 2011; Bauer, et al., 2009; Pyne, 2011), and is confirmed by the data presented in this study. Specific challenges young people faced within shelter programs included: a lack of privacy, feeling misunderstood by staff and peers, feeling unsafe, limited time to prepare for their days, and the limited allowance of stay within shelter programs.

Consistent with the literature (Bolas, 2007; Burgess, 2009; Cochran, et al., 2002; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Grossman, A. & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman, et al, 2005; Morrow, 2004; Ray, 2006; Walls, Hancock & Wisneski, 2007), the young people described experiences of victimization and risk related to their housing instability. They also discussed experiences of victimization within their homes, often related to the disclosure or discovery of their TGNC identity, a notion also asserted in recent literature (Burgess, 2009; Davis, 2009; Koken, Bimbi & Parsons, 2009; Thaler, Bermudez & Sommer, 2009). However, the findings also reveal another less explored side to their experiences. Through their housing instability, TGNC young people were granted the freedom to articulate their gender identity in ways they had not previously been able. In essence, their loss of a physical home facilitated the discovery of a gender home as they were freed from needing to constantly manage their identities in order to receive familial acceptance.

The findings suggest a more nuanced understanding of the binary constructs of risk vs. safety or stability vs. instability. In addition to positive experiences related to identity assertion, participants also reported gaining knowledge, developing skills, access to transition related services, and connection to community. The study participants experienced these aspects of their housing instability as beneficial; these things were not available within their homes, or in some cases, within their towns of origin. Connection to a supportive community of like others has been noted as a protective factor for TGNC young people (Cooper, 2009; Maguen, et al., 2007; Stieglitz, 2010). Though no one chose to be homeless, and no one participant's experience of housing instability was without challenges, danger, or risk, participants made positive meaning of their experiences. They described a greater sense of self-efficacy and determination to overcome.

Significance & Contributions

This dissertation set out to examine the experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people. The examination of the experiences of this particular subgroup of the LGBT population shed light on the ways in which their needs and experiences are uniquely different than mainstream conceptualizations of both the LGBT youth experience and also of the homeless experience. It is hoped that this research contributes to our understanding of transgender identity assertion, youth homelessness, and barriers to the acquisition of adequate shelter/social services for TGNC young people.

Filling in existing gaps and identifying questions for future inquiry, this dissertation speaks to the commonly iterated need for a deeper understanding of unstably housed TGNC young people's lived experiences. There is a paucity of scholarship in relation to this specific population of young people. A growing body of research documents the experiences of

homeless LGBT youth, however little attention has been paid to the unique and specific needs of the TGNC young people within the broader LGBT category. Likewise, the phenomenon of TGNC children and youth is an emergent topic of interest in both the social work literature and also the mainstream media. A recent segment of Katie Couric's daytime television show (aired February 25, 2013) entitled "Raising A Transgender Child" demonstrates an increasing awareness of and curiosity about the experiences of this population. Furthermore, TGNC inclusivity on college campuses has also received attention. However, the experiences of the most marginalized segment of the young TGNC population – those for whom parenting guides and college campus ratings are not as urgent a need as safe shelter – is absent from the developing discourse. It is hoped that this dissertation contributes their voices to the conversation. The words and illustrations of the TGNC participants have shown how the experiences of unstably housed TGNC young people often run contrary to dominant discourses related to homelessness and also call for innovative interpretations of their presenting needs in both policy and practice contexts.

Rather than placing an emphasis on the detrimental effects of housing instability and further confirming the risks associated with homelessness, the results herein document other aspects the participants' experiences. The data demonstrate the potential for growth, identity assertion, and connection that was characteristic of the participants' experiences, suggesting a paradigm shift in the way that social workers, researchers, and policy makers conceptualize intervention strategies for TGNC young people who are unstably housed. Of equal significance is that this work offers a new perspective for shelter programs and policies to ensure their relevance to TGNC young people and to remove institutional barriers to their success. Examining programs through the lens of cisnormativity brings to light previously unrecognized

obstacles found within the very programs meant to provide a pathway out of homelessness for TGNC young people.

Framed first by an explanation of cisnormativity, the following discussion considers the unique contributions that this work adds to the social work literature by revisiting the key themes in this research, namely: *The Reciprocal Relationship of Gender Identity Assertion and Housing Status, The Other Side of Risk, Unique Needs of TGNC Young People, and The Pivotal Role of Programs.*

Cisnormativity

> *I feel like I have to prove something. I always feel like I have to prove something everywhere I go. I feel obligated. Like, everywhere I go in life I feel like there's an obligation that I have to have. I'm obligated – I have to be a certain way. - Berlin*

The findings are best understood through the lens of cisnormativity. Cisnormativity demands we pay attention to the ways in which services are designed for cisgender consumers. Cisnormative ideology dictates institutional policies and practices that oppress TGNC people, contributing to the erasure and negation of their experiences, and resulting in individual acts of transphobia (Bauer, et al., 2009; Pyne, 2011). The TGNC young people in this study experienced transphobia at the hands of their families, their peers, and individuals from whom they sought services. Although needs assessments and research studies have consistently documented the harassment and discrimination experiences of TGNC young people and their difficulty accessing services, an analysis of the production and maintenance of their marginalization is virtually absent (Bauer, et al., 2009). Herein lies the importance of recognizing cisnormativity and its significant role in the lives and experiences of TGNC people. Focusing only on individual acts of transphobic behavior incriminates individuals for acting in accordance with a larger societal structure, leaving that societal structure firmly in place without

questioning the inherent oppressive nature of its systems. It is imperative that social workers grasp this concept if they are to make real change for those experiencing harassment and discrimination based on gender identity or expression.

Review of Primary Themes

Reciprocal Relationships: Gender identity assertion and housing status. Gender identity assertion and housing instability were intimately related for the study participants. The majority of the young people interviewed reported their housing instability to be a direct result of their TGNC identity and/or expression. Even when not explicitly stated as the direct precipitant to their housing instability, such as being kicked out of their homes due to TGNC identity assertion, their narratives included instances of gender-based harassment and transphobia within their homes. Once out of their homes, their housing instability, in turn, enabled them to articulate their gender identity in ways that they had previously been unable. A commonly articulated outcome of losing their physical homes was the ability to feel more at home within their gender identities and expression. In other words, through the loss of a physical, literal home, study participants were able to find a gender home.

I use the term gender home to describe a TGNC young person's understanding of who they are in a gendered sense, as well as their ability to safely articulate this knowing. The concept of a gender home takes contextual factors into account, rather than focusing solely on one's own internal process of identity acceptance and consolidation. This added dimension of finding comfort and safety in the act of aligning one's physical presentation with their authentic gender shifts the focus from the individual alone to the individual in relation to the environment. Context is a significant variable to consider when examining the process of identity assertion among TGNC young people. For the participants in this study, consideration of their immediate

environmental contexts was necessary for their survival. They avoided settings they perceived to be unwelcoming, or they altered their presentations to ensure their safety when required to inhabit hostile environments.

The limited research concerning TGNC young people emphasizes the critical nature of their authentic gender expression (Mallon & DeCrescenzo, 2006). In fact, it has been asserted that young people will not find peace in any part of their lives if they are not able to find a balance between their social interactions and their gender identities (Grossman, et al., 2005). In order to find this balance, TGNC young people must be able to express their gender identities, which, in some cases, means being free to "re-make" themselves both socially and physically (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell & Hubbard, 2005). The process of re-making for the participants was both informed by and complicated by their housing status. In describing his experiences after leaving home, Nino said:

> I'm, I'm open to everything. I'm...like, um…I'm certain about myself and stuff. I'm cool, I'm peaceful. Chillin'. That's the peace sign.

It was after Nino left home and discovered other people like him that he gained access to transition related information and services. As a result, he expressed certainty in his identity. One facet of the pathway to the articulation of identity was the presence of a clean slate. A clean slate facilitated the re-making process previously mentioned. It allowed young people to actively engage in building a life void of the judgment of people who knew them by their past identities.

When examined in its entirety, the data negates a binary construction of risk versus safety or stability versus instability. What is revealed is a more nuanced construct in which housing instability, often considered "unsafe," actually provided TGNC young people with stability in their identities. Conversely, prior to their housing instability, they were often at risk in their homes as a result of their identities. A young person's pathway from home to the street was also

a pathway towards the articulation of a complex identity that could not previously be expressed and was not previously supported. This finding suggests closer examination of the concept of gender management (Davis, 2009) in better understanding the experiences of identity assertion when TGNC young people are no longer in their homes of origin. The freedom to articulate their identity freely could be the result of the diminished need to manage their gender identity. This diminished need for gender management was the result of their housing instability.

The Other Side of Risk. The findings prohibit conceptualizations of housing instability among TGNC young people as solely a mechanism for risk and violence. This one-dimensional understanding undermines the resourcefulness and growth of young people who actively search for a world in which they can be themselves. It is important not to reduce young people to one aspect of their experiences; their narratives reveal much more than their often recognized "at risk" status. While the participants did share experiences that supported the dominant discourse related to homelessness, including experiences of violence, risk, and victimization, they also described situations that they experienced as beneficial and growth-producing. Their narratives were populated with much more than risk, and they talked about things other than risk with more frequency. They also described instances of affirmation, connection, and growth and referenced the development of skills and feelings of self-sufficiency.

Connection to Community. The data support the assertion that belonging to a transgender community – that is, knowing and involving oneself with a support network of similar others – is a supportive and protective factor for many TGNC young people (Cooper, 2009; Maguen, Shipherd, Harris & Welch, 2007; Stieglitz, 2010). Finding other people who shared their identity propelled participants to a deeper understanding of themselves. Through their connections with other TNGC young people, the participants gained access to knowledge of which they had

previously been unaware. The kind of information ranged from knowledge related to gender transitioning, to available supports and services, to language, to awareness of community and transgender history. The new knowledge was transmitted via transactions with TGNC identified individuals and LGBTQ social service programs.

Exposure to other TGNC people expanded the possibilities that the participants could imagine for themselves. Because TGNC people are not routinely visible in mainstream media, and because of the negative stereotypes produced by our society, TGNC young people are left without visual representations of who they themselves are, or who they could potentially come to be. Before being exposed the broader TGNC community, Rebekah imagined her only options in life were to become a showgirl or to work in the sex industry. Similarly, Berlin believes that without the exposure to other transgender women she would've "wholesaled the hotel." Their shifts in perspective were the result of meeting individual people like them and also their involvement in identity affirming programs. They were accepted and validated within the communities they found and the connections they formed during their periods of housing instability.

The Pivotal Role of Programs.

> *It was just like, oh shit! That's it. Like that was, it was like, like a puzzle…like you found a missing piece of a puzzle and it fit perfectly. It was just like, mmmm, yeah. Damnit, this is where I gotta go. – Isa*

Programs played a central role in participants' lives following their departure from home. An analysis of programmatic impacts upon the experiences of TGNC young people is complex. On the one hand, programs provided life saving services and facilitated multiple beneficial experiences. At the same time, when viewed through the lens of cisnormativity, it is clear that programs are organized around the cisgender service user. The benefits of programs will be

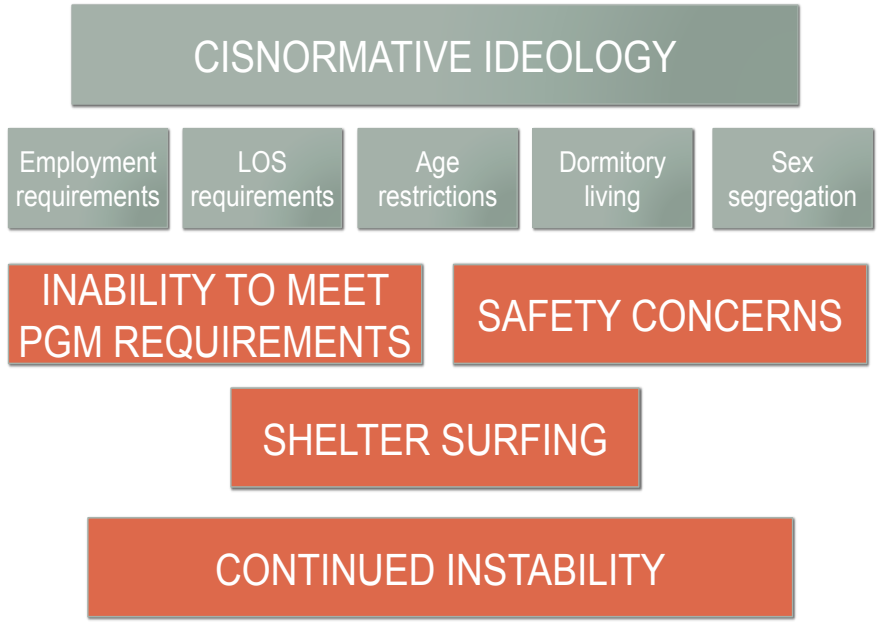
reviewed, followed by a critique of their cisnormative structure and an explication of the ways in which this structure adversely affects TGNC young people.

Connection to identity affirming programs was crucial to the survival of the young people in this study. An identity-affirming program can be understood as one that is supportive of identity exploration and assertion. Such a program does not pathologize transgender or gender non-conforming identities or expressions. Within this type of program, affirming the identities of program members is an integrated part of the program structure, from the language used for speaking and documentation, to the types of services offered. All of the study participants experienced safety and connection within the context of a homeless youth program at some point during their homeless experiences. The role of programs cannot be overstated; programs provided TNGC young people with necessities such as food and supportive services, and in some instances, shelter. Programs offered a temporary home base from which the TGNC young people in this study could learn about, explore, and/or express their authentic gender. Identity affirming programs also acted in the vital roles of information provider and facilitator of community. Through programs, Nino was able to gain transition related information that enabled him to begin taking testosterone. Programs facilitated participants' connection to legal services and medical services that assisted in their social and medical transitions. TC shared a story about learning terminology through a support group offered at her shelter, Rebekah and Berlin credit a transgender support group with deepening their understanding of transgender history and advocacy.

At the same time that they were helpful in meeting basic needs and facilitating the transmission of knowledge, shelter programs did not offer a sense of residential stability for TGNC young people. As a result, one study participant (Miranda) chose not to further explore

and assert her gender identity until her living situation was more stable. The lack of residential stability can be attributed to institutional barriers resulting from cisnormative program structures. The cisnormative program structures derive in part from the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), which dictates length of stay restrictions, age limitations, and program requirements. These program structures may be challenging for all unstably housed young people; however the barriers they erect for TGNC young people were often insurmountable. Figure 18 details the challenges for TGNC young people within shelter programs, when understood through the lens of cisnormativity. Aspects of programs that created barriers include employment requirements, length of stay requirements, age restrictions, dormitory living, and sex segregation. As a result of these barriers, TGNC young people were often unable to meet program requirements and/or expressed concerns for their safety (resulting from dormitory living and sex segregation). The programs produced what I refer to as "shelter surfing," when TGNC young people moved between short term shelter programs, leading to continued housing instability.

Figure 18
Programmatic Barriers Through the Lens of Cisnormativity



For TGNC young people under the age of 21, stays within shelter programs are limited to 30 days with a possible additional 30-day extension, pending approval from the governing body of the program's contract. This is an insufficient amount of time for a young person to position themselves for independent living. Many young people arrive at these programs with little more than themselves. Among the tasks that a TGNC young person might need to complete once arriving at a shelter are obtaining proper identification (social security card, birth certificate, state ID card) and obtaining clothing and other items crucial for their gender presentation. For instance, Jaime's father destroyed all of her clothing, make up, and wigs before kicking her out of the house. When she arrived at the shelter, she had only the clothes on her back and no financial resources. Zariah was robbed while sleeping on the subway, and had no identification and no money. The tasks associated with obtaining identification, clothing, and other transition related supplies require time and financial resources, and must be completed before a young person begins the process of seeking employment, which will enable them to meet the requirements for entry into a longer-term transitional living program.

For a TGNC young person to legally change their name in New York City, they must go through a multi-step process that involves both time and money. A certified copy of their birth certificate is required. This costs approximately $15 and can take anywhere from 2 days to 4 weeks to receive, depending on the state from which it is requested and whether or not they are able to expedite the request. Expedited requests require an additional fee. The young person must also provide an address where the birth certificate will be mailed. The residential instability that characterized the experiences of many TGNC young people reduces the likelihood that they will receive their documents in the mail. Once they've received a certified copy of their birth certificate, they must file their paperwork with the court and await a hearing

date. The fee for the hearing is $65. When the name change is granted, it must be published. One of the most inexpensive papers in which to publish a name change in NYC is $35. In order to change the gender marker on a New York state identification card, a young person must present a written statement from a doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist on letterhead stating that the gender marker they are requesting is their "main gender" (http://transequality.org/Resources/DL/DL_policies.htm). The fee for this service is $10.

The restrictions on length of stay, coupled with the difficulties of meeting the requirements of longer term housing programs, resulted in shelter surfing for TGNC young people in this study. They moved from 30-day bed to 30-day bed to 30-day bed, with no continuity of services or consistency in living arrangements. If a program was full, their names were put on waiting lists and they were forced to find other places to stay until a bed opened up. With the uncertainty of where they would go after their 30 days, in addition to a discontinuity of care, young people were challenged to set and reach goals that would enable them to progress into longer terms housing programs and eventually out of the system altogether. Interventions need to be devised that support the continued growth of these young people and facilitate their independence, rather than shuffling them from short term stay to short term stay, in effect shelter surfing.

The majority of the young people in this study were 21 years of age and older. Though recognized by researchers and practitioners, the category of emerging adulthood is not accounted for in public policy geared towards unstably housed young people. As such, the majority of study participants lacked adequate access to shelter beds, the majority of which are reserved for young people under the age of 21. Considered alone, this regulation does not seem to specifically limit the ability for TGNC young people to succeed. When contemplated in relation

to additional road blocks TGNC young people face and the additional time they may require to accomplish routine tasks, such as obtaining proper identification or acquiring transition related products and services, the need for additional time beyond their 21st birthday becomes more clear.

Unique needs of TGNC young people. The research findings establish the need to consider unstably housed TGNC young people as a distinct population with unique needs that differentiate them from their LGB counterparts. Some parallel processes do occur, such as coming out, negotiating familial conflict, and navigating institutions that may not welcome LGB identities. However, the findings herein reflect differential needs of TGNC young people. First and foremost, TGNC people must contend with a society that continues to be intolerant of gender diversity, harshly punishing those who transgress gender norms. The data support the work of Shelley (2009) and Ryan (2003), which claims the more gender nonconforming a young person is, the more likely they are to be victimized. TGNC young people must navigate a cisnormative world that has no place for them. From gendered bathrooms and sex-segregated facilities to exclusionary paperwork, systems are not designed to accommodate anyone whose identity varies from the dyadic categories of male and female. Transphobia is a pervasive part of the participants' lives, shaping their interactions with systems, communities, and individuals such that discrimination and rejection become the norm.

Another unique need of TGNC young people is that, unlike their LGB counterparts, TGNC young people may undergo social and/or physical transitions so that they may experience their physical and social selves in alignment with their authentic gender. Berlin shared:

> I got the hormones and all that type of stuff and that was difficult because I was dealing with homelessness and then I had to, like, learn myself all over again and then dealing with society, being trans and…that was just a whole big, that was hard. I got through it but that was *so* hard. Like, the actual steps of transitioning and what comes a long with

that, period.

TGNC young people in this study stated their need for privacy and adequate time to prepare for their days. They also described stressors related to being "found out" as they navigated the experiences of daily living. Without adequate privacy and time, the young people were unable to complete their grooming rituals and consequently, were forced to encounter a critical world with less confidence. As a result, they expressed a need for places of respite. They desired affirming spaces in which they were able to simply be, without guarding against judgment and discrimination. Without homes of their own, they hoped to find spaces such as this within programmatic contexts.

Conclusions

A primary tenet of social work practice is meeting the client where they are. When meeting unstably housed TGNC young people *where they are*, we cannot neglect that one facet of where they are is within a cisnormative society; a society that continues to condemn gender nonconformity and that is not designed to facilitate their pathways to success. This position, coupled with a lack of resources for homeless youth, places unstably housed TGNC young people in a precarious state of existence. The context of their worlds is one in which they are often forced to choose between the basic need of housing (physical home) and the basic need of identity assertion (gender home). Social workers practicing within programs for unstably housed young people need to recognize that TGNC identity assertion is crucial to the well-being of unstably housed TGNC young people, and must support this process. It is imperative that social service providers understand the impact of macro level systems on the programs in which they work, and the ways in which those programs may play a role in the maintenance of the marginalization of TGNC young people. Cisnormativity provides a lens through which we may

better understand the barriers TGNC young people face within programs and within society at large.

Limitations

Inherent in a phenomenological research study involving a small group of participants are certain limitations. Namely, the results reported herein cannot be generalized to all TGNC young people, or to all young people experiencing homelessness. Situated in a major metropolitan area, the study participants were involved in programs and systems that cannot be generalized to the programs and systems found in other cities, whether urban centers or rural locales. While this study does not provide generalizable findings, it does provide useful insights for policy and practice with TGNC young people experiencing homelessness.

This study is also limited by the researcher's subjectivity. Though measures were taken to mediate biases, the researcher's experiences of housing instability and identity assertion constrained the data collection and analysis. The researcher's positionality as a member of the TGNC community who was ejected from her own home should not be overlooked. Furthermore, the researcher's experiences working within housing programs for unstably housed LGBTQ young people further complicated the relationship to the process. Though often filled with the desire to facilitate connections and provide knowledge and resources, the researcher directed the participants to appropriate resources when they asked for assistance.

The researcher's connections to TGNC communities in the New York metropolitan area were utilized and contributed to the success of this project. However, these connections could also be a limitation. TGNC young people who are not connected to the programs and services within which the study was promoted may not have been aware that they could participate, limiting the study's potential reach. Though fliers were posted and listserves were utilized to

advertise the study, participants may not have felt comfortable contacting someone with whom they had no connection. Conversely, some young people may not have felt comfortable participating in the project with a researcher who is well connected to their community due to confidentiality concerns.

An additional limitation is the frequent gatekeeping that TGNC young people must contend with in order to acquire the services they desire. TGNC young people frequently have to prove that they are who they say they are, and many have learned the script that will allow the successful navigation of social service systems. As a former direct service provider and administrator in an agency that provides direct services to LGBTQ young people experiencing homelessness, participants may have felt they needed to convey a particular set of experiences. It is important to recognize the limitations to this study, however these limitations do not diminish the insights generated by this dissertation. The research herein gives voice to a population whose stories are not often heard, and when heard, are rarely conveyed through a non-pathological lens.

Future Directions

This research adds to the social work literature in the areas of housing instability, TGNC identity expression, and cisnormativity. Future research can build off of this work and should endeavor to address some of the limitations stated herein. For instance, obtaining a sample that is more geographically diverse would yield a better understanding of the experiences of TGNC young people outside of a major metropolitan area.

In addition, obtaining a sample of TGNC young people who have not been actively engaged in the youth shelter system would lend insight into the needs and experiences of a population that is perhaps more marginal than those represented in the current study. It may be

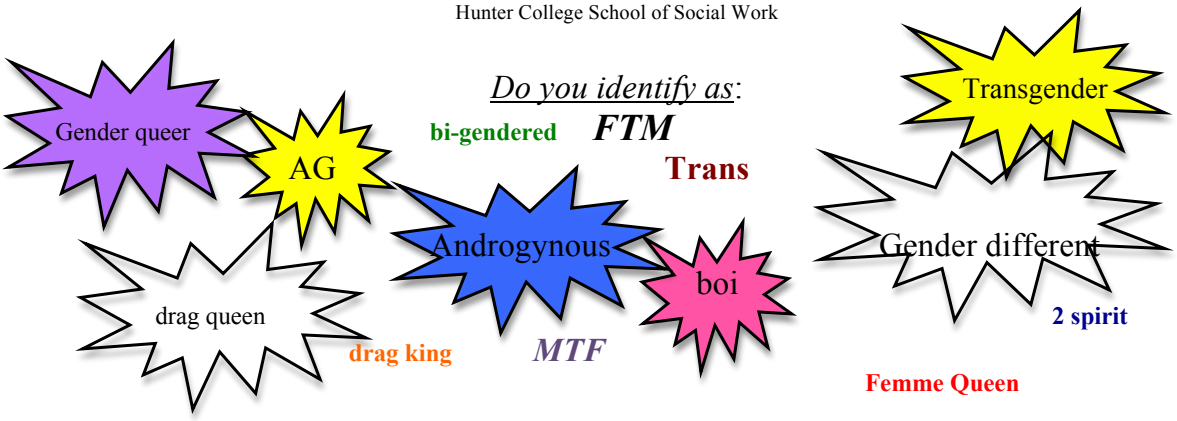
useful to better understand what leads some TNGC young people to access shelter services while others do not.

Further studies are needed that identify what *is* working for unstably housed TGNC young people. From this perspective, social services providers can build upon the positive experiences described by the young people. In turn, interventions could be designed that facilitate similar positive occurrences. It would be beneficial to know if the positive experiences TGNC young people experience out of home could be could be facilitated prior to their departures in an effort to mitigate their housing instability.

It is my hope that future researchers concerned with the lives and wellbeing of TGNC people utilize the lens of cisnormativity in their investigations. This will allow for continued critical discourse about large level processes that reinforce gender identity-based oppression and discrimination. It is from this place that social change may occur.

APPENDIX ONE: RECRUITMENT FLYER

CUNY Graduate Center &
Hunter College School of Social Work



Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study

There's no place like home?

The experiences of unstably housed transgender and gender non-conforming youth/young adults

My name is Jama Shelton and I am a student in the Social Welfare Ph.D. program at the CUNY Graduate Center. My dissertation will be based on this research study. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people ages 18-25 who have experienced housing instability/homelessness. I want to hear about your life, in your own words, in order to contribute information to programs and policies that are meant to

You qualify for this research study if you:

- Identify as transgender/gender non-conforming/genderqueer/androgynous/drag queen/drag king/AG/boi/bigender/2 spirit/gender different, and/or _____.
- Are between the ages of 18 – 25
- Have had an experience of housing instability or homelessness in the past 24 months
- Currently live in stable permanent or semi-permanent housing (including housing programs/long term shelters)
- Have been living in stable permanent or semi-permanent housing for a minimum of 3 months and for no longer than 24 months

Your participation could help make programs and policies more aware and more effective. Participation includes participating in an interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. A round trip metrocard and a $10 gift card to a restaurant will be provided as compensation for your participation.

To learn more about this research, contact Jama Shelton at jshelton@hunter.cuny.edu.

Jama Shelton
jshelton@hunter.cu

APPENDIX TWO: INFORMED CONSENT

CUNY Graduate Center &
Hunter College School of Social Work

CONSENT FORM

Purpose of Research
My name is Jama Shelton and I am a student in the Social Welfare Ph.D. Program at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY), and Principal Investigator of this project, entitled "There's no place like home? The experiences of unstably housed transgender and gender non-conforming youth." This is a research study of transgender and gender non-conforming (GNC) people ages 18-25 who have experienced housing instability/homelessness. Much of the research and service provision meant to address the needs of and provide support to TGNC youth does so within the context of the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth population, rather than differentiating the needs of TGNC young people from their LGB counterparts. This study is expected to provide information that could help make programs and policies more effective.

Procedure
I would like permission to interview you about your experiences, and would like you to fill out a brief questionnaire. The interview will consist of approximately 10 questions and 3 pen and paper activities. This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. You will be given a round-trip metrocard and a $10 gift card to a restaurant for your participation.

Risks/Benefits
The risks from participating in this study are no more than those encountered in everyday life. While there is no direct benefit you will experience from your participation, the information you provide will contribute to the limited knowledge that policymakers and programs have about the needs of TGNC youth, and it has the potential to impact future policies and programs.

Confidentiality
With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded. The recordings will only be heard by me and my advisors. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access.

You will be assigned an identification number before the interview takes place and all of the information that is collected from you will be labeled with this number. I will retain a list of names and identification numbers in a separate and secure location in the event that I need to verify information that you have provided.

I may publish results of the study, but names of people, or any identifying characteristics, will not be used in any of the publications. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with information about how to contact you and I will send you a copy in the future.

Withdrawal of participation
At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or end this interview.

Contact information
If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at jshelton@hunter.cuny.edu, or my advisor at sdodd@hunter.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7525, kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.

Thank you for your participation in the study. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

_____ _____
Participant's signature Date

_____ _____
Investigator's signature Date

Consent for audio recording

With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded. The recordings will only be heard by me and my advisors. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access.

You will be assigned an identification number before the interview takes place and all of the information that is collected from you will be labeled with this number. I will retain a list of names and identification numbers in a separate and secure location in the event that I need to verify information that you have provided.

Please sign below if you consent to the audio recording of the interview.

_____ _____
Participant's signature Date

_____ _____
Investigator's signature Date

APPENDIX THREE: DEMOGRPAHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Pseudonym # _____

1. What is your age?

2. How do you identify your gender? *(check all that apply).*

- ☐ Gender queer
- ☐ Transgender male
- ☐ Transgender female
- ☐ Intersex
- ☐ Androgynous
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Not listed (please specify: _____)

3. What was your assigned gender at birth?

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Intersex

4. How do you identify your sexual orientation?

- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Queer
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Heterosexual
- ☐ Not listed (please specify: _____)

5. How do you identify your race? *(check all that apply).*

- ☐ Black
- ☐ African American
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ White
- ☐ Mixed race
- ☐ Not listed (please specify: _____)

6. Are there any other identifiers that you would like to share?

_____
_____

7. Where are you from? *(city, state, country)*

_____
_____

8. Where do you currently live?

_____
_____

9. Where is your home?

_____
_____

APPENDIX FOUR: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Questions for study:

I. What is the meaning and significance of gender identity and expression for unstably housed TGNC young people?

II. What is the interplay between gender identity and the experience of housing instability among TGNC young people?

I. What role does the often necessary shift from stability to instability (with regards to housing) play in the reconfiguration of identity among TGNC young people?

Hi, my name is _____. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.

I am studying the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young people who have experienced housing instability or homelessness. I want to learn more about some of your experiences and about what you think about those experiences. I have a few questions to ask and I have also brought some art supplies. Don't worry – you don't need to be an artist to participate in the activities! There is no right or wrong way to participate or to answer these questions. I am just really interested in learning about what your life has been like and how you have felt about it.

1. To begin, can you tell me about the different ways you identify?
    - What words do you use to identify yourself?
    - Your gender? (to describe your gender identity)?
    - Any other identifiers you'd like to share with me?

2. What is it like to be (use their identifier relating to gender) specifically?
    - How has that affected your life up to this point?
    - How has that affected your relationships?
    - The activities of your daily living?

3. Describe the first time you realized that you were (use their identifier relating to gender).
    - How did it make you feel, to have this realization?
    - Did it change over time, how you thought of yourself?

4. Tell me about a time that you really felt like (use their identifier related to gender).

5. Now I'd like to talk a little bit about your experiences with housing instability. What does that phrase ("housing instability") mean to you?

6. Tell me about a time when you felt homeless.
    - What were your relationships like at that time (friends, lovers, family)?
    - How did you feel about yourself during this time?
    - Where did you spend your time during the day?

- Where did you spend your time at night?
- Did you move around a lot?
- What was it like to move around a lot?

7. Describe the events leading up to you being in a situation without housing.
    - In what ways, if any, was your gender identity or presentation a part of this decision?
    - Who was involved in making the decision that you needed to leave home?
    - If you could change what happened that made you need to leave, what would you do differently now?

8. Where do you live now?
    - Tell me about what it's like to live there.
    - How has the way you thought about yourself changed from before you left home until now?

9. Tell me about a time when you felt really at home.
    - What about this time felt like home?
    - What does home mean to you?

10. Using the materials provided, create a map of your journey from the time you left home to where you are today in life. You can include people, places, successes, challenges you have come across along the way – whatever stands out to you the most when you think about how you got here, to be the person that you are. You can use different colors to represent different feelings, or you can use shapes, arrows and lines, or draw pictures – it is entirely up to you.

11. Please describe the map to me.
    - *Possible probes:*
    - When you consider all of the experiences we've discussed about you being (use their identifiers) and also about your housing instability, tell me how you think these parts of yourself/your experiences are related?

    - How do you imagine your story might be different had you not left home?

APPENDIX FIVE: REFERRAL LIST

Programs and Services for NYC's LGBT Community

The LGBT Community Center
208 West 13th Street
New York, NY
212.620.7310
www.gaycenter.org
Programs include the Gender Identity Project, Youth Enrichment Services, Center Care Recovery, among others.

Identity House
39 W. 14th St, Suite 205 (btwn. 5th & 6th Ave.)
NY, NY 10011
(212) 243-8181
www.identityhouse.org
Identity House provides peer counseling and therapy for lesbian, gay, bisexual and all other adults who are struggling with issues of sexuality, alienation, relationships and family. They also sponsor groups, workshops, and other events.

Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
356 West 18th Street (btwn. 8th & 9th Ave.)
NY, NY 10011 (212) 271-7200
www.callen-lorde.org
General medical, dental, and mental health services; transgender and youth programs; STI and HIV Testing.

NYC Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project
240 West 35th Street, Suite 200
(btwn. 7th & 8th Ave)
NY, NY 10001 (212) 714-1184
HOTLINE (24 hour) (212) 714-1141
Fax: (212) 714-2627
www.avp.org
AVP serves lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and HIV-positive victims of violence and others affected by violence, by providing therapeutic counseling and advocacy within the criminal justice system and victim support agencies, information for self-help, referrals to practicing professionals, and other sources of assistance. Services are free and confidential.

ACQC
97-45 Queens Blvd. Suite 1220
718-896-2500
www.acqc.homestead.com
Weekly support group for LGBT youth at AIDS Center of Queens County

Ali Forney Day Center
527 West 22nd Street (between 10th & 11th Avenues) New York, NY 10011
212-206-0574 for an appointment
www.aliforneycenter.org
Offers recreational activities, support groups, counseling, and medical services for LGBT homeless youth. Monday - Friday 10am-6pm

Alianza Dominicana
2410 Amsterdam Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10033
212-740-1960
www.alianzadom.org
Support groups, peer education and safer sex workshops for LGBT youth. Bilingual

Audre Lorde Project
85 South Oxford Street, Brooklyn 11217
718-596-0342
www.alp.org
Programs for LGBT people of color, plus summer youth program.

Equasian
400 Broadway New York, NY 10013
212-334-7940
Carla Catuncan (ext. 222)
www.apicha.org
Group and activities for LGBT Asian Youth, at APICHA

Fierce!
147 w. 24th St. 6th Floor M-F 4-8pm
646-336-6789
www.fiercenyc.org
Community organizing and advocacy for LGBT youth of color

Generation Q
30-74 Steinway Street, 2nd Floor, Astoria, NY 11103
718-204-5955
www.myspace.com/generationqrules
Activities for LGBT youth under 21 in Queens

Community Health Action of Staten Island
56 Bay Street, 6th Floor, Staten Island, NY 10301
718-981-3366
www.sihealthaction.org
Safe space for LGBT youth on Staten Island

Yo! GMAD
(Young Gay Men of African Descent)
103 East 125th Street, NYC 10035
212-828-1697
www.gmad.org
Weekly discussion groups for young men of color, HIV education and testing

Hetrick-Martin Institute
2 Astor Place (near Broadway and 8th St.) Ages 21 and under.
(212) 674-2400
www.hmi.org
Social service agency for LGBT youth and home of the Harvey Milk High School. Call to make an appt for counseling or drop by the center from 3 – 6 pm, Mon – Fri. Free and confidential, bring ID if possible.

The Door
555 Broome Street (between Avenue of the Americas and Varick St.).
(212) 941-9090 call for an orientation
www.door.org
Social service agency for all youth, offering a support group for LGBT youth as well as: health care services, recreation, referrals, and GED. You have to become a member first.
Call for appointment.

HOTLINES
Trevor Helpline
For gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning youth
1- 800-850-8078 (24 hrs)

NYC Youthline
1-800-246-4646

Suicide Prevention Hotline
212-673-3000
Referrals

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