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THE IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON IDENTITY IN LGBTQ+ YOUTH OF COLOR

by

ISABEAU TYNDALL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors Undergraduate Thesis program in Sociology
in the College of Sciences
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Thesis Chair: Amy Donley, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of homelessness on the identity formation of LGBTQ+ youth of color. This group of people is overrepresented within the unhoused community, and unfortunately, under-studied, especially within the qualitative data sector. A literature review found primary themes of identity formation, intersectionality, and discrimination and stigma. In addition to exploring the impact of housing instability on the identity formation of LGBTQ+ youth of color, this study emphasizes the significance of intersectionality in understanding their experiences. By noting the overlap of multiple marginalized identities such as race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, this research illuminates the unique challenges faced by individuals at the nexus of these identities. Based on a survey of the existing literature, an exploratory interview, and a quantitative data analysis, this study aims to shed light on the experiences of those who have struggled with housing instability, and who also identify as LGBTQ+ people of color within the age range of 18-25. Findings advocate for comprehensive support systems to empower and uplift these marginalized individuals, addressing systemic disparities and promoting social equity.

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INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is a complex and persistent social issue that affects individuals and communities across the United States. It is a multifaceted problem that may be accompanied by physical, mental, and social challenges and often impacts our most vulnerable populations the hardest. According to the most comprehensive study of unhoused adolescent and young adults that spans a year, roughly 4.2 million youth under the age of 25 in the United States experience housing instability of some form (Morton, 2019). On any night in 2022, over 580,000 Americans suffered from being unhoused, 30,000 of whom were unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age (Annual Homeless Assessment Report, 2023). The psychological distress of homelessness for youth is significant as it can negatively affect their social and emotional development, creating a ripple effect into adulthood.

Among our most vulnerable populations are LGBTQ+ youth of color, resoundingly overrepresented in the unhoused population. Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and more) have a 120% higher risk of becoming unhoused as compared to their cisgender (when one's gender identity is the same as what was assigned at birth) and heterosexual counterparts (Morton et al., 2018; Morton, 2019). The reasons for the above-average number of unhoused LGBTQ+ individuals are complex, with the most common reason being various forms of familial rejection or familial issues inflamed by the disclosure of their identity (Fraser et al., 2019).

Similarly, people of color (non-White individuals) are heavily overrepresented within the unhoused community. This overrepresentation is attributed to various factors, such as the social

exclusion of wealth and discrimination within health care, education, employment, housing, and the criminal justice system (Crenshaw, 1991; Ecker, 2016; Olivet et al., 2021). Redlining, as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “to withhold home-loan funds or insurance from neighborhoods considered poor economic risks”, often in a discriminatory manner. Practices such as redlining created a significant housing disparity for many ethnic/racial minoritized groups concerning home ownership and, as a result, generational wealth (Olivet et al., 2021).

Thus far, a small but growing body of research exists on the impact of homelessness on LGBTQ+ youth; however, up to this point, little qualitative research has been conducted surrounding the experiences of unhoused LGBTQ+ youth who also possess other minoritized identities, such as youth of color (Ecker, 2016). For LGBTQ+ youth of color, being unhoused may exacerbate the challenges and marginalization they already face due to the intersectionality of their triple-minoritized status. The central aim of this thesis is to delve into the intricate relationship between being unhoused and identity within the context of LGBTQ+ youth of color, shedding light on the unique challenges they encounter and the potential implications for their well-being. By examining existing literature and conducting exploratory interviews, this study contributes to the growing knowledge surrounding this critical issue and advocates for comprehensive support systems to empower and uplift these individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity

Homelessness can have a significant impact on the development and maintenance of identity. For unhoused individuals, central social and psychological needs may be challenged, such as self-confidence, belonging, and emotional support (Parker, 2012). This can be particularly true for youth who are members of racial minoritized groups or identify as LGBTQ+. These youths often face additional barriers to accessing resources and support, which can have devastating effects on overall well-being and a positive sense of self (Tunåker, 2015). For LGBTQ+ youth, exploring and developing their sexual and gender identities is inextricably tied to settling into a “home” or a home-like environment (Matthews et al., 2019).

It is important to note the language used when describing individuals who are facing housing instability. Terms such as “unhoused”, “homeless”, and “housing instability” are often used interchangeably. The experience is fluid and varied for each person, so using a range of vocabulary can help to capture the full range of challenges faced by this community. For the purpose of this research, the term “unhoused” will be most commonly used, in order to maintain a person focused perspective.

Parental support or rejection is the determining factor in whether or not LGBTQ+ youth will have a positive self-view of their queer identity (Tunåker, 2015). A “queer identity” is any sexual or gender identity other than heterosexual and cisgender. How parents talk about other LGBTQ+ individuals and how they react to their child coming out is vital for the healthy development of their child’s sexual and gender identity. If these interactions go wrong, the

results can be traumatizing and often devastating (Tunåker, 2015). Similarly, the results may also be indirect, resulting in arguments seemingly unrelated to sexual or gender identity but are in actuality tied to the oppressive environment in which they live. LGBTQ+ youth may have to choose between suppressing an essential part of their identity and related development or risk living in an unsupportive, unwelcome, or unsafe place. Coming out can thus snowball into couch surfing, or even sleeping on the streets, all while contending with the loss of their family, stability, childhood, and sense of belonging (Tunåker, 2015).

Within media, news, and even research, those experiencing housing instability can be grouped into various stereotyped groups based on their “homeless identity,” treating it as *the* defining characteristic (McCarthy, 2013). This, however, can be destructive when attempting to understand the experiences of people experiencing homelessness, especially those with multiple marginalized identities. It is thus important to remember that identity is fluid and layered, so an intersectional viewpoint is vital for making significant progress on this topic (McCarthy, 2013).

Intersectionality

To address the experiences of identity formation for individuals with multiple and varied marginalized identities more thoroughly, it is relevant to discuss the sociological framework of intersectionality. First developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality asserts that individuals experience varied and numerous versions of oppression due to multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1991). These identities may compound to create more significant and more complex adverse health and social outcomes. As opposed to individuals with singular disadvantaged identities (e.g. unhoused, white men), those with more than one oppressed identity (e.g.

unhoused LGBTQ+ youth of color) would experience more complex oppression. The concept of intersectionality encourages research to focus on individuals as a whole rather than the sum of their parts concerning their experiences in society and within systems of oppression. It is more relevant to address and dismantle the systems in place to better the status of being unhoused rather than place the responsibility on the people experiencing housing instability, who are, essentially, fighting a disproportionately uphill battle (Otiniano et al., 2023).

For LGBTQ+ youth with ethnic and racial minoritized identities, the intersection of these identities may heighten their chances of having adverse experiences due to a greater likelihood of suffering from poverty, discrimination, and victimization. LGBTQ+ people of color have greater odds of suffering from hardship and emotional distress, which housing instability can exacerbate. The lens of intersectionality examines how discriminatory social determinants such as racism, classism, transphobia, and queerphobia can compound to create systems of oppression that uniquely affect people with multiple interconnected marginalized identities (Fraser et al., 2019; Green & Subramanian, 2017).

This concept of intersectionality is reflected in data as well. In 2017, the most comprehensive study of youth housing instability was conducted over the course of a year, known as the Voices of Youth Count (VoYC) initiative. Based on the exhaustive data, roughly 3.5 million young adults aged 18-25 and 700,000 (conservatively estimated) adolescents aged 13-17 experience some form of housing instability each year. This indicates that there is an increased vulnerability present as adolescents at risk transition into young adulthood. This study's umbrella of housing instability included couch surfing, sleeping in cars, and literal homelessness on the streets or in shelters. One in 10 young adults between 18 and 25 years of

age dealt with housing instability—half of which was couch surfing, and the other half of which was literal homelessness (Morton, 2019).

The study identified several youth populations with higher rates of housing instability. The groups were primarily LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color, including Black or African American, Hispanic non-White individuals, and Native American or Alaska Native. Black or African American youth had an 83% higher rate of becoming unhoused, and Hispanic non-White youth had a 33% higher risk of homelessness, as compared to national averages. Native Americans or Alaska Natives (AI/AN) had the highest prevalence of housing instability of all racial groups surveyed, with a 120% increased risk compared to national averages. AI/AN youth were twice as likely to experience explicit homelessness (utilizing shelters, transitional housing, or places not intended for sleeping) as other youth (Morton, 2019). Additionally, LGBTQ+ youth were found to have a 120% greater risk of homelessness than their non-queer counterparts. LGBTQ+ youth were also found to have a greater risk of experiencing self-harm, assault, trauma, exchanging sex for basic needs, and twice the rate of early death (Morton, 2019; Morton et al., 2018).

Individuals who report discrimination due to multiple identities were associated with increased odds of housing instability. Hence, the more marginalized groups an individual belongs to, the higher the chance of them becoming unhoused (Otiniano et al., 2023; Morton, 2019; Morton et al., 2018). It is, however, important to note that while people who occupy intersectional identities may experience increased vulnerability to housing instability and being treated in a discriminatory manner, it does not necessarily guarantee a more significant *amount* of discrimination than those with a single marginalized identity (Otiniano et al., 2023).

Discrimination and Stigma

Discrimination is an all-too-common experience for unhoused from all backgrounds and walks of life. Stereotypes, implicit biases, and stigmas can prevent homeless individuals from accessing community resources, medical care, and other vital necessities for survival. Individuals who belong to multiple marginalized communities, on top of being unhoused, often have experiences with discrimination and stigma that can add further complications and barriers to their living healthy and happy lives. Discrimination and stigma can make people feel isolated, cause low self-image, and ultimately make it even harder to finding stable housing (Fraser et al., 2019). To most accurately understand the experiences of people experiencing homelessness with intersectional marginalized identities, it is necessary to examine the role discrimination and stigma may play in their lives.

Logically, LGBTQ+ unhoused youth are more likely to experience discrimination based on their sexual and gender identities than straight, cis-gendered individuals. Moreover, LGBTQ+ youth are also more likely to report experiences of discrimination based on other aspects of their identity, such as housing status, race/ethnicity, or gender (Ecker, 2016). As is aligned with the framework of intersectionality, individuals with multiple marginalized identities are more likely to report housing instability. Similarly, those reporting higher levels of discrimination are more likely to experience housing instability (Morton, 2019).

In addition to explicit biases and discrimination, individuals may feel the effects of implicit biases, including socialized attitudes or stereotypes, resulting in unconscious discrimination or unfair treatment of marginalized groups. This can result in resources and services for unhoused individuals responding differently to the concerns and needs of LGBTQ+

youth of color than their straight White counterparts (Erney & Weber, 2018). Research has also shown that for LGBTQ+ people, there is a direct relationship between guilt, shame, and self-blame with the severity of the stigma they report experiencing (Fraser et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, for many queer individuals, discrimination begins at home, with parents and family being the first to show them unfair treatment, which can directly lead to feelings of shame and self-blame. These experiences of shame, guilt, and self-blame can ultimately further distance LGBTQ+ individuals from the possibility of maintaining long term stable housing.

Discrimination against people who are unhoused can have severe long-term impacts, as this group especially needs community resources and support to live. For people of color, it has been found that when low and moderate levels of racial stigma are reported, the level of unhoused stigma correlates with the level of poor psychological and physical health, whereas when reported racial stigma is high, psychological and physical health is low irrespective of the level of unhoused stigma experienced (Weisz & Quinn, 2018). Further, research has found that perceived racial stigma from service providers (health, mental health, case workers, social services, housing, education) indicated a higher chance of service avoidance (Schmitz & Tyler, 2018; Weisz & Quinn, 2018). Thus, concerns about racial stigma perceptions discourage people of color from utilizing those services in the future.

Housing instability is a complex and pervasive social issue affecting millions in the United States, especially vulnerable populations such as LGBTQ+ youth of color. Understanding the intricate relationship between the experience of being unhoused and identity is crucial in addressing this critical issue and advocating for comprehensive support systems. There have been studies performed to examine the needs and challenges of people of color, youth, and

LGBTQ+ (primarily white gay men) people who are unhoused. These identities have been somewhat examined separately, however, for those with intersectional identities, the different aspects of who they are do not exist in vacuums. Thus, there is a gap in qualitative research focusing on the impact of being unhoused on identity for those with intersectional marginalization. This thesis aims to bridge that gap by conducting interviews with LGBTQ+ youth of color to gain first-hand knowledge of their unique experiences.

METHODS

Sampling

The goal of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the interaction of identity and being unhoused for LGBTQ+ youth of color between the ages of 18-25. The method of data collection was through qualitative, narrative-focused interviews with participants. The requirements for individuals involved in the study were that they must be a person of color between the age of 18-25 and identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Participants also had to be able to speak and understand English. As this is a small population, a convenience sample was employed to make it more possible to find individuals eligible for the study. Recruitment flyers were sent to relevant organizations in Florida to find participants via email and social media. The organizations then forwarded the flyers and contact information to qualifying parties. The flyer instructed potential participants to email if they are interested in participating in the study. Once potential participants emailed, participants were sent more information about the study. If they agreed to participate, a meeting was scheduled that works with their schedule, conducted virtually via Zoom, telephone, or in-person. The goal sample size for this project was 15 participants.

After an interview is scheduled, a Zoom link was sent for the interview as well as a link to a Qualtrics survey which collected basic demographic information. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant over Zoom. The interviews were semi-structured and qualitative, with open-ended questions allowing for various responses from participants. These interviews allowed participants to talk about what *they* feel is relevant to their identity and experience of

being unhoused. The interview questions emphasize how being unhoused impacts factors such as identity, specifically with respect to intersectionality, discrimination, and stigma. This interview format allows room for each participant to tell their story and go into depth on their experience of being unhoused.

In addition to the open-ended questions, participants also completed a demographic survey through Qualtrics. Before each interview, informed consent was acquired from each participant. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant before the interview and used during the transcription and analysis process to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Similarly, participants were reminded of the study's purpose and the key points from the informed consent form. The interviewer also got consent to record the interviews over Zoom to allow for easier transcription. The interviewer used the Otter.ai app to facilitate the transcription process.

Data Collection

Despite efforts to recruit participants for interviews, the study encountered challenges resulting in a limited sample size. Twelve people completed the initial Qualtrics demographic survey, however, only one interview was fully conducted and completed. Two additional interviews were scheduled, yet obstacles were encountered. One participant did not attend the scheduled interview, resulting in a no-show. The other participant encountered technical difficulties, due to poor WIFI connectivity, making effective communication unfeasible.

Given the challenges faced in recruiting and conducting interviews with the intended number of participants, the researcher adapted her approach to maximize the use of the available data. Instead, the single completed interview was analyzed as a case study, providing insight into the intersectional experiences of unhoused LGBTQ+ youth of color. This case study analysis

dives into the narrative provided by the participant, exploring the themes brought up in the interview. By examining this case, the study aims to generate meaningful insights that can inform future research studies.

The demographics of the participant are as follows:

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Age	Sexual Orientation	Race/Ethnicity	Religion	Current Employment
Jade	Woman (cisgender)	21	Biromantic/ bisexual	Black/Jamaican	Catholic	Student, employed part-time

Table 1: Demographic Information for Interview

The interview was conducted via Zoom and was semi-structured, with questions sensitized based on existing literature and studies performed relating the primary themes of identity, intersectionality, and discrimination and stigma, as found in the literature. The questions were created to prompt participants to focus on the aspects of their story they deemed relevant. Each question was open-ended, allowing the participant to give as lengthy or as brief of an answer as they feel comfortable sharing. Prior to the interview commencing, the participant gave consent to have the interview recorded via Zoom and transcribed via the Otter.ai app. The participant also read the informed consent document. Additionally, the participant was given a document listing resources in the local community for individuals experiencing housing instability. To maintain privacy as per the UCF Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, the interview participant shall henceforth be referred to under the pseudonym “Jade”.

In addition to the case study analysis, a quantitative content analysis will be conducted to assess the current resources available to individuals, particularly unhoused LGBTQ+ youth of color. This review aims to evaluate the role that existing support systems play in addressing the ongoing struggles of this group. Examining the availability and accessibility of various resources such as shelters, mental health assistance, and social support networks, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural factors contributing to housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth of color.

Although the study did not achieve its intended sample size, the qualitative data obtained from the completed interview offers the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by unhoused LGBTQ+ youth of color. Through thoughtful analysis and interpretation, this study endeavors to contribute to the existing body of literature and inform future research directions in this important area of study.

Quantitative Content Analysis

A content analysis of websites was performed to gain a better understanding of the existing resources for unhoused LGBTQ+ youth of color, and the feasibility of access to the resources provided by commonly found websites. By utilizing Google and baseline search terms, the quality and quantity of the resources already existing will be analyzed.

Title	Website URL	Topics Mentioned	# of Times Mentioned	Type of Content
Homelessness Among LGBTQ+ Youth & Gay Teens	https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/lgbtq-homeless-youth	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Identity	3	Information, Resources

True Colors United: Home	https://truecolorsunited.org/#:~:text=True%20Colors%20United%20implements%20innovative,youth%20are%2033%25%20more%20likely	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth	3	Information, Resources
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness & Housing Instability Statistics	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth	3	Information
Support Organizations Working to End LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness This Pride Month	https://community.solutions/organizations-to-support-this-pride-month/	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Intersectionality	3	Information
Housing For: LGBTQIA+	https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/06/30/housing-for-lgbtqia/	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth	3	Information
LGBTQ Homelessness - NCH	https://nationalhomelessness.org/lgbtq-homelessness/	LGBTQ+, Youth	3	Information, Resources
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-lgbt-homelessness/#program-guidance-and-equal-access-rule	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth	2	Information
LGBTQ Homelessness	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-lgbt-homelessness/#program	LGBTQ+, Youth	2	Information, Resources

	-guidance-and-equal-access-rule			
Resources for LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/resources-for-lgbtq-youth-experiencing-homelessness/	LGBTQ+, Youth	2	Resources
Resources for LGBTQ Youth By State	https://legacy.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/fs_resources-for-lgbtq-youth-by-state_1.pdf	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Intersectionality	2	Resources
<u>Youth and Young Adults</u>	https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Intersectionality	2	Information
14-2 Taking Pride into Our Work: LGBTQ+ Youth	https://nlihc.org/resource/14-2-taking-pride-our-work-lgbtq-youth-homelessness-towards-safety-and-acceptance	LGBTQ+, Youth	2	Information, Resources
Avenues for Youth: Home	https://avenuesforyouth.org/	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Intersectionality	2	Information
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness	https://nn4youth.org/lgbtq-homeless-youth/	LGBTQ+, Youth	2	Information
Centering Youth of Color & LGBTQ Young People in Efforts to End Homelessness	https://www.usich.gov/news-events/news/centering-youth-color-lgbtq-young-people-efforts-end-homelessness	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth	2	Information

LGBTQ Youth Homelessness: Why We Need to Protect Our LGBTQ Youth	https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/lgbt.2021.0324	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Intersectionality	2	Information
Homelessness and Housing	https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/homelessness	LGBTQ+, Youth	2	Information, Resources
COVID-19 Action that Centers Black LGBTQ People Can Address Housing Inequities	https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/covid-19-action-centers-black-lgbtq-people-can-address-housing-inequities	LGBTQ+, POC, Youth, Intersectionality	2	Information, Resources

Table 2: Crossover Websites

Four separate Google searches were performed using these respective terms:

- LGBTQ+ People of Color Young Adult Homeless Resources
- LGBTQ+ People of Color Youth Unhoused Help
- Queer People of Color Homeless Support
- Queer POC Homeless Help

Based on those searches, 82 articles were found, 18 of which showed up multiple times as crossover between the searches. This provides a sample size of 58 different websites to examine. In Table 2, the website titles, URLs, type of content, and the topics mentioned on the websites that showed up more than once can be observed. A complete list of all websites used for the content review can be found in Appendix C. The term “LGBTQ+” for this instance was treated as interchangeable with “queer,” “LGBT,” and “LGBTQIA.” Meaning, if any of those terms were discussed on the website, it was counted under the “LGBTQ+” umbrella for the

topics mentioned in Table 2. Similarly, the search term “POC” was treated as interchangeable on the websites with terms such as people of color, youth of color, black, African American, Latino, BIPOC (black, indigenous, and other people of color), and other related terms. All websites included as a baseline were screened to discuss homelessness and other synonymous terms.

Many of the websites that showed up multiple times were extremely comprehensive. Often, they included easily digestible infographics or other means of sharing important facts and figures. Notably, transequality.org, www.hudexchange.info, and www.covenanthouse.org had readily accessible links along the lines of “get help now.” This is especially helpful as it took mere seconds to identify once the website was accessed. Moreover, they connected the user to immediate shelters and resources geolocated to the immediate area of the user.

Of the 58 websites sampled, 23 discussed all three primary themes of LGBTQ+, POC, and youth. An additional four discussed intersectionality, as well as the three main terms, and an additional two discussed those three terms and identity formation. 19 of the websites found contained resources, or resources and additional topics. This indicates that there is not a shortage of resources to be found online with just a few quick Google searches.

One limitation noted during the review of websites is that many of the websites are focused primarily on community education and political actions. 20 of the 58 articles were exclusively information-based websites and did not contain resources for users. While this is useful for the sake of visibility and future goals, these types of websites were not aimed at those currently struggling with housing instability. Additionally, three of the 58 websites that came up lead directly to academic journals, which are less useful for this content analysis.

Overall, based on the information and resources assessed from the analysis, it seems that accessing a sufficient level of resources for people experiencing homelessness is not the problem. This brings up a separate point of discussion about why individuals may be hesitant to use resources or feel that they cannot access them effectively. Future research could use this study as a baseline to dive further in-depth into how individuals specifically engage with resources within their communities, and what role that plays in them utilizing these resources. Future qualitative interviews may want to focus on individuals who have a history of using many resources, to gain a clearer picture of the nuance of the situation.

RESULTS

The results discussed in this section are derived from the qualitative interview conducted as well as a supplementary quantitative content analysis. During the literature review portion of this study, the primary themes found were identity, intersectionality, and discrimination and stigma. The main themes found during the interview were access to resources, insecurity, intersectionality, social support, and change in identity. While the major themes found in this interview were slightly different from the primary themes found in the literature, that is likely due to the small sample size for this study, rather than inconsistency in the existing literature. The interviewee, Jade, encountered housing instability on two separate occasions: the first, during high school for a period of a year, and the second prior to her junior year of college for six months.

Identity

The literature indicates that individuals who have been unhoused are more likely to have various social and psychological needs such as a sense of security and belonging. For young members of the LGBTQ+ community, the security of a consistent and reliable home, or the equivalent thereof, can be vital in the development of their sexual and gender identities, as explored in the work of Matthews et al. (2019). The interview with Jade revealed a shift in her identity before and after experiencing housing instability. Jade expressed a newfound appreciation for feeling secure where she lives and for creating a sense of permanence in her living environment. She articulated this shift in identity through her tendency to invest in decorating her current apartment, stating:

"I guess not having, like, home security kind of makes me want to make whatever home I'm in feel permanent. So I might buy a little extra stuff like to decorate and stuff because I want to feel like this is my home." - Jade

Jade's experience of housing instability has also influenced her perspective on providing support to others in similar situations. She expressed an openness to extending hospitality to those in need, highlighting the empathy she has garnered from these experiences.

"Whenever I own my own house and everything, I'll be more welcoming to let people stay with me, just because I know what it feels like to not be in a stable place." - Jade

Jade's articulation of the importance of feeling secure in her home reflects the fundamental need for stability and belonging, as reflected in the literature. Her expressed desire to create a sense of permanence in her living environment illustrates the effect of unstable housing situations on a sense of long-term security and peace.

Intersectionality

The framework of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, will be utilized to understand how multiple dimensions of identity (in this context, race, gender/sexuality, and housing status) overlap to influence an individual's experience and access to resources. Intersectionality acknowledges that these layered identities may overlap to create nuanced forms of oppression, resulting in sometimes complex challenges.

During the interview, Jade remarks that she does not believe her sexuality has had an impact on her experience due to her only being out to a handful of close friends. She does point

out, however, the uneven racial dispersal she observed when she experienced homelessness for the first time, during high school. Her family lived in various hotels and motels in the area during this time and she notes:

“Being a black person, well, when I think about it a lot of us are having issues with housing and stuff. Like, we tend to be lower income and everything. I know the majority of people staying in those hotels were also black. The cost of living was just so expensive. It was rough” - Jade

These findings align with existing research highlighting the disproportionate effect of being unhoused on people of color, particularly black communities, due to systemic racism, economic disparities, and discriminatory housing policies.

Insecurity

Housing instability can evoke feelings of insecurity as individuals struggle with uncertainty about their living situation, concern of judgment and/or stigma from others, and a vulnerability due to the lack of stable housing. Throughout the interview, a common theme that came up was feelings of insecurity. Jade says “When I was in it (unhoused), it definitely made me feel insecure”. She goes on to share how she stayed with a friend for a period of less than a year and felt supported by most of her friend’s family. One family member, however, she felt, looked down upon her, which made her feel bad.

“This is my home, I should feel comfortable” – Jade

This is a simple sentiment, yet often a challenge for many individuals struggling with housing instability.

During the period of a year time in early high school when she and her family were living in hotels, Jade recalls feeling embarrassed about other kids at school finding out.

“I didn't want anyone to know that I was (unhoused), so it was really hard. Because I had a private bus, so people would see that I was dropped off at a hotel and it was kind of embarrassing. You know, I don't want anyone to know that that was a way I was living.” - Jade

Though Jade did not experience anything overt to make her think her peers were sitting in judgment of her home situation, she says she felt a deep insecurity within herself. Feeling comfortable and accepted for who you are in your home life, and any situation, is central to the human desire for stability and regulation. Becoming unhoused at a young age can have a profound impact on one's sense of self and well-being. To combat these challenges, having a strong social network can be vital to maintain emotional well-being, and a sense of stability.

Social Support

When going through a difficult time, such as being unhoused, it is only natural to lean on one's social support system, either through family, friends, community, or ideally, all three. Navigating the stress of this challenging experience can be mitigated via those who provide support, whether that is through practical help, giving a sense of belonging, or being an emotional grounding source and support.

“Kids in school would make fun of people for being gay and use it as an insult” Jade says, but follows up by asserting that this did not have much of a negative impact on her. Jade has an uncle who is gay, which she says has helped her to be more accepting of herself and her

identity. She remembers having a discussion growing up with her uncle wherein he explained what it means to be gay, bisexual, and more. “My uncle made it made me feel very comfortable with it (LGBTQ+ identities)” she says. She feels accepted in her immediate family by her uncle. Her close friends, whom she is out as bisexual, were very casual about it. Thus, she feels accepted by her primarily social circle. It can be extremely meaningful to have people in your life with whom you share the same identities and, can thus feel safe be authentic around.

Access to Resources

Readily accessible resources can be life-changing for people who are unhoused, and similarly, the financial and physical stress associated. In practice, sometimes some barriers prevent people who are unhoused from reaching out to get help. Pride can sometimes prevent individuals from feeling they even need to access help in the first place. Though Jade now uses a food bank close to where she lives and says she would readily use resources in the community as needed, that was not the same mindset when she was unhoused the first time. When Jade went through housing instability in high school, she recalls her mom working often seven days a week, day and night, to take care of Jade and her younger siblings. Jade says the only help her family had during this time was an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. Outside of EBT, “I think she kind of has a little bit of pride. And she didn't want to go and look for those resources”. The stigma associated with seeking support for being unhoused and financial strain can multiply feelings of shame and intensify the reluctance to seek assistance further. Jade mentions that beyond the food bank near her home right now, she is learning to be more familiar with the resources that exist in the community in case she or someone else needs to find them quickly.

DISCUSSION

Recruitment

The limited number of interviews conducted in this study allows for consideration regarding the challenges of recruiting often difficult-to-reach populations, such as LGBTQ+ youth of color who have experienced homelessness. Over 40 community-based organizations, groups, and academic spheres were contacted, with a great deal of engagement from the organizers of these various groups. This is believed to be an ample reach for virtual recruitment, thus, the primary reason for the lack of interviews may be attributed to the primary reliance on remote methods of outreach. Due to the time limitations of the study, the recruitment and interview process ran for two months. This, coupled with the virtual platform, seemed to be ineffective in recruiting the target sample size. Participating in a research study that discusses your personal identity and story can be a very vulnerable activity, especially for already vulnerable populations. It may be helpful for potential participants to meet with researchers in person and put a face to a name prior to deciding if they would like to participate. The lack of in-person engagement may have contributed to a sense of disconnect or mistrust among potential participants, impacting their willingness to engage in the study.

To combat these barriers and enhance recruitment outcomes in future studies, it is recommended that researchers adopt a more direct in-person approach by engaging with community resources where unhoused LGBTQ+ youth of color are likely to frequent. This includes visiting shelters, drop-in centers, food banks, nonprofit organizations, and other community organizations that provide support services. By creating rapport and fostering trust

with individuals in these settings, researchers may be able to create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and recruitment that may not otherwise be achievable through remote methods.

It is further recommended that future studies should allocate sufficient time and resources for recruitment efforts, recognizing the complexities involved in engaging marginalized populations. This may involve extending the duration of the recruitment or leveraging community partnerships to enhance visibility and access to the study. Financial compensation as an incentive for participation would likely increase recruitment efforts as well. Due to the nature of the target demographic of people who are unhoused, financial compensation is expected to be especially beneficial in incentivizing participants to dedicate their time to being interviewed.

Overall, while the challenges encountered in this study highlight the nuance of researching certain populations, they also underscore the importance of adopting culturally responsive and community-centered approaches to recruitment and engagement. By prioritizing direct engagement with community resources and investing in meaningful relationships with participants, researchers should have a better chance of overcoming barriers and ensuring that the stories and needs of marginalized people are addressed in future research endeavors.

Interview

Due to the nature of the interview format, it would have been greatly informative to have participants who have utilized multiple resources within the community such as shelters, nonprofits, food banks, and more. Due to the nature of the interview questions, there were some limitations as the interviewee (Jade) had not used any community resources during the period of time when she was unhoused. Through the adjusted recruitment tactic of meeting potential

participants at locations that they may frequent in the community, future researchers may be able to gain better insight into the experiences of utilizing those resources.

As far as the interview itself, most of the questions seemed to be applicable for Jade to answer to explain more of her story. The first three questions were useful to gain a baseline understanding of her experience. Additional broad questions toward the beginning may be useful in triggering participants to reflect deeply on their experiences and thoughts about how being unhoused has impacted them.

The question portion of the interview lasted about thirty minutes. This was limited due to the small sample size for this study, however, for future research imploring a larger sample size this may be ample time. If it is not, to address this limitation in future studies, a broader array of probing questions could be employed, aimed at eliciting specific memories, narratives, and experiences relevant to the research inquiry. Particularly notable was "Jade's" limited utilization of available resources, suggesting the potential of incorporating additional questions to prompt discussions on resource access and utilization among participants. By having a broader range of questions prepared, non-applicable prompts can be removed, while maintaining a relatively sizeable sample of questions.

For example, some questions that may have been added for the interview conducted are:

- What has your experience been like being ____ (LGBTQ+)?
- What has your experience been like being ____ (POC)?
- Have you ever experienced moments of racism or prejudice?
- Do you feel like you can talk to people about your experience of being unhoused?

- Have you gotten any (emotional, or otherwise) support from your family or friends while struggling with housing instability?
- For those who haven't used resources:
 - Why haven't you accessed resources to assist you?
 - Do you feel comfortable using resources in the community? Why/why not?

The interview conducted gave insight into Jade's story and her experience with housing instability. Future studies may benefit from including a larger sample size with participants who have utilized an array of different support services such as shelters and nonprofits. Adjusting recruitment strategies to include engagement with those who utilize the community resources may enrich the breadth of knowledge gained from qualitative interviews. Similarly, adding a greater number of questions to extend the overall interview time will aid in providing a more comprehensive view of participants' stories and perspectives. By adjusting these methodological tactics, future research can greatly contribute to our understanding of the nuanced narratives and perspectives of LGBTQ+ youth of color struggling with housing instability.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Homelessness

1. How long have you been navigating being unhoused?
2. Can you talk about what caused you to first experience housing instability?
3. What have been the most significant changes in your life since experiencing housing instability?
4. How has homelessness affected how you view yourself, if at all?
 - a. Has it affected your sense of belonging?
 - b. Has it had any impact on your self-confidence?
5. How would you describe yourself in a few words?
 - a. Has this changed since experiencing housing instability? If so, how?

Identity

6. Are you out to your friends and family as _____ (LGBTQ+)?
 - a. What was the response of those individuals?
7. Did you grow up in an environment where you felt supported as LGBTQ+?
8. How has your experience of being unhoused been influenced by having an intersectional identity, if at all?
9. Were there any programs or services offered to you focused on supporting individuals with LGBTQ+ or POC identities?

- a. If so, what was your experience like utilizing those resources?
 - i. Would you feel comfortable going back?
- 10. Do you feel comfortable using resources in the community when you need them?
- 11. Do you feel service providers have adequate resources for individuals with your identity (LGBTQ+, POC)? (clinics, non-profits, shelters)
 - a. How have your identities impacted your use of services and resources, if at all?
- 12. Have you experienced discrimination or stigma since experiencing housing instability? If so, please describe it.
 - a. Specifically, have you experienced discrimination from providers of resources and services for unhoused individuals?
 - b. Was this influenced by your identities (LGBTQ+, POC)?
- 13. Is there anything else you want to discuss that we have not yet touched on?
- 14. Do you want us to ask any additional questions to better understand your experience?

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Sex/Gender identity: _____
2. Pronouns: _____
3. Age: _____
4. Sexual orientation: _____
5. Race: _____
6. Ethnicity: _____
7. Religion/spiritual philosophy: _____
8. Compared to Americans (US) in general, would you say that your income is: (please circle one):
 - a. Far below average
 - b. Below average
 - c. Average (median household income is \$80,000)
 - d. Above average
 - e. Far above average
 - f. Do not know
9. Highest degree earned: _____
10. If currently in college:

a. Year in school: _____

b. Declared major(s)/minor(s): _____

11. Current Employment:

a. Employed full-time (35+ hours per week)

b. Employed part-time

c. Unemployed, but looking for work

d. Unemployed, not looking for work

e. Full-time student

f. Other _____

APPENDIX C: CONTENT ANALYSIS WEBSITES

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Title	Year	Website URL
Homelessness Among LGBTQ+ Youth & Gay Teens	2024	https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/lgbtq-homeless-youth
True Colors United: Home	2024	https://truecolorsunited.org/#:~:text=True%20Colors%20United%20implements%20innovative,youth%20are%2033%25%20more%20likely
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness & Housing Instability Statistics	2022	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/
Support Organizations Working to End LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness This Pride Month	2021	https://community.solutions/organizations-to-support-this-pride-month/
Housing For: LGBTQIA+	2023	https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/06/30/housing-for-lgbtqia/
LGBTQ Homelessness - NCH	2023	https://nationalhomeless.org/lgbtq-homelessness/
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness	2023	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-lgbt-homelessness/#program-guidance-and-equal-access-rule
LGBTQ Homelessness	2024	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-lgbt-homelessness/#program-guidance-and-equal-access-rule

Resources for LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness	2021	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/resources-for-lgbtq-youth-experiencing-homelessness/
Resources for LGBTQ Youth by State	N.D.	https://legacy.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/fs_resources-for-lgbtq-youth-by-state_1.pdf
Youth and Young Adults	2023	https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/
14-2 Taking Pride into Our Work: LGBTQ+ Youth	2023	https://nlihc.org/resource/14-2-taking-pride-our-work-lgbtq-youth-homelessness-towards-safety-and-acceptance
Avenues for Youth: Home	2024	https://avenuesforyouth.org/
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness	N.D.	https://nn4youth.org/lgbtq-homeless-youth/
Centering Youth of Color & LGBTQ Young People in Efforts to End Homelessness	2018	https://www.usich.gov/news-events/news/centering-youth-color-lgbtq-young-people-efforts-end-homelessness
LGBTQ Youth Homelessness: Why We Need to Protect Our LGBTQ Youth	2022	https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/lgbt.2021.0324
Homelessness and Housing	N.D.	https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/homelessness
COVID-19 Action that Centers Black LGBTQ People Can Address Housing Inequities	2020	https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/covid-19-action-centers-black-lgbtq-people-can-address-housing-inequities

Why Are Young People Homeless?	N.D.	https://rootsinfo.org/young-adult-homelessness
LGBTQ Youth and Young Adults Resources	N.D.	https://www.rhyttac.net/lgbtq-youth-and-young-adults-resources
Ways to Give	2024	https://www.covenanthousefl.org/newpage
Mental Health Resources in the LGBTQ+ Community	N.D.	https://www.hrc.org/resources/mental-health-resources-in-the-lgbtq-community
At the Intersections: A Collaborative Resource on LGBTQ ...	2019	https://truecolorsunited.org/resources/at-the-intersections-a-collaborative-resource-on-lgbtq-youth-homelessness/
LGBTQ Housing	2024	https://www.acrhealth.org/youth-programs/youth-housing/
Wanda Alston Foundation: Home	2023	https://www.wandaalstonfoundation.org/
LGBTQ+ Youth Experiencing Homelessness Say More ...	2022	https://dcist.com/story/22/07/27/dc-homeless-youth-lgbtq-housing-shelter/
About Us	2024	https://truecolorsunited.org/about/
LGBTQ Youth Homelessness Prevention Initiative	N.D.	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-homeless-youth/lgbtq-youth-homelessness-prevention-initiative-community-plans/
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness Policy Brief	2023	https://nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/23-LGBTQ-Policy-Brief.pdf

Addressing LGBTQ+ Homelessness: Challenges, Disparities, and Promising Practices	N.D.	https://mecklenburghousingdata.org/frontpage-article/addressing-lgbtq-homelessness-challenges-disparities-and-promising-practices/
Black Queer Youth, Unstable Housing and Homelessness: Understanding the Impact of Family Conflict, School and Community-Based Violence on Racialized LGBTQ2S Youth	2017	https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/6_Racialized_LGBTQ2S_Youth.pdf
Housing and Homelessness	2024	https://transequality.org/issues/housing-homelessness
LGBTIQ+ Homelessness: A Review of the Literature	2019	https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6695950/
‘Homelessness is a queer experience.’: utopianism and mutual aid as survival strategies for homeless trans people	2021	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2022.2108381
Addressing the Needs of Youth of Color Experiencing Homelessness – Part 1: Breaking Down Barriers	2018	https://buildingchanges.org/resources/addressing-the-needs-of-youth-of-color-experiencing-homelessness-part-1/
Homelessness Among LGBT Adults in the U.S.	2020	https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-homelessness-us/

LGBTQ People of Color Encounter Heightened Discrimination	2021	https://www.americanprogress.org/article/lgbtq-people-color-encounter-heightened-discrimination/
LGBTQ Youth Experiencing Homelessness	N.D.	https://nche.ed.gov/lgbtq-youth/
Homeless LGBTQ youth risk discrimination and harassment when seeking help	2023	https://youthtoday.org/2023/08/homeless-lgbtq-youth-risk-discrimination-and-harassment-when-seeking-help/
DOP Pride	2024	https://www.nyc.gov/site/probation/community/dop-pride.page
Homelessness Among LGBTQ+ Youth & Gay Teens	2024	https://www.covenanthouse.org/homeless-issues/lgbtq-homeless-youth
True Colors United: Home	2024	https://truecolorsunited.org/#:~:text=True%20Colors%20United%20implements%20innovative,youth%20are%2033%25%20more%20likely
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness & Housing Instability Statistics	2022	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/homelessness-and-housing-instability-among-lgbtq-youth-feb-2022/
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness	2023	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-lgbt-homelessness/#program-guidance-and-equal-access-rule
Support Organizations Working to End LGBTQ+ Youth	2021	https://community.solutions/organizations-to-support-this-pride-month/

Homelessness This Pride Month		
LGBTQ Homelessness	2024	https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/resources-for-lgbt-homelessness/#program-guidance-and-equal-access-rule
Housing For: LGBTQIA+	2023	https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/06/30/housing-for-lgbtqia/
LGBTQ Homelessness - NCH	2023	https://nationalhomeless.org/lgbtq-homelessness/
Resources for LGBTQ Youth By State	N.D.	https://legacy.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/fs_resources-for-lgbtq-youth-by-state_1.pdf
Youth and Young Adults	2023	https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/who-experiences-homelessness/youth/
14-2 Taking Pride into Our Work: LGBTQ+ Youth	2023	https://nlihc.org/resource/14-2-taking-pride-our-work-lgbtq-youth-homelessness-towards-safety-and-acceptance
Avenues for Youth: Home	2024	https://avenuesforyouth.org/
LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness	N.D.	https://nn4youth.org/lgbtq-homeless-youth/
Centering Youth of Color & LGBTQ Young People in Efforts to End Homelessness	2018	https://www.usich.gov/news-events/news/centering-youth-color-lgbtq-young-people-efforts-end-homelessness
LGBTQ Youth Homelessness: Why We Need to Protect Our LGBTQ Youth	2022	https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/lgbt.2021.0324

Homelessness and Housing	N.D.	https://youth.gov/youth-topics/lgbtq-youth/homelessness
COVID-19 Action that Centers Black LGBTQ People Can Address Housing Inequities	2020	https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/covid-19-action-centers-black-lgbtq-people-can-address-housing-inequities

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