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Dependence as Independence, Instability as Immaturity: The Organizational Contradictions of Young Adult Homeless Centers Serving LGBTQ+ Clients

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Erik S. Lovell

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Abstract

Although research has shown LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in counts of homeless youth, scholars have yet to investigate whether this trend exists among adults experiencing homelessness. This dissertation uses an organizational analysis of four Chicago homeless centers that cater to young adults to argue that most LGBTQ+ youth are not exiting homelessness during the transition to adulthood. I use over 350+ hours of volunteer ethnography, 33 interviews, and document analysis to document three ways in which homeless services in Chicago inhibit pathways to stability for LGBTQ+ young adults experiencing homelessness. First, deinstitutionalization and neoliberal governance of welfare has led to scattered and siloed young adult homeless sector in Chicago. The spatial-temporal dynamics of Chicago's homeless centers introduce additional barriers to stability. Second, due to the liminality of young adults in social policy, organizations developed a discourse of "adulthood" in order to evaluate whether clients are mature enough to progress to stability. However, this discourse tends to use traditional standards *of stability* (housing, jobs, education) as *markers of adulthood* – thus judging homeless individuals' instability as evidence for immaturity. Finally, I analyze the history of regulating sexuality in welfare discourses as well as the complicated nature of resistance and complicity of LGBTQ+ organizations in this moral regulation. By ignoring how sexuality is inherently tied to individuals' survival habitus, organizations that attempt to regulate sexuality reduce the possible strategies of young adults for finding stability. This research pushes organizational scholarship to consider spatial-temporal dynamics *within* a specific social service sector. Homeless research must incorporate the insights of organizational scholarship to better understand the limits of the current structure of homeless relief. And as young adults now have the highest poverty and homeless rate of any demographic, this dissertation demonstrates a need for further research in young adult homelessness as well as targeted interventions for this age group.

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I count myself fortunate to have an incredible "village" supporting me and this project. First, I would like to thank the organizations that allowed me to work with them as a volunteer researcher. It was a first for me and for many of the organizations and I am deeply grateful for the flexibility and understanding each provided. Second, an immense thank you to each of the young adults at the shelters and on the street who offered their time, expertise, and guidance in evaluating the system of young adult homeless organizations. Their insights and stories were invaluable towards pinpointing the unspoken practices and policy consequences that make exiting homelessness difficult.

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My intellectual journey began as an undergraduate at Brigham Young University. Growing up, I lived in a suburb in the Southwestern US and was able to avoid grappling with

issues of poverty, racism, and similar power asymmetries. During an LDS mission to Italy, I had to confront poverty and socio-economic marginalization directly. Returning to BYU after the mission, I dedicated my studies to understanding the circumstances that allowed for the racism, xenophobia, and economic deprivation I witnessed in a supposed "first-world country." After trying seven majors, I found my intellectual home in BYU's Sociology Department. Under the guidance of Dr. Stan Knapp, Dr. Lance Erickson, and Dr. Curtis Child, I began crafting a better understanding of how the social world operated and they sparked my desire to continue my graduate studies.

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For Mom -

I know you're still looking out for me and all those young people I met over the last four years

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1. An Organizational Study of LGBTQ+ Homelessness

Just before Ms. Carrington-Marr left her post as CEO of *Project Alight*[1]—a homeless drop-in and residential center for young adults in Chicago—we sat down for a Zoom interview in which she attempted to describe how her organization coordinated with other services in the city. Although *Project Alight* is funded entirely by private donations, she explained that she meets regularly with other organizational and city leaders to coordinate city relief of homelessness:

> "Oh my gosh. We meet every week. There is always some team you could be on. It could be youth, it could be specific to housing like transitional, interim, permanent supportive, rapid rehousing, you know. There are all these subgroups and subcategories."

However, Ms. Carrington-Marr could not elucidate an actionable vision that the system of homeless centers in Chicago had for alleviating young adult homelessness. She told me, "The mayor and all of us always talk about ending youth homelessness and homelessness period."

As she described these weekly meetings and plans to eradicate youth homelessness in Chicago, I asked how *Project Alight* distinguished itself or understood its role within the city's overall aid for young adults experiencing homelessness. She argued that *Project Alight* is focused on three attributes: wrap-around services, 24/7 availability, and low barriers to service accessibility. Yet most other organizations would argue they have similar wrap-around services and low barriers, and at least half have some services available 24/7.

From 2018-2020, I worked in four young adult homeless services in the Chicago area. Although each of these four centers had similar suites of services, I observed that most clients frequented all four. Set miles apart requiring clients to traverse a labyrinth of trains and buses to access, it seemed strange that young adults experiencing homelessness would make these

[1] Names of people and organizations in my study have been changed to pseudonyms.

interorganizational journeys day after day, month after month. How does this system of homeless services—specifically organized to help young people escape homelessness—affect the clients they serve?

Since each center has similar programs, it would seem the organizations are either unable to meet the needs of the young adult population or their coordination is failing in important ways. If this collaboration worked efficiently, we would expect (or at least hope) that organizations with so much client crossover would coordinate care amongst themselves. But when I asked the lead Youth Advisor at *Project Alight* how much she interacts with case managers or staff at other young adult organizations, Clare laughed and then simply said, "Never." Whether due to a lack of resources or lack of interest, the absence of coordination regarding individual clients demonstrates a fundamental problem with city and regional efforts to organize and implement homelessness reduction measures.

Liam Starts Over

This lack of coordination carries consequences for the young adults accessing services and resources in this organizational network. In November 2019, as I travelled to *La Fortaleza* on the South Side of Chicago, I saw Liam, a 24-year-old white male with an Associate's Degree, getting on the same bus with two pieces of luggage. I first met Liam at *Project Alight* where he had been staying as a resident in the interim housing units. That November morning he had reached *Project Alight's* maximum 120-day stay policy He was headed to *La Fortaleza*, an interim shelter on Chicago's south side, with the hope that they would have a spot for him at least for the night.

He had stayed at *La Fortaleza* three years ago before going through a Job Corps training program in 2018 and finding a job in Montana. When he decided to move back to Chicago in

2019 to be closer to friends and family, he explained he could not find a job as, “I’m too expensive, having two degrees and certifications in healthcare and horticulture.” That brought him to *Project Alight* where he stayed while trying to find work—without any success.

Upon his return to *La Fortaleza*, the residential staff members provided Liam a bed in their interim center on the condition that he agree to both undergo a new intake and comprehensive assessment as well as work through their programs again. He tried to explain that he had done this with *La Fortaleza* three years ago and *Project Alight* just a couple months back. But neither center communicated with each other and *La Fortaleza*’s policies which required an intake—an assessments and “diagnosis” of homeless circumstances—for any incoming resident whether new or returning. The policy provided case managers with information they needed to submit to Homeless Information Management System (HMIS), which helps regional organizations—Continuums of Care (CoCs)—synthesize data on the homeless population for that region. Further, it helps case managers create a “exiting homeless” plan tailored to that client.

For the client, however, the intake interviews are exhausting and require a detailed account of their personal history, which often includes recounting traumatic events. Further, Liam was not looking forward to sitting through group sessions on “Interpersonal Relationships” or “Professional Behaviors for the Workplace.” In explaining these arduous requirements to his older sister, she provided a reprieve: “Nope, I’m not having you stay there. You’re popping into my place now.” Within three days, he moved into his sister’s one-bedroom apartment in New York City just as COVID-19 swept through the United States. Following up with him in May of 2020, the economic recession had made work even more elusive and he was still staying in his sister’s apartment.

As the case of Liam reveals, the lack of client-specific coordination of care for young people experiencing homelessness raises important questions about how a system of homeless relief operates and how it inadvertently pushes people outside of the care system. Liam's parents asked him to become an emancipated minor at 17 and have not provided any support since. However, he is fortunate enough to have a sister with enough resources to help him travel and take him in just as a deadly pandemic took hold. While some might deem his experience as a success story for no longer living in homeless shelters, he effectively traded one safety net for another. No longer a public charge using non-profits for support, he now receives help from private resources—his sister. But what about those without this secondary safety net? Homeless coordination that commanded the time and attention from Ms. Carrington-Marr and her colleagues relies on incidence rates and other population-level data—but underlying these statistics are questions on how organizations, through their organizational practices and structure, regulate the lives of young adults experiencing homelessness. How do organizations, both individually and collectively as a system, limit the ability of young people to achieve self-sufficiency, housing, and stability?

In this dissertation, I analyze four homeless centers in Chicago that cater to young adults and are frequented by LGBTQ+ individuals in order to investigate two overarching concerns regarding LGBTQ+ homelessness. First, I demonstrate the need for homeless research to engage with organizational literature to understand why the coordination efforts of many homeless services fail. These organizational lenses push us to consider how organizations broker social and organizational ties; frame experiences with, and solutions to, poverty and homelessness; provide the mechanisms by which discourses of deservingness affect individual lives; and, create unnecessary burdens for achieving stability through geographic and temporal mismatches with

clients' lives. The experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in these organizations also reveal how organizations regulate sexuality and sexual identity in ways that restrict opportunities for obtaining stability.

Second, I further provide evidence that LGBTQ+ youth and young adults struggle to achieve socioeconomic stability and are likely to continue experiencing homelessness into adulthood. While scholars have demonstrated a higher incidence rate of homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth (Choi et al. 2015; Robinson 2020a), research has yet to investigate outcomes of interventions as these youth move into adulthood.

FROM UTAH TO A DISSERTATION – WHY STUDY LGBTQ+ YOUNG ADULTS

The first inklings for this project came from a cultural and political battle in the Utah State Legislature in the mid-2010s. Activists had raised the alarm that youth suicide and homeless rates were increasing in Utah and they were concerned that these rates were connected to the LDS Church's new categorization of LGBTQ+ persons in same-sex marriages as "apostate[2]." Conservative legislators argued that little evidence showed a connection between LGBTQ+ identification and the increasing suicide and homeless rates in Utah. Activists countered that there was a lack of evidence because of researchers' inability to ask Utah teens about their sexual orientation. In 2015, Utah rejected the CDC's inclusion of an optional sexual identity question to the organization's flagship standard questionnaire for youth.[3] Paradoxically, without data, activists and non-profits could not convince the Utah legislature to allow them to

[2] As a matter of doctrine for the LDS Church, apostasy means turning away from the principles of the gospel. Organizationally, a person who is categorized as apostate is subject to church discipline. This could result anywhere from losing various privileges to losing one's membership entirely and having rituals like baptism be considered void.

[3] *Deseret News*. Mar 28, 2017. "Utah doesn't collect data on LGBT teens, but could a change save lives?" by Sara Israelsen-Hartley.

collect data. In 2019, the Utah Department of Human Services finally added questions about sexual orientation to their Student Health and Risk Prevention (SHARP) Statewide Survey[4]. However, the 2019 SHARP report only included counts of teens that identified as gay or bisexual, and did not include analyses on whether these youth were more likely to have suicidal ideation or homeless episodes than heterosexual youth[5]. Questions regarding transgender or non-binary youth are still not included.

The State of the Data: Who Collects Data on LGBTQ+ Homelessness?

In searching for any statistics that would better my understanding the plight of LGBTQ+ youth in Utah, I found that data collected on the prevalence of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness came largely from two institutes. For almost a decade, the UCLA Williams Institute, a research institute focusing on the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity, law, and public policy, has conducted research suggesting that up to 40% of all youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+ (Choi et al. 2015; Durso and Gates 2012). The University of Chicago's Voices of Youth project identified that 20% of young adults experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ+, and on average, LGBTQ+ youth were 2.2 times more likely to experience homelessness than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Morton et al. 2018). And yet, the only government in the United States to include sexual orientation on their official surveys of homelessness is the City of San Francisco[6]. The US Interagency Council on Homelessness, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and

[4] According to *Equality Utah's* Youth Laws checklist: https://www.equalityutah.org/youth-laws
[5] *State of Utah: Department of Human Services*. 2019. "Student Health and Risk Prevention: Prevention Needs Assessment Survey." : https://dsamh.utah.gov/reports/sharp-survey
[6] In 2019, their Point-in-Time (PIT) count, revealed 46% of youth and 27% of adults experiencing homelessness identified as LGBTQ+. See San Francisco's Research and Reports for PIT Count Reports: https://hsh.sfgov.org/about/research-and-reports/san-francisco-homeless-point-in-time-count-reports/

the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs all rely on either the Williams Institute's 2012 report or the 2018 Voices of Youth project for their information on LGBTQ+ individuals experiencing homelessness.

Startlingly, this means no research has catalogued the prevalence of LGBTQ+ *adults* experiencing homelessness in the United States. Scholars noticed this gap as early as 2014:

> "The long-term trajectory of homelessness from youth into adulthood for LGBT individuals remains largely unknown. Risk factors influencing whether homelessness among transitional age LGBT youth evolves into chronic homelessness in adulthood are poorly understood, and prospective studies of homeless LGBT adolescents transitioning into adulthood are mostly lacking." (Keuroghlian, Shtasel and Bassuk 2014: 67)

In 2017, Ecker, Aubry and Sylvestre (2017a) found no systematic studies examining the life course trajectories of LGBTQ homeless youth, their experiences in young adulthood, or how past episodes of homelessness affect them in adulthood. We could speculate on the reasons why the scant research on sexual orientation and gender minorities experiencing homelessness focuses solely on *youth* rather than all stages of the life course; however, while that certainly is an important area of research, this project begins to address this gap with a focus on the transition of LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness into adulthood.

LGBTQ+ YOUTH: ENTERING AND EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

While government agencies have largely avoided investigating LGBTQ+ homelessness themselves, decades of scholars have worked to provide us with a good picture of the circumstances leading LGBTQ+ youth to enter homelessness, as well as their experiences during homeless episodes. There is a widely-held misconception that family rejection after the discovery of a child's same sex desire is the driving antecedent to incidents of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness. In fact, the dynamics are much more complex. Poverty and precarious living

situations (foster care, drug addiction, and abuse) often create the conditions for family rejection (Castellanos 2016; Ream and Forge 2014). From there, family instability intersects with attempts to enforce heteronormative compliance, generating a volatile economic and psychological climate. Some scholars even view anti-LGBTQ+ family rejection as a *secondary* cause, or final catalyst towards, youth homeless episodes. It is important to note that LGBTQ+ youth also experience discrimination in community and school settings that may prevent them from seeking recourse near home (Corliss et al. 2011; Keuroghlian, Shtasel and Bassuk 2014).

Andrew Robinson (2018a; 2020) explains that poverty and family instability condition how LGBTQ+ youth perceive familial rejection. For many of these families, various forms of abuse are used as tools to enforce heteronormative compliance—even if a young person never explicitly expresses having a non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identity (Rosario, Schrimshaw and Hunter 2012). When poverty and familial stressors have weakened family ties, conflict surrounding sexual or gender identity may fracture those ties and the young person may choose (or be forced) to leave the family. As family reunification and raising awareness of LGBTQ+ issues remain the primary methods for solving or preventing LGBTQ+ youth homelessness, Robinson (2018a, 2020) calls on researchers and providers to recognize the social and economic contexts that condition family stress in the first place.

Experiences While Homeless

Once on their own, LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk for many of the problems that accompany youth homelessness. They are more likely to use drugs and experience sexual and physical abuse than cisgender and heterosexual homeless youth (Cochran et al. 2002; Gattis 2013; Whitbeck et al. 2004), their likelihood of which is already higher than their peers at all

economic levels (Edidin et al. 2012; Toro, Dworsky and Fowler 2007). LGBTQ+ youth on the street experience longer episodes of homelessness (Choi et al. 2015; Durso and Gates 2012) and higher rates of mental health problems, including suicide attempts (Keuroghlian, Shtasel and Bassuk 2014; Moskowitz, Stein and Lightfoot 2013; Whitbeck et al. 2004). Discrimination towards LGBTQ+ persons, especially towards transgender youth, can make accessing healthcare difficult or impossible (Cochran et al. 2002; Mottet and Ohle 2006; Yu 2010). An inability to find employment also contributes to the higher rate of LGBTQ+ homeless youth resorting to sex work as a survival strategy and contracting sexually transmitted infections (Greene, Ennett and Ringwalt 1999; Rew 2001; Van Leeuwen et al. 2006; Walls and Bell 2011).

Our current system of policies, shelters, and services available to aid LGBTQ+ youth have yet to match the existing need or completely mitigate against discrimination based on sexual or gender identity (Abramovich 2012; Choi et al. 2015; Hunter 2008). In New York City, for example, 250 LGBT-specific beds exist for an estimated 570-8,000 LGBT homeless youths (Ream and Forge 2014). Further, non-LGBTQ+-specific shelters and services have a history of discriminating against LGBTQ+ youth and lead many to live on the streets (Abramovich 2012; Hunter 2008; Ray 2006).

Racial and ethnic prejudices further exacerbate these conditions as estimates suggest that Black youth are overrepresented in LGBTQ+ youth homelessness, making up an estimated 30% of the group (Choi et al. 2015). Racism, especially within queer-focused spaces, continue to marginalize Black LGBTQ+ youth and hinder their ability to access services and remove barriers to exiting homelessness (Billies 2015; Orne 2017; Reck 2009; Rosenberg 2017).

Is There an Exit?

Considered altogether for LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness, the combined high rates of sexual and physical abuse, use of drugs and alcohol rates, and mental and sexual health risks would suggest many would enter into chronic adult homelessness. Studies on youth experiencing homelessness (although not LGBTQ+ specific) have identified that the aforementioned adverse childhood events are strong risk factors for adult homelessness in general, especially chronic homelessness (Herman et al. 1997; Koegel, Melamid and Burnam 1995; Nino, Loya and Cuevas 2009; van den Bree et al. 2009). For example, Chamberlain and Johnson (2013) found that out of 3,941 homeless adult respondents, 35% experienced their present homelessness as a continuation from youth homelessness, far outpacing other factors such as housing crises (19%), substance abuse (17%), mental health issues (16%), and family breakdown as an adult (11%). Further, life course scholars have found that incidents of foster care, homelessness, and similar situations during childhood and young adulthood are likely to lead to increased socioeconomic precarity for emerging adults (Arnett 2007; Wenzel et al. 2012; Yen, Powell Hammond and Kushel 2009).

We can thus assume that LGBTQ+ adults are likewise overrepresented in the adult homeless population when considering these two conclusions: 1) LGBTQ+-identified youth are overrepresented in youth homeless counts, and, 2) common youth homeless experiences (sex work, exploitation, drug use, work in the informal economy, and more) are significant predictors

for future homeless episodes and chronic adult homelessness.[7] Still, this best guess still needs empirical evidence.

USING AN ORGANIZATIONAL LENS FOR LGBTQ+ HOMELESSNESS

Using an organizational lens to study LGBTQ+ homelessness provides us with better insight into whether LGBTQ+ youth and young adults are exiting homelessness. Although unable to demonstrate long-term outcomes, this research suggests that current interventions are ineffective at providing short-term stability for young adults experiencing homelessness. I specifically investigate three dimensions of homeless centers catering to young adults. First, I analyze the spatial-temporal dimensions of homeless organizations in the Chicago area: how organizations are dispersed and how they construct timetables for themselves and clients. Second, I connect framing discourses of homelessness, adulthood, and sexuality to organizational rules, policies, and practices: how organizations interpret, reproduce, and challenge larger narratives around frames of homelessness and their clients. Finally, I tie both the spatial-temporal dimensions and the organizational rules and practices to immediate outcomes of young adult clients experiencing homelessness: how these organizational dynamics affect the short-term pathways available to young adults moving through homeless episodes.

Overall, this research demonstrates the need for scholars and policy-makers to pair homeless research with organizational analyses. The spatial-temporal dimensions of organizations and the ways in which organizations manage and regulate young adults create additional barriers to finding housing and economic stability. Connecting these practices and the

[7] It should be noted that the general movement from childhood or teen homelessness into adult homelessness is still poorly understood. There is a group of researchers in Canada who are working on this, but research is still developing. (see Baker Collins et al. 2016)

geographical dispersion to larger discourses and historical movements helps us contextualize *why* the organizations are operating in a way that often hinders rather than helps their clients. By recognizing the power dynamics at work, based on discourses of homelessness, adulthood, and sexuality, policy-makers can include more practical interventions when organizing homeless services and resources.

US POVERTY AND HOMELESS RELIEF: DEPENDENT ON ORGANIZATIONS

While homeless centers seem to many as a natural part of society, a brief overview of the developments in the United States' approach and rationales to poverty relief demonstrate the increasing importance of organizations like these shelters. Prior to the 1900s, poverty relief was highly localized and largely the realm of private organizations like the Charity Organization Society or local governments (Katz 2013). No federal agency coordinated homeless relief—instead, cities, states, and charitable organizations helped when they could. "Tramps" and "vagabonds" roamed from cities to rural towns often knocking on doors asking for something to eat (Kusmer 2002). As time went on, fewer cities and townships penalized vagrants although they were sometimes forcibly placed in almshouses.

As the Great Depression hit the United States, the federal government began investing in poverty relief more than ever. In 1935, the United States created a cash-welfare system as part of the Social Security Act: Aid for Dependent Children (ADC). ADC was modeled after local mother's pensions[8] and allocated federal dollars for cash payments to families in poverty currently raising children (Howard 1992). However, transients—most often men—still had little

[8] Mothers' pensions arose in local governments during the 1910s to provide regular payments to abandoned or widowed mothers of dependent children. The purpose was to provide the money necessary for raising kids so the children would not be placed in foster homes or orphanages (see Skocpol 1995).

federal support and the increasing number of unhoused persons strained city and community resources. The infamous "Hoovervilles" began to develop, wherein homeless individuals putting together makeshift shacks and bartering with each other for needed supplies (Kusmer 2002).

Although Congress routinely reduced welfare benefits between the creation of ADC in 1935 until the major welfare overhaul in 1996, few structural changes in federal welfare and homeless relief occurred (Gordon 1994).[9] The 1980s, however, brought about a wave of concern about homelessness while also reducing welfare funding and the number of individuals on welfare rolls. Rates of homelessness had swelled beyond the skid-row era of the previous decade and garnered enough public attention for action.[10] However, the response was an uncoordinated, patchwork system:

> "The resulting perception of emergency need generated a grass-roots response from many individuals and from nonprofit and religious groups. … The predominant 'system' arrangement that emerged was a loose collection of independent, small, service providers seeking to serve a specific need or a specific segment of the homeless population." (Hambrick Jr and Rog 2000: 354)

In 1994, the Department of Housing and Urban Development began experimenting with a new model of coordinating homelessness relief and federal funding for homeless social services called the "Continuum of Care" (CoC). Municipal government agencies or non-profits could organize a CoC, which then would coordinate the broad, regional coalition of public agencies, community non-profits, and other organizations working to alleviate homelessness. Based on number of homeless individuals in a specific CoC-governed area, HUD would announce the

[9] One important exception may be the ways in which federal and state governments altered poverty aid and child welfare rules as Black Americans secured the right to federal assistance after the Civil Rights Act (Kail and Dixon 2011; Roberts 2009).

[10] While causes of homelessness have shifted over time, scholars generally agree that the swell of homelessness during the 1980s derived from the changing economic landscape for the urban poor after the 1970s. Homelessness was less a persistent state for individuals (chronic homelessness), and more a revolving door repeatedly entered and exited by people in poverty (episodic homelessness) (see chapter 1 in Baumohl 1996).

amount of funds for each CoC for that given year. The CoC would then determine the priorities of its area's homeless efforts and the region's non-profits would submit applications for HUD funding through the CoC. The CoC then would judge applications based on its priorities, rank the organizations and programs that applied for funding, and allocate the money based on that ranking.

While homeless counts were rising in the 1970s and 1980s, a poor economy led many politicians to put the blame on government programs like those set up by Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty. This antimony towards welfare programs connected with racial hostility as greater numbers of women of color accessed poverty benefits (Hancock 2004). Racial resentment has been found to underlie voter and politician views on poverty and homelessness, and those attitudes fueled growing mistrust of poverty-relief policies throughout the 1980s and 1990s (DeSante 2013; Gilens 2009; Hancock 2004). Claiming that government interventions create a culture of dependency, politicians crafted racist tropes of Black "welfare queens" who gamed the system. These stereotypes were (and are) weaponized to justify reducing funding and enforcing increasingly strict eligibility requirements for welfare (Collins 2002; Hays 2004). Also critical to note, poverty and homeless policies are founded on norms of heterosexism and cissexism (Canaday 2009b; Shelton 2015). This means that policies regarding welfare and homeless services actively privilege heterosexual families while punishing those that deviate from those norms. This includes policies that restrict access to resources for gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals and marriage eligibility requirements for welfare applicants.

In 1996, Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA). This new legislation replaced AFDC with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Now, welfare has a 5-year lifetime limit, strict work requirements, and moral

regulations to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies and single-parent households (Hays 2004). The increased eligibility requirements have made welfare offices and staff ever more important to the distribution of resources to help individuals escape poverty (Hasenfeld 2010; Hays 2004; Schram et al. 2009; Watkins-Hayes 2009). As Allard (2008) argues: "The shift away from cash assistance and emphasis upon work have made issues of access to social service agencies more relevant today than at any point since the New Deal." (36) This welfare reform set the stage for increased economic precarity for many families and contributed to the increased prevalence of episodic homelessness for families in poverty (Miles and Fowler 2006: see also Edin and Shaefer 2015). And while we cannot empirically link youth and young adult homeless trends to welfare reform, scholars have noted that increased economic precarity in families is connected to increased risks of homelessness, especially for LGBTQ+ persons (Robinson 2018a).

In 2009, the Continuum of Care model was codified into law with the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act and CoCs had to be established and following guidelines by the year 2012. Today, CoCs set regional homeless alleviation goals, coordinate data collection on homeless counts, host and manage the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and coordinate funding for emergency and transitional shelters. Although this approach finally appropriated significant federal resources towards the alleviation of homelessness, it also provided non-governmental organizations with increased power to frame homelessness and set the conditions for aiding people without housing.

Public-Private Partnerships

These developments reveal a shift in the US government's approach to poverty and homelessness that consists of decentralizing control to state and local governments alongside

partnerships with non-governmental agencies. State or local governments might set up a CoC, but services for homeless individuals are largely controlled by non-governmental organizations. Similarly, as PRWORA shifted away from cash assistance to job training, education, and work placement, the government contracted non-profit and for-profit companies to provide services (Haney 2010; see also Rose (1999)). This created a system of welfare provision in which non-governmental organizations are not just partners in providing aid to people in need, but are critical actors in defining and impacting public issues. Marwell and Morrissey (2020) define this system as *governance*, or "the relationships and interactions between government and nonprofit organizations, as well as the conditions and rules that frame them, that give rise to goal setting, steering, and implementation regarding public issues" (233). Thus, the policy of contracting non-governmental agencies for addressing the public's socioeconomic needs increases the importance of organizations like homeless shelters, food pantries, hospitals, prisons, and other agencies in alleviating poverty and managing populations.

System of Homeless Services in the US

Currently, the majority of federal assistance for homeless programs can only be accessed through a single application submitted by a CoC (Boyd et al. 2020; Mosley 2021).[11] Overall, the CoCs operate by coordinating a three-tier homeless response structure—also called the "staircase" model. Emergency shelters are often first contact individuals have with the homeless system, and there individuals and families will be given referrals to other housing services and

[11] Seven US federal departments provide funds for homeless organizations including ED, DHS, HHS, DOJ, HUD, DOL, and VA. However, aside from HUD's funds, these department grants are highly targeted for specific populations (e.g. – funds for grade schools with homeless children, funds for domestic violence shelters, and health care for veterans).

resources. If individuals/families need more intensive support or time to reach stability, emergency shelters will often refer them to the second tier: transitional housing shelters. These transitional programs provide wrap-around services and aim to promote "housing readiness" through treatments, trainings, and case management (Wong, Park and Nemon 2006). The third-tier, permanent supportive housing, provides housing for individuals unlikely to maintain stable housing on their own. While the majority of CoC coordinated services are now permanent housing (57% of beds), these are still managed by individual non-governmental organizations (Homelessness 2020). As an example, Chicago's CoC, *allChicago,* coordinates the funding and strategic plans for over 100 homeless organizations.

Many cities in the US have adopted a reversal of the staircase model called "Housing First." This approach focuses on providing stable housing and then providing wrap-around services for other concerns[12]. However, the majority of Housing First programs focus on individuals with a long history of *chronic* homelessness or who qualify for permanent supportive housing[13]. Thus, able-bodied young adults are rarely listed as a priority for Housing First programs.

From one tier to another, non-governmental agencies operate as the providers of homeless services and support. Individuals experiencing homelessness can move throughout years of homeless episodes without ever entering or speaking with government officials—even if their organizations are funded by federal or state governments. CoCs also coordinate initiatives and objectives for their region's homeless response. As collectives of non-governmental

[12] See: "Fact Sheet: Housing First" by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2016: http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/housing-first-fact-sheet.pdf

[13] See Chicago's Housing First plan as part of their overarching objectives to reduce homelessness. In this plan, they specifically document an increase Housing First units for permanent supportive housing services. https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/fss/supp_info/Homeless/Plan20/ChicagoPlan20FullVersion.pdf

organizations, this demonstrates how *governance* (Marwell and Morrissey 2020) operates in the homeless management system. These organizations are important voices for the framing of homelessness as a social issue, the goal-setting and steering of homeless initiatives, and the allocation of federal funds.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS AFFECT POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

Having established that organizations are fundamental to poverty and homeless relief in the US, it is necessary to understand *how* they impact the distribution of aid and the management of people in poverty (Allard and Small 2013). Specifically, organizations are primarily important for understanding poverty and homelessness in the following four ways. As described above, organizations serve as resource brokers: collecting, coordinating and allocating poverty aid. Second, organizations that affect life chances for people in poverty and those experiencing homelessness extend beyond welfare offices and homeless centers. Recognizing the organizational networks and their geographic dispersion helps demonstrate how poverty is managed via the movement of people through organizations (Allard 2008; Lara-Millán 2021). Third, the ways in which people understand the causes and experiences of poverty and homelessness, the expected method for moving through or out of their situation, and the resources available are all mediated by organizations (Watkins-Hayes, Pittman-Gay and Beaman 2012). Finally, organizations link systemic political discourses of welfare, poverty relief, and deservingness to the local level where resource distribution takes place (Hays 2004; Marwell and McQuarrie 2013).

Resource Brokerage and Organizational Ecology

As the government decentralized its approach to poverty relief and created public-private partnerships with many non-profits, organizations and local coalitions have become the main source for distributing funds and in-kind resources to populations in need (Allard and Small 2013: 8). Organizations providing direct relief include food pantries, welfare offices, non-profit legal aid centers, child-care centers, educational and vocational training, and homeless shelters. Many centers, like transitional housing shelters, also function as brokers to a suite of services—providing in-house education/vocational training, connecting clients to legal aid, coordinating with health care centers, and more.

However, organizations do more than simply collect and distribute available funds and resources. Small's (2009) research on organizationally embedded resource networks exposed an important mechanism for how organizations intentionally *and* incidentally connect clients to social and other resource ties. In his ethnographic work on child day-care centers, Small found that, "the process of tie formation, to the extent it is organizationally embedded, conditions" the effectiveness of social ties that provide the means for economic mobility. In short he argued, "To know what good a tie does an actor, one should know how the actor formed the tie." (Chapter 8, Paragraph 3).

To effectively broker social ties and other resources, an organization must 1) provide opportunities for regular and long-lasting interactions; 2) be minimally competitive and maximally cooperative; and, 3) be grounded in both external and internal motivations for brokering ties (Small 2009). Further, an organization's effectiveness at brokering organizational ties depends on, among other things, the extent of the organization's network diversity. In these ways, organizations, whether intentionally or not, connect clients with people, resources, and

other organizations and thus function as an important mechanism for distributing access to economic mobility.

The unique characteristics of homeless centers and individuals experiencing homelessness make an organizational analysis of homelessness distinct from previous work centered on individuals in poverty. Individuals experiencing housing insecurity will have longer and more frequent interactions with homeless organizations. Whether living at a shelter or simply finding a center to stay during the day, homeless organizations differ from other welfare and poverty non-profits as being a place to *live* as well as a place to access resources or aid. Homeless organizations also function to provide a high number of *purposeful* resources and social ties. Most shelters and centers today work to ensure access to a wide variety of support including legal aid, food, shelter, mental health care, addiction and drug treatment, etc. Many have direct partnerships with employers, health clinics, and more. Homeless shelters often attempt to operate as a "one-stop shop" for connecting individuals with all the resources and connections they need. Thus, the amount of resources offered and the need for frequent and lengthy interactions make homeless centers unique among other organizations that work with individuals in poverty.

People experiencing poverty or homelessness do not solely interact with welfare offices and homeless shelters. A broad range of organizations work together to "redistribute the poor." Lara-Millán (2021) investigated why public expenditures for jails, hospitals, and welfare continued to increase while the number of people in each institution decreased. He argues that state officials and organizations "circulate people between different institutional spaces" and how, "despite the public resolution of crises, people continue to suffer and the underlying economic strife continues" (3-4). Schools, welfare offices, and hospitals criminalize the poor

partly to solve their own organizational needs: send them to prisons or probation offices to lessen costs and capacity. Conversely, prisons and jails medicalize inmates, pass them to drug programs or probation officers, or discharge them to homeless centers and halfway houses. Public libraries, food pantries, community centers, parks, and more all play roles in the movement and redistribution of impoverished or unhoused persons.

As organizations structure the movement of populations in poverty, the geographic dispersion of these organizational networks also affect the ability of people to access and mobilize resources. Another consequence of the US's decentralized approach to social services is the existence of a scattered network of social service organizations. Allard (2008) argues,

> "Matters of place and access to opportunity affect how well the safety net achieves its goals of promoting employment and self-sufficiency. … [A] mismatched distribution of safety net resources hinders the effectiveness of social welfare programs and produces misleading impressions of program impact." (49)

He finds that social service organizations are often found *outside* of impoverished neighborhoods (see also: Freeman Anderson 2017). This decreases the likelihood that individuals have the time or capacity to travel to organizations, that organizations will reflect the identities and values of the impoverished communities they serve, and whether individuals are even aware the organizations exist. When investigating the safety net as a whole (including government offices, nongovernment antipoverty organizations, and other community institutions), geography matters in how individuals are able to access and mobilize resources to improve life circumstances (Allard 2008: 9).

Thus, the ways in which organizations broker social and organizational ties for clients and the ways in which organizations are geographically dispersed both hold important consequences for the possibility of socioeconomic mobility. In this dissertation, I investigate the

geographic spread of young adult homeless shelters and centers in the Chicago area to demonstrate how the dispersion creates significant barriers for exiting homelessness.

Framing Institutions

The ability of people in poverty to improve their socioeconomic standing is predicated upon their understanding of why they are in poverty and any possible solutions, resources, or actions available to them. However, this understanding does not appear immediately once someone enters, or is born into, poverty. Instead, political platforms, media, families, and social service organizations all play a part in *framing* the experience of poverty and homelessness and *developing* the conceptual framework individuals use in adapting to their circumstances.

Sociologists have long discussed how individuals are socialized into their ways of knowing and acting. Goffman (1978) used the metaphor of *scripts* to describe how individuals learn repertoires of thought and action to carry out various social roles. Swidler (1986) argued that people learn habits, skills, and strategies of action and carry these in a *cultural toolkit* to use when encountering new situations. And Bourdieu (1990) conceptualized the *habitus* to explain embodiment of socialized norms which guide behaviors and thoughts, and which is constantly shaped by interactions with other people, organizations, and societal structures. Using these theories, scholars of homelessness have attempted to demonstrate how people experiencing homelessness and poverty draw from scripts (Cloke, May and Johnsen 2008; Roschelle and Kaufman 2004), cultural toolkits (Frederick 2019; Snow and Anderson 1993), and habitus (Barker 2016; Farrugia 2011) to make their pathways through homeless episodes.

What scholars often miss from these analyses are ways in which organizations function as *framing institutions*. Developed from Benford and Snow's (2000) work on framing and social

movements, framing institutions generate the "language, adaptive skills, and practical knowledge that shape how individuals interpret a new life condition" (Watkins-Hayes, Pittman-Gay and Beaman 2012: 2030). For those facing poverty or homelessness, social service organizations help individuals craft narratives of why they find themselves in these situations and their potential avenues for socioeconomic improvement. Homeless centers might focus on personal characteristics of grit, perseverance, and hard work or structural conditions of economic realities and political advocacy (Cress and Snow 2000; Croteau and Hicks 2003; Noy 2009; Robinson 2018b). These frames then influence both personal understandings and approaches to one's homelessness as well as dictating the organizational requirements for accessing resources.

Federal, state, and local policies all frame poverty and homelessness in various ways. Hays (2004) describes how the 1996 welfare reform laws created two conflicting frames of poverty which put heavy burdens on women to prove their deservingness of aid. On one hand, women were required to demonstrate their family values and were penalized for having children out of wedlock, getting divorced, or being away from children. On the other hand, women also had to prove they were independent and self-sufficient by leaving the home and focusing on work. Welfare centers and caseworkers then interpreted, negotiated, and regulated these competing frames as they worked with clients attempting to access resources and aid. Subsequent research demonstrated how organizations and staff negotiate these frames based on personal positions and beliefs (Watkins-Hayes 2009), networks of organizational coalitions (Croteau and Hicks 2003), and funding sources (Sutton 2018).

Bridging Discourses, Regulation, and Individuals

As discussed above, national policies and political conceptions of poverty and homelessness frame the ways in which the public and individuals understand, cope with, and find exits from poverty and homelessness. These frames are not simply cultural objects, but are discourses of power by which governments and institutions manage populations. Originating in Foucault's theorization of decentralized power, discourse is the means by which power operates in society:

> "…there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association." (Foucault 1980: 93)

It is thus a combination of language and practices that construct knowledge and subjects to control (Hall 2004).

Perhaps the most infamous discourse in poverty regulation is the *discourse of deservingness* (Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky 2016). Poverty relief in the US is based on the cultural value of economic independence and self-sufficiency (Fraser and Gordon 1994). When deciding how to allocate funds, individuals are deemed "deserving" of assistance if they conform to that value. For example, the most generous poverty programs in the US target the sick, the disabled, and the elderly (Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky 2016). Welfare legislation has implemented time limits for "able-bodied" and working-age individuals as well as strict requirements to seek work in the formal economy. These policies reform or penalize those who either resist or are unable to meet these expectations (Katz 2013; Schram et al. 2010; Soss, Fording and Schram 2011b).

Discourses of power describing and managing homelessness have evolved as socioeconomic conditions in the US have shifted over time. Gowan (2010) identified the evolution through three discourses in American history: homelessness as sin, as sickness, and as systemic consequence. The remedies of homelessness prescribed by these discourses include, respectively, exclusion, treatment, and social change. In their work describing the "New Homelessness," Lee, Tyler and Wright (2010) demonstrate how discourses in both research and policy before the 2000s focused on individual-level explanations and solutions. Similarly to Gowan, they note a shift at the turn of the century towards structural causes of homelessness and the creation of policies like Housing First. Yet other scholars maintain that the US' current discourse of homelessness largely consists of an urban blight solved by removal and criminalization (Mitchell 2011; Stuart 2016). For example, NYC police changed their designation of homeless encampments to "hotspots" as a way to target and disperse homeless groups in gentrifying or gentrified neighborhoods (Goldfischer 2020)

Organizations function as the enforcers of these discourses as well as the sites for their reproduction and evolution. As described by Marwell and McQuarrie (2013):

> "[O]rganizations affect neighborhood circumstances and people [through] (1) how organizational action is conditioned by practices and developments within the fields in which organizations are embedded [and] (2) how organizational action at the local level [plays] a role in the structuring of those fields." (139)

National discourses of poverty and homelessness shape individual's lives *through* organizations—and this is increasingly true in the United States' "context of a decentralized safety net that depends on local organizations for the delivery of services to populations in need" (Allard and Small 2013: 8). Thus, it is important for researchers to evaluate the intersections between national discourses of power, organizational practices and logics, and individual

pathways through poverty and homeless. The organization itself, as the site of negotiating between individual needs and power discourses, is a prime site for research on homelessness and poverty.

Altogether, we see the importance of organizations, their practices and logics, and their geographic placement to the alleviation and maintenance of poverty. Yet, research and policy work on homelessness rarely interacts with this organizational lens. Some studies have attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Continuum of Care (Hambrick Jr and Rog 2000; Wong, Park and Nemon 2006), but have mostly focused on resource allocation without a discussion of the power discourses which structure an organization's practices. And while other scholars have described the discourses that frame homeless individuals and their pathways (Gowan 2010; Mitchell 2011), they have not shown how organizations function as the site of discourse reproduction and contestation (Marwell and McQuarrie 2013). Thus, this dissertation begins to bring an organizational lens into conversation with homeless research through an investigation of homeless centers that work with LGBTQ+ young adults.

ORGANIZATIONS, POVERTY, AND YOUTH

Scholars have recently begun connecting the life course of individuals to neighborhood organizations, organizational dynamics, and organizational networks (Browning, Cagney and Boettner 2016). Within youth studies, research has increasingly focused on how organizations collectively criminalize youth. Rios (2011) names this the *youth control complex:* a system in which the organizations and institutions that intersect with young people's lives construct actions of young people as criminal and respond accordingly. These organizations and institutions include the family, hospitals, police, probation officers, community centers, schools and more.

The criminalization by these organization can be both material (harassment, exclusion, no-loitering policies, detention, suspensions, etc.) or symbolic (surveillance, stigma, paternalistic attitudes, profiling, etc.). This symbolic criminalization pulls from power discourses of racialized youth as "thugs" or "urban problems" (Tilton 2010) and selects the material criminalization processes to manage young people. Because these organizations are gatekeepers to important resources for survival and life improvement (education, healthcare, food, etc.), youth must continue navigating these systems. Thus, we see how organizations play an important role in the life course of young people through resource dispersion, the framing of individuals and organizational responses, connecting young people to larger discourses of power, and working as a system to regulate and criminalize them.

Queer Control Complex

While originally the *youth control complex* focused largely on the racist dynamics of the organizational system to control youth, subsequent work has found large efforts by community organizations to regulate heteronormative and cisnormative behaviors. Robinson (2020a) conceptualizes this process as the *queer control complex*: a system of organizations and institutions that police specifically LGBTQ+ youth's gender and sexual expression and behaviors. The criminalization of young Black and Brown people also regulates racialized forms of masculinity and femininity (Stuart and Benezra 2018). Overall, these processes demonstrate how organizations control access to needed resources, frame individuals and their needs, and regulate the behaviors of youth to fit dominant notions of citizenship, gender, sexuality, and race.

Young Adults

Finally, this research investigates social services that specifically deal with young adults. While research has started to connect the life course to organizational networks in neighborhoods (Browning, Cagney and Boettner 2016), the field still focuses primarily on children, adolescents and the elderly. As discussed earlier, these populations are often considered the most deserving of welfare assistance (Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky 2016) and thus the majority of poverty relief is tailored to these demographic groups (Sironi and Furstenberg 2012). This has left young adults with few opportunities for government assistance, while simultaneously having the highest rates of poverty among any other age group (Hawkins 2019; Wimer et al. 2020). In fact, in Chicago, the percent of homeless individuals is decreasing for every age group *except* people ages 18-24. In 2020, homelessness among 18-24 year-olds increased by 29% (allChicago 2021). It is thus critical to understand how political and social discourses are framing young adults who are homeless, how organizations mediate and regulate those discourses, and the effects of those discourses on young adults experiencing homelessness. Yet, little research has focused on young adults and the ways in which organizations manage their movements through homeless episodes.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

To complete this organizational analysis of LGBTQ+ young adult homelessness, between 2018 and 2020 I collected data among four Chicago homeless centers that cater to young adults (Appendix A; Table 1.2). During those years, I conducted 386 hours of volunteer ethnography (Robinson 2020a) at the shelters. I conducted informal interviews with staff and clients and used field notes for analysis, as well as collecting and analyzing documents from volunteer orientations, youth handbooks, employee manuals, and client databases. In 2020, I interviewed

29 LGBTQ+ young adults who experienced homelessness during young adulthood in the Chicago area (Table 1.2). Finally, during the summer of 2020, I interviewed 1 former CEO of a homeless center, 2 former lead case managers, and a youth advisor—asking specific questions relating to the results I was uncovering from analyzing my field notes, documents, and interviews with LGBTQ+ young adults.

In the next section, I describe the four homeless centers I studied. I provide short histories of their work in Chicago, their location in the city, the clients they service, and the services they provide.

YOUNG ADULT HOMELESS CENTERS IN CHICAGO

In 2018, I attended the *True Colors United Impact Summit* in Atlanta, a yearly conference organized by LGBTQ+ young people who have experienced homelessness. Executives, directors, staff, and young clients from homeless centers all throughout the nation gathered for training on best practices towards understanding and supporting LGBTQ+ youth. At the conference, I met Ms. Judy Carrington-Marr, a newly hired CEO of *Project Alight—Chicago. Project Alight* is an international Christian non-profit that establishes homeless centers and shelters all throughout the world. They had opened *Project Alight—Chicago* in 2016 and Judy was hired to expand an interim housing facility to temporarily house around 16 young adults for 120 days at a time. Judy was new to social services and, after hearing about my dissertation project, eagerly accepted my request to conduct research at *Project Alight* as a volunteer.

Over the next year, I negotiated access with two more parent organizations and began volunteering at a total of four homeless centers: *Project Alight*, *Fierce*, and *La Fortaleza-West*, and *La Fortaleza-South*. All four centers provided resources for young adults (ages 18-24)

experiencing homelessness. However, they were chosen specifically because of their geographic spread, their targeted demographics, their ideological foundations, and the types of services they provide.

Because of Chicago's infamous racial segregation between the majority African-American "South Side," the majority Latinx/Hispanic "West Side," and the majority white "North Side," I chose organizations that served each of these regions: *Project Alight* near downtown, *Fierce* on the Northside, *La Fortaleza-West* on the Westside, and *La Forteleza-South* on the Southside of Chicago. While *Project Alight* had no specific target demographic besides young adults, *Fierce* specifically catered to LGBTQ+ and racial minorities and *La Fortaleza* was created to fill a need for the Hispanic/Latinx populations on the West and South sides of Chicago.

Ideologically, *Project Alight* aligns with its religious foundations. The Director of International Programs, who I met at *True Colors United*, maintained that their church's sponsor had no direct influence over policies—but their mission statement and principles contained clear religious themes (explored more in chapter three). *Fierce* operated with clear frameworks from civil rights activist circles. such as restorative justice and sex positivity. *La Fortaleza* based its services with language and ideals from contemporary policy recommendations, prioritizing a *Housing First* model and its collaboration with Chicago's Continuum of Care.

While there are a myriad of programs and centers for individuals seeking homelessness, I chose organizations that tended to have longer relationships with young adults, either because of interim housing programs or long-lasting case management and resource assistance. Thus, I did not conduct observations at emergency shelters, libraries, or similar places where young adults experiencing homelessness frequent, but relationships with staff are less likely to be forged.

Instead, *Project Alight, Fierce,* and *La Fortaleza-West* each had a drop-in day center where clients often became regulars because of the depth and breadth of services. *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza-South* also had interim housing where young adults could stay for up to 120 days—providing a sense of security and attachment to the organization. Below, I describe each of the organizations with brief histories, the setting of their sites, and the services they provide.

Project Alight—Chicago

Project Alight is located close to downtown Chicago next to a busy shopping district in a large, 23-story Art-Deco building. Much of the building comprises of nearly 600 single-room-occupancy (SRO) units with reduced rents for low-income individuals. The day center (or drop-in) for *Project Alight* functioned, as I soon learned, like most other drop-ins catering to young adults. Depending on the number of staff available for the day, a space capacity ("the cap") was set to determine how many clients could enter the space. Between 8-9am, if a young-adult arrived before the cap, they gained access to the space from 9am to 3pm. *Project Alight* required all those in the day center to either attend "group meetings" in which staff members led discussions or workshops on various topics from "self-compassion" to "networking". If staff were not holding a group meeting or serving food, clients were expected to be working on their case plan, as negotiated with an assigned case manager. Case plans required young adults to focus on at least one of three goals: improving education, gaining job skills or finding a job, and finding housing.

Across the hallway is the interim residential side of *Project Alight*. If a client is lucky enough to make it through the 50+ person waitlist, they will be assigned a room for up to 120 days. "Residential," as the clients and staff call it, is open from 3pm till 8am the next morning

and operates with fewer planned activities, although clients need a staff escort to enter and leave at any time before curfew (9pm). These strict temporal arrangements restrict movement, and clients must yield to organizational structures in order to access services.

La Fortaleza

La Fortaleza started in 2002 to serve the Hispanic population of the West side, but has since grown to multiple locations throughout the West and South sides of Chicago. *La Fortaleza-West* is on a busy street lined with dilapidated buildings. Many of the stores in the 2-story brick buildings were closed with "FOR RENT" signs in the windows, and few people walked the sidewalks. *La Fortaleza*'s building stood out from the surrounding area: a four-story, mostly glass façade that spanned the space of multiple building lots.

La Fortaleza-South is situated in an industrial area that formerly housed the Union Stock Yards, once the largest meatpacking center in the country and the setting for Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. The neighborhood today is still filled with industrial plants, car repair lots, and similar facilities. *La Fortaleza-South* is found on a block of small 2-story brick buildings in between a permanently closed seafood restaurant and a small, local auto parts shop.

The day center at *La-Fortaleza-West* remains open until 8pm or 9pm daily—later than most other services. While they do have some restrictions on entering and exiting (see chapter 3), the environment feels much more relaxed than *Project Alight*'s strict entry/exit requirements. *La Fortaleza-South* opens at 3pm, similar to *Project Alight*'s residential program. Here, clients must enter before 9pm or lose their bed (unless they have preapproved work or other obligations). Clients are also searched (for weapons, drugs, and illicit material like pornography) in an entryway before entering and cannot leave without staff permission.

Fierce

Fierce started 20 years ago as an independent non-profit with the purpose of providing a haven for LGBTQ+ young people. During its history, *Fierce* has moved through various locations in and around Chicago's LGBTQ+-neighborhood, "Boystown." A former Assistant Director explained that *Fierce* initially started to give Black and Brown youth a place to escape both the homophobia of Chicago as a whole and the racism experienced specifically in "Boystown".[14] As economic conditions worsened after the 2008 recession and ever-increasing rent, *Fierce* had more and more homeless young adults asking for aid (both LGBTQ+ and straight/cisgender individuals). After being subsumed by a large LGBTQ+ health non-profit in Chicago, *Fierce* operates as a drop-in center for LGBTQ+ and homeless young adults (largely young adults of color) alongside a health clinic with full-time physicians, nurses, therapists and a twice-a-week psychiatrist.

A staff member sits at a desk in the day center, entering the days metrics or responding to requests from other teams at the clinic. Other staff members are often found playing cards, painting, or chatting with the young adults in the room. If requested, a team member from the Education/Vocational Resource team or the Resource Advocate team (housing, healthcare, legal, etc.) will escort a client into a back office. Behind the large drop-in room, clients can shower, use the washer/dryer, or search through a clothing/hygiene goods closet. In a small room behind the desk, young adults can sleep on bunk-beds away from the bustle of the larger drop-in space.

Because of *Fierce's* history providing space away from discrimination and harassment, the organization rarely forces young adults to participate in activities, group meetings, or case

[14] See Chapter 12 of Jason Orne's (2017) *Boystown* for an in-depth examination of racial tensions within Chicago's LGBTQ+ neighborhood.

plans. While *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza* often pressured their clients to "be productive," *Fierce* emphasized finding sanctuary. Staff members pushed against norms of "regulating the poor" (Piven and Cloward 2012). As an example, a staff member at *Fierce* explained that they do not have case managers because, "Our young people are not cases to be managed." Instead, young adults could sign up to meet with Resource Advocates (RAs) for specific help regarding housing, education, vocational training or job searches, and more. While young adults took advantage of the ability to simply exist without any pressure every so often, most took time to actively meet with RAs, study, or address immediate needs like laundry, showers, and getting supplies. Throughout the dissertation, I will continue to highlight distinctions like these to demonstrate how discourses are reproduced or contested within organizations and how they affect clients in their efforts to achieve economic stability.

Homeless Center Staff

I argue in the dissertation that organizations link the broader social policies and cultural discourses with the young adults experiencing homelessness. However, we will see how staff at these shelters play an intermediary role between organizational rules and norms and the day-to-day actions of the young adults. We meet Luné, the lead case-manager at *La Fortaleza*, who had no notion of youth homelessness before finding a job as a youth advisor during college. There is Natasha, the lead case-manager at *Project Alight*, who worked at multiple youth homeless agencies for years until she became so frustrated with *Project Alight* that she would leave the sector altogether. And there's Ms. Carrington-Marr, who became CEO of a homeless center without any prior experience in social services or working with impoverished populations. Some staff simply wanted a job. Some are dedicated to addressing society's problems. But all must

interpret, negotiate, and navigate various federal and organizational policies as they work with clients.

Scholars have shown how street-level workers in social services operate must grapple with competing institutional pressures (Hays 2004; Lipsky 1971) and the norms, values, and histories that underlie their own identities (Watkins-Hayes 2009). These "Street-Level Bureaucrats" can often seem like the villains of an analysis that shows harmful outcomes for a marginalized population, but the reality is much more complex. And while I do not investigate the individual concerns, pressures, and values of the staff in the dissertation, I witnessed a range of reasons and conflicting rationales for the actions taken by staff. Future scholarship should continue to investigate the staff's role in navigating the policies and discourses that affect people's pathways in poverty and homelessness—especially in a system of governance where power is increasingly decentralized to non-state actors. But I hope readers do not simply cast blame on the staff, as even those perpetuating harmful discourses were doing so unknowingly and really did intend to help and serve those experiencing homelessness.

THE DISSERTATION PATHWAY

As mentioned earlier, I specifically explore three aspects of homeless centers catering to young adults: 1) the spatial-temporal dimensions of young adult homeless organizations in Chicago; 2) the connections between framing discourses and organizational rules and practices; and, 3) the consequences of these organizational dynamics on short-term outcomes of young adults experiencing homelessness. In what follows, I briefly outline the arguments of each chapter.

In chapter 2, I outline the effects of two historical shifts in poverty relief: deinstitutionalization and the development of a neoliberal public-private partnership of poverty relief. Prior to the 1970s, 'socially undesirable' people (the mentally ill, chronically homeless, and more) were often institutionalized in asylums where doctors and organizations had custodial care over their "patients". Facing various pressures, many of these asylums were shut down and clients were returned to their home communities for localized care (deinstitutionalization). Then, as welfare and homelessness became a social problem in the 1980s, the federal government instituted public-private partnerships for providing relief from poverty and homelessness. Together, these created three profound effects on the homeless pathways of young adults. First, deinstitutionalization created a geographically scattered and decentralized network of social services. Second, neoliberal policies weakened the social safety net and reduced the resources available for people in poverty and/or experiencing homelessness. Third, the deregulation in the economy has led to low wages with high rents and shifted the demographics of homelessness away from chronic homelessness towards a diverse groups of people who would experience homelessness in cycles. Thus, Chicago's young adult homeless network is both geographically dispersed throughout the city and must also deal with reduced resources and time constraints even though young adults require *more time* and *more resources* in order to craft a stable life in the current economic environment.

In chapter 3, I investigate the liminality of young adults in social policy and the intersection of young adults with the *youth control complex*. Young adults occupy a nebulous area between childhood innocence and adult responsibility—complicated by interactions with power dynamics of race and class. As federal policies and guidelines describe youth in contradictory categories of childhood and adulthood, organizations have no clear guidance or

institutionalized logic for how to work with young adults[15]. Thus, organizations have developed a distinct discourse of "adulthood" by which they judge the deservingness of young adults in order to allocate resources. This unstated logic forces young adults to guess when being dependent shows independence and when independence shows immaturity. The negotiation of adulthood, maturity, and independence often results in discharges from organizations and fewer opportunities for young adults to access the services they need.

In chapter 4, I continue to explore how organizations manage homeless populations by investigating the sexual regulation of young adult clients. I review the history of moral/sexual reform as part of poverty relief and demonstrate how *Project Alight*, despite using new justifications, follows this history and continues to regulate clients' sexualities in a way that is detrimental to their ability to reach economic stability. I review the history of LGBTQ+ movements resistance and complicity in sexual regulation as a lens for understanding *Fierce's* attempts to implement harm reduction and sex-positivity frameworks in its homeless center. Overall, I demonstrate that social service organizations restrict sexuality and sexual development, which is an important part of young adult (and human) physical, emotional, and economic stability. I show how a habitus of survival for homeless young adults *is itself* a sexual habitus. A regulation of sexuality is a restriction of strategies for survival.

[15] By institutional logic, I borrow from Thorton and Ocasio (1999) to describe the "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality." (804, quoted in Thornton and Ocasio 2008)

The Triple Intervention

Like much of scholarship that investigates social problems, this research makes empirical, theoretical, and political interventions. First, I solidify evidence that LGBTQ+ youth and young adults are unlikely to escape homelessness using the current homeless system available. Over the course of my research, few individuals successfully navigated the resources and organizations towards stability. This is not due to individual deficits, although many make mistakes along the way. However, these young adults are thrust into a system that is at best ill-equipped to meet the demands of contemporary, neoliberal housing and job markets and at worst is intentionally "redistributing" this population from organization to organization in order avoid public crises (Lara-Millán 2021).

The dispersed network of homeless centers attempt to speedily push individuals through programs. They do this despite knowing that young adults have faced decades of socioeconomic marginalization that is unlikely to be overcome in a matter of months. In order to justify withholding aid or expelling individuals from their care, they have developed a discourse of adulthood and maturity to judge young adults on their worthiness and readiness to enter into the formal economy. Yet, paradoxically, the standards by which they judge adulthood are the metrics of stability that young adults are *trying to achieve*. Finally, the framing of sexuality as a reward for economic stability restricts multiple pathways to stability and provides yet another avenue for organizations to discharge clients and reduce strains on capacity.

Theoretically, I argue that research on organizational networks must not only look at the overall geographic spread of social services (Allard 2004, 2008), but within specific sectors (e.g. – homeless sectors that cater to young adults). Scholarship must grapple with the mismatch of time-tables between that of the broader economy, those set by organizations, and those needed

by marginalized individuals to gain capital and stability. As homeless centers face pressure to demonstrate higher numbers of clients served to appease donors and government grant reviewers, they push clients through programs quickly without providing time to unpack trauma, to gain the skills necessary to compete in the formal economy, or to address decades of socioeconomic marginalization.

I also reveal how the discourse of adulthood and independence in homeless policy and organizational practice help explain why young adults in the US account for the largest age group in poverty and the fastest-growing percentage of homeless populations. As young adults exist in a liminal position in welfare discourses (between childhood innocence and adult responsibility) and legal designations (children in some policies and adults in others), organizations are pressured to find new logics to determine who receives care and who they can dismiss. Together, these interventions reveal how space, time, and adulthood discourses determine how homeless centers allocate aid and demonstrate the need for pairing homeless scholarship with organizational theories.

Finally, we must consider how homelessness is itself a form of sheltering that current political and economic discourses have allowed to exist. Reflecting on the radical politics of Silvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, I argue that despite any changes and developments remedying organizational practices, homelessness will endure as a social fact and a devastating experience for those living through it. Until coalitions are successful in the fight for sexual freedom and liberation from poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and other power dynamics, homelessness—and specifically homelessness of LGBTQ+ persons—will continue to scourge the US and the world.

2. At a Distance and On Hold: A Spatial-Temporal Analysis of Young Adult Homeless Centers as an Organizationally-Embedded Resource Network

In October 2020, Chicago entered its third and worst COVID spike since the pandemic began. *Fierce* finally started allowing volunteers to return to help with their center. I arrived at 8:30am and listened as staff explained the new protocols and services. From 9:00-11:00am, Fierce served a steady stream of young adults with to-go hot breakfasts and lunches, clothes, hygiene products, and other goods. After collecting what they needed, clients could drop off laundry to be washed and sign up for afternoon meetings with resource advocates. However, the pandemic required Fierce to shut down one of its prized resources: allowing clients to simply exist away from the rest of the world.

Dominique walks in smiling. She is a young, short Black woman that I have seen at all four research sites. Through our multiple passing conversations, I learned she works a full-time job, is trying to pay off some debts, and is looking for a higher-paying job so she can afford an apartment. She describes herself as a friendly, but fierce, self-defender against injustices directed at her. Referencing a history of abuse in the home and racial discrimination at the workplace, Dominique found speaking up early and often was one of the best ways she could protect herself.

She went through the service line, collecting the items and food she needed, and then asked to see the housing advocate. After being told she needed to sign up for a time slot between 1-3pm, Dominique raises her voice to the room in frustration:

> "Y'all told me this yesterday and I explained to you that I need to see someone in the morning! Y'all know I'm coming up from *La Fortaleza* early to get y'alls help and I gotta get to work by 10! I ain't able to come back from the West Side for this. If y'all are advocates, why aren't you working with me!"

La Fortaleza's temporary shelter on the south side is approximately 11 miles away from *Fierce,* taking over an hour by bus and train. Her work on the West Side requires two train rides totaling

another 45 minutes. After work ends around 6pm, she takes another two-bus, hour-long commute back to *La Fortaleza* in hopes she arrives before dinner is over. In total, Dominique's daily round includes 28 miles and almost three hours of travel time.[16]

The spatial dispersion of young adult-specific organizations costs Dominique both time and resources. She astutely plans her shelter visits: *La Fortaleza* is close to her home neighborhood and family. She comes to *Fierce* to receive, in her opinion, better one-on-one support for her housing needs and snatch one of the Target gift-cards that staff hand out regularly. (*Fierce* is also known for having the best breakfasts and lunches.) To access the resources at *Fierce,* she needs to use the bus card provided by *La Fortaleza* and hope that *Fierce* has enough remaining bus cards for her to travel to work.

RESOURCE BROKERAGE: MEDIATED BY SPACE AND TIME

Over the past four decades, the United States has cemented its commitment to a decentralized form of homeless relief through providing grants to non-profits (Allard and Small 2013; Hambrick Jr and Rog 2000). In this system, homeless organizations secure resources (food, shelter, and more) and distribute them to people in need. However, they also broker ties to other people and organizations that can assist individuals in socioeconomic mobility (Small and Gose 2020; Small 2009). These ties can be fostered among other homeless individuals who can share information or leads on job opportunities and housing options (Hersberger 2003; Molina-Jackson 2008). Organizational ties may include referrals to legal services, health clinics, job training services, and employment. At all four homeless centers, large bulletin boards had tens of job postings, educational options, clothing and grooming opportunities, and more. Most daily

[16] I asked her the address of her work and used Google Maps to estimate the fastest time between each location.

announcements would include some reference to a new job lead or reminder that a lawyer from the *Chicago Coalition for the Homeless* would be on-site next week to help with various legal needs.

Of the many mechanisms that contribute to successful tie formation, two provide important insights into this chapter's analysis: spatial dispersion and organization of time. Scott Allard (2008) noted how "geography matters" in the placement of social services throughout a city. Allard investigated the proximity between impoverished neighborhoods and the social services that help people in poverty. Closer proximity increased the likelihood that clients knew about the services, reduced the cost of seeking help (travel), and increased the likelihood that service-providers would be culturally sensitive and aware of local needs. Unfortunately, Allard found two concerns: 1) social services were less likely to reside in high-poverty and minority neighborhoods; and, 2) social services often became siloed—the "serious physical and operational partition among providers" (149)—by either their jurisdictional area or type of program offered. Overall, geographic spread greatly affects the ability of potential clients to access needed resources and for organizations to broker ties amongst their clients.

Organizations also require *time* to foster ties that assist people in upward socioeconomic mobility. In an analysis of low-income people's survival networks, Small and Gose (2020) find two important time-related factors that promote helpful survival ties. First, interactions between potential ties should be *frequent*; patrons to an organization will find more success in crafting survival ties when they have recurring interactions with the organization. Second, ties become stronger and more effective when a longer *duration* of time is spent in the organization and with potential ties.

This chapter expands this understanding of organizationally-embedded brokerage by exploring the cases of young adults experiencing homelessness and their movements through the network of young adult shelters and homeless centers. First, organizationally-embedded networks' effectiveness is mediated by geographic dispersion. I demonstrate how the history of deinstitutionalization and other economic pressures have created dispersed homeless organizations, siloed from both each other and from surrounding community organizations, and how this has reduced the efficacy of organizational brokerage in helping individuals access and mobilize resources. Second, organizational pressures to push young adults into stability *quickly* creates a temporal tension with clients' need to *recover* and with the *waiting* required for finding jobs and housing in today's economic context. This spatial-temporal dimension of organizational-brokerage plays an important role in explaining how inequality, especially for those in the direst of economic circumstances, is reproduced over time.

FROM DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION TO SERVICE-ORIENTED WELFARE

Before the 1970s, 'socially undesirable' people (the mentally ill, chronically homeless, and more) were often institutionalized in asylums where doctors and organizations had custodial care over their "patients" (Dear and Wolch 2014; Foucault 2013; Niles 2013). Two simultaneous pressures in 1970s began deinstitutionalizing people in asylums towards a theoretical model of community care: first, economic pressure to reduce the costs of asylum, and, second, humanitarian concerns of inhumane treatment at institutions (DeVerteuil and Evans 2009; Rose 1979). Community care was a theoretical model of treatment in which people would be returned to friends and family, local physicians, and a community that could find the appropriate treatment. However, asylums were closed before any systematic approach to community care

could be achieved, leading to scattered sites and sporadic aid. In the end, scholars found that deinstitutionalization created two populations: the well-connected, sane, and housed against the isolated, insane, and homeless (Dear and Wolch 2014).

Deinstitutionalization mirrored, and in some cases created, the conditions leading to the skid row type of homelessness common in the late 70s and early 80s (Bahr 1973). This population of individuals experiencing homelessness was more likely to have mental illnesses, addictions, and other traits commonly considered antisocial. Despite the theoretical benefits of community care, it never materialized in a way that could actually assist this population. As the country enforced a neoliberal approach to welfare and the economy, efforts to help the homeless shifted to non-profit, service-oriented welfare (DeVerteuil 2003; DeVerteuil and Evans 2009).

These service-oriented welfare organizations—such as homeless shelters, health clinics, public housing including SROs, and large affordable housing projects—were often concentrated near the skid rows of a city, creating "service-dependent ghettos" (DeVerteuil and Evans 2009; Milligan 1996). Yet, as soon as these "ghettos" formed, they became disrupted by various political and economic shifts.

First, welfare cutbacks from the 1980s to the 1996 welfare reform (PRWORA) withdrew funding from many of these non-profits and public organizations (Lyon-Callo 2008; Schram et al. 2010). Second, economic shifts resulting from policies like deregulation, financialization, and similar positions led to stagnant wages and increasing rents (Fine and Saad-Filho 2017; Harvey 2007). These economic shifts eventually led to the "new homelessness": individuals and families experiencing temporary or cyclical episodes of homelessness due to fluctuations in the job and housing market (Lee, Tyler and Wright 2010). Distinct from the population of individuals experiencing homelessness due to deinstitutionalization and the service-dependent ghettos, these

individuals often have many social ties and similar levels of human capital to their neighbors, but cannot afford the skyrocketing cost of housing, especially in urban areas (Desmond 2016).

The third shift involves the breaking up of the service-dependent ghettos and the dispersion of social services throughout the city. The dispersion of homeless services used a logic of poverty management similar to that which caused the destruction of large housing projects like Cabrini Green in Chicago, largely in favor of mixed-income dwellings and providing vouchers for poor individuals to find housing outside of impoverished neighborhoods (Reese, Deverteuil and Thach 2010). Fourth, in addition to the public service dispersion, policing practices (Herring 2019; Stuart 2016), anti-homeless laws (Fisher et al. 2015), and changing employment opportunities (Wolch, Rahimian and Koegel 1993) led to a breakup of skid row populations and a dispersion of the neighborhood of individuals without homes.

Finally, as homelessness became recognized as a serious social issue and gained more attention throughout the 1980s, private non-profits attempted to provide the needed aid missing from government funds. This resulted in a "loose collection of independent, small, service providers seeking to serve a specific need or a specific segment of the homeless population" (Hambrick Jr and Rog 2000: 354). In the 1990s, HUD attempted to solve the problem of this fragmented, patchwork approach to homeless relief by instituting the Continuum of Care system. By assigning a non-profit or local agency as the point organization for a region's goals and homelessness relief efforts, the "CoC was designed to augment service coordination and integration at the local service system, as well as to improve access to services as homeless clients move from one tier of service to another in their transition to stable housing" (Wong, Park and Nemon 2006: 68) While CoCs provide a greater measure of organizational coordination,

they have yet to solve issues of sector fragmentation (Mosley 2021) and have not addressed problems related to geographic dispersion.

Following these shifts, scholars have attempted to map social service dispersion and the mobility of persons in poverty throughout individual cities (De Verteuil 2011; Esparza and Hamilton 2012; Lee and Price-Spratlen 2004; Murphy and Allard 2015). These studies suggest that social service dispersion is dependent on various contextual factors including inequality and city type, as well as interactional factors such as NIMBY ("not in my backyard") advocacy. However, these studies relied on looking at social services and non-profits in totality, rather than focusing on one sector of social services (i.e. organizations that help young adults experiencing homelessness). This distinction is important, as the US trends of aid provision are moving towards funneling resources to organizations with clear demarcations of who can access their services. Dispersion and concentration of services mostly matters when considering the services that a certain demographic will use.

SPATIAL DEMANDS AND TAKING UP VALUABLE TIME

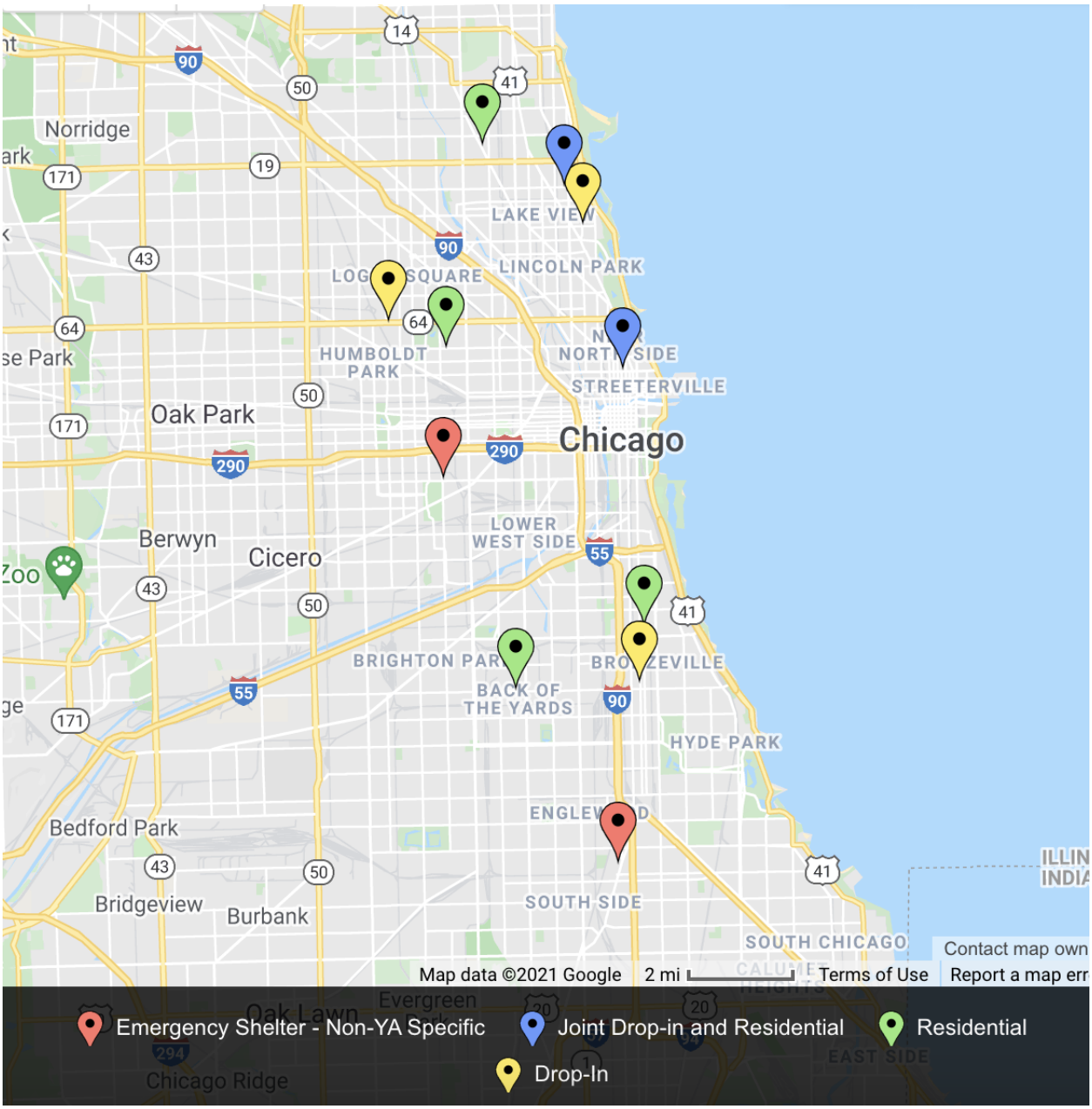
This brings us back to Dominique's experience traversing Chicago for services, work, and shelter. The services in Chicago which specifically cater to young adults are widely spread out. Most of these organizations try to provide a full suite of services that clients would need to access and tries to provide resources to every person who walks in their door. But with an increasing number of potential young adult clients, this means they spread their resources too thin and rarely can serve as a one-stop shop for any client. Thus, a core group of the city's homeless young adults travel and use multiple organizations to have their service needs met. The various facilities offer a combination of overlapping and niche services that make it so that no

single organization covers the gamut of clients' needs. For example, all centers provide educational and vocational assistance, but *Fierce* had hired specific Resource Advocates whose only job was to provide assistance in education and job training. At *La Fortaleza* and *Project Alight,* case managers and youth advisors attempted to do that work in addition to their other responsibilities. As another example, each location worked with the same legal aid organization to help clients retrieve birth certificates, commute past convictions, apply for name changes, and more. A lawyer would only visit each center once a week. If a client resided at *Project Alight,* but worked during the day when the lawyer visited *Project Alight,* they would have to travel to another center to access legal assistance. This means that a significant part of the daily round of Chicago's homeless young adults includes traveling throughout the city to gather needed resources.

In Figure 2.1, I map the eleven homeless organizations in the city that either specifically cater to young adults, or which multiple participants in my interviews or fieldwork had frequented. The four centers I worked with were not the most northern, southern, or western-located services for young adults. Yet, the distance between these four shelters alone spans over 10 miles from north to south and almost 5 miles east to west. To move between all four would take over two hours and 17 miles of travel. If we theorize that the community of young adults experiencing homelessness are a geographically mobile neighborhood (due to both the dispersion of services and their day-to-day mobility), we must ask: how do organizationally-embedded ties operate in a geographically mobile neighborhood? How is their effectiveness impacted?

Few scholars have attempted to theorize or explain the daily activities and movements of young people experiencing homelessness. More often than not, scholars mark checklists of individual actions or experiences rather than evaluating the flow of time. For those that have

Figure 2.1: Spread of Centers and Shelters Serving Young Adults in Chicago



investigated this phenomenon, they often describe a vacuum of sorts. In occupational therapy research, the day-to-day lives of young people experiencing homelessness are often characterized by *empty routines* (Simpson et al. 2018; Simpson, McDermott and Hild 2020). An anthropologist in Romania described the daily rounds as *the space of boredom* (O'Neill 2017). Geographers

studying poor young men in England used the term *mundane lives* (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris 2020). Altogether, these scholars describe periods of slowed time, emptiness, and unproductive activities.

Karabanow et al. (2010), on the other hand, describe a different story—one of young people living on the margins of a neoliberal society doing informal work (i.e. work not sponsored by legal, long-term employment). Instead of daily rounds filled with empty time, the lives of young adults are filled with entrepreneurship and autonomy—just not the variety that is rewarded in the formal economy or neoliberal welfare institutions. The authors describe the "daily routines of homelessness and informal work [as] not significantly different from the routine required to maintain formal work. The difference is in who controls its structure" (48).

The spread of organizations and the ways in which the centers schedule their activities not only control the daily structure for clients, but steal time away during the day and make accessing other resources difficult. For example, Clarissa, a 21 year-old Black bisexual female, told me she loved *Fierce.* Not only did she feel understood by their LGBTQ+ focused framework, but it was connected to a health clinic where she could easily access birth control, STI tests, and other medical needs. However, *Fierce* often runs out of bus cards and has no residential program. Clarissa ended up receiving a spot at *Project Alight*'s interim shelter, but could not afford to go to *Fierce* for her LGBTQ+-affirmative healthcare. As I closed my interview with Clarissa, I asked her what she might consider the biggest barrier to exiting homelessness. She replied,

> "Getting a job…But, not *getting the job* really. It's getting *to the job*. I don't have a hard time finding jobs, but I have no transportation. I take care of my mom and use my bus cards to help her. But I'm not getting enough to go to every interview for every job I find."

Transportation Aid

Each organization understands the struggles their clients have in moving around the city, as well as the financial constraints they themselves must face to provide transportation to their clients. *Fierce* gives out 2 bus cards per client until they run out. Their resource advocacy teams can offer additional bus cards, but they also rarely meet demand. *Project Alight* requires an application for each set of bus cards requested by a client, and they are only provided if the client has evidence of a promising lead for housing, education, or employment. *La Fortaleza*, knowing its shelter is relatively far from many other services and opportunities for employment, provides two tickets a day (but only two): enough to leave *La Fortaleza* in the morning and return at another point in the day.

Node to Node

One might imagine that having a network spread throughout the city would provide these young adults with more potential ties to businesses, other resources, and other people. However, I found each location was treated as an isolated node, largely hidden from the larger community. In fact, at each location, community members have asked the organizations to "hide" their clients. In 2019, *Project Alight* submitted a zoning exemption to build a new facility on the West Side of Chicago to hold more young adults in their interim housing. The community-to-be campaigned to prevent the shelter from moving to their neighborhood. At the zoning review board hearing, both *Project Alight* and community members brought over 30 individuals for each side to argue their case. In her introduction to the board, *Project Alight*'s CEO explained:

> "We are completely unlike an emergency shelter where it is common for people to line up outside the building for a chance at a bed. Our residents will be living with us for up to

> 120 days. Our intake process will take place entirely inside of our property and we will *not* have lines on the street. … Our facility will be staffed with security personnel for 24 hours a day."

The chair of the Zoning Board asked the first question: "I understand that the idea is that they are not lining up outside your facility, but how does that look like in practice?" The CEO repeated that all activity happens inside the facility. The second question from the Board, "You usually operate at full capacity. What happens when a youth comes and you cannot house them? Aren't they then on the street?" The CEO answered that they refer the youth to an emergency shelter so no clients ever linger around the neighborhood.

Community members repeatedly voiced concerns about "kids loitering around in a neighborhood where drugs and crime are everywhere." One felt there was no way that *Project Alight* could keep the "kids" inside all day – "because of the current gang and drug activity, this is just going to exacerbate it. These kids will be outside, they'll be easy targets, and our neighborhood doesn't want more of this." The CEO finished with, "We are hoping to be a good neighbor as we said we're going to be. … You won't see people hanging outside."

The community members, and *Project Alight*'s CEO, coalesced around a definition of "being a good neighbor" that meant something akin to "out of sight, out of mind." In the daily operations of the current *Project Alight* facility, young adults can step outside two to three times a day for a "smoke break" accompanied by a staff member. Over the two years that I spent at *Project Alight*, there were no meetings with neighborhood businesses, no tours of the facility, and no introductions between business owners and youth. *Project Alight* did provide their clients with "field trips"[17] and other excursions, including a trip to Six Flags, attending Cubs and White Sox games, etc. Each time, clients were driven by a van rather than walking through the

[17] This was language used by *Project Alight* CEO in the zoning board hearing.

neighborhood. There was only one instance in which we, as a group, left the facility and walked around the area: the board of directors organized an "architectural scavenger hunt" and had teams of 4-5 clients, staff, and board members walk to three different "architecturally significant" buildings guided by clues on notecards. Again, there was no interaction *with* the neighborhood (either residents or businesses) other than sight-seeing.

Similarly, *Fierce* and *La Fortaleza* made efforts to avoid being a 'presence' in the neighborhood. *La Fortaleza* installed an entry chamber to their shelter in which clients could enter from off the street and wait for a staff member to give them an intake or conduct the customary pat-down before entry into the shelter. *Fierce* did have lines in the morning (as they often reached their daily cap and entry was based on who arrived first). While I volunteered at *Fierce,* the staff attempted different strategies to avoid annoying the surrounding neighborhood: they tried a rule prohibiting clients from lining up before 8:30am, they moved the line across the street, and once tried the line around the corner. During the day, *Fierce* allows their clients three 10-minute breaks if they want to return, both as a way of reducing disruptions to the milieu of the space and to avoid bothering the next-door businesses.

However, *Fierce* did make more attempts to connect with nearby organizations than the other centers. They regularly hosted an open mic night at a small club to provide young adults the space to show off their creative skills. They also hosted various holiday party fundraisers, advertised via flyers, had staff bring their partners, and more. However, it was unclear throughout my volunteering time how much (if any) of this connection *to* the community provided any meaningful networking ties to clients.

Although the four organizations that I studied were notable for the lack of what Small (2009) described as *non-purposeful* ties to people and organizations in the "isolated, but

dispersed" geographic area, each organization did have specific *purposeful* organizational network ties that clients could access. The majority of these network ties were various forms of job training programs. *Project Alight* contracts with a large career-skills firm that provides staff with material to teach group meetings such as "Networking" or "Professionalism." Another partner provides clients with part-time janitorial work in preparation for a full-time position as an experienced janitor. However, the actual connections and purposeful network ties I found were fairly similar to what had been described in previous organizationally-embedded network research, and followed the same neoliberal actions and consequences that has already been explored in other research (Korteweg 2003; Krinsky 2007; Purser and Hennigan 2018; Van Oort 2015; Wacquant 2009). These programs privilege particular work-place attitudes and norms and push clients to adopt these practices (Gatta 2020; Halpin and Smith 2017). Further, scholars have found that job training programs in homeless or welfare centers only provide clients with opportunities for low-wage work, rather than helping develop skills for socioeconomic mobility (Van Oort 2015).

Overall, from their long rides on public transportation in pursuit of resources to NIMBY-ism that kept them isolated within the walls of shelters, the young adults were part of a dispersed neighborhood network with each social service operating as its own silo. The organizations collaborated little with local businesses and community organizations, beyond being involved with selected non-profits for legal aid and healthcare. I also never observed interactions between the centers' front-line workers themselves to discuss coordinating care[18]. This raises the question

[18] The one exception was Natasha. She was the lead case manager at *Project Alight* and also worked part-time as a Youth Advisor at *La Fortaleza-South*. She mentioned in our interview that this helped her gain only a little extra information as she preferred to act simply as "the friend" at *La Fortaleza*. During my ethnography at all four centers, Natasha would frequently ask me: "So, what are they doing at *La Fortaleza* and *Fierce* when X situation comes

of the expected pathways through which homeless youth were expected to exit homelessness, given the absence of expansive organizational or personal networks at their disposal.

WHOSE TIME TABLE?

A second key component of organizationally-embedded ties and the effectiveness of an organization to broker resources is in its ability to provide *regular* and *long-lasting* interactions between its client, other clients, and other organizations (Small 2009). Thus, an important aspect to analyze for this geographically-mobile neighborhood and its resource brokerage is the way it structures interactions and the time spent within its walls. Little work has been done to connect the analysis of Small's organizational brokerage theories to the construction and enforcement of *time*. However, the ways in which social services construct time-tables (both daily and life-course) for their clients in ways that dramatically shape the long-term prospects of young adults experiencing homelessness.

Homeless centers and other social service institutions face increasing financial constraints (Siliunas, Small and Wallerstein 2019; Wong, Park and Nemon 2006). This creates perverse incentives for organizations in their management of people in poverty. They may only select the most likely to find stability, push people through their program quickly, or ignore important problems which clients face (Siliunas, Small and Wallerstein 2019). Individuals in homeless episodes require up to two years of support to gain economic and human capital and transfer that capital into socioeconomic stability (Somerville 2013). Nevertheless, the average length of stay allowed by homeless services is often around 6 months (Wong, Park and Nemon 2006). For

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up?" Even though she worked part-time at *La Fortaleza*, she distanced herself somewhat and used me for more information.

young people in particular, this leads to an "experience of continuously moving on or 'going through'" the various services and provides, and the prolonging of homeless episodes (Mayock, Corr and O'Sullivan 2013: 456)

Considering the need for time in achieving stability, I analyze the organizational schedules set by the four homeless shelters. The ways in which center rules and staff actions pressure young adults to quickly achieve stability discounts the realities of their current economic context. In addition, the bureaucratic nature of poverty and homelessness relief is inherently time-consuming and shelters are unequipped to provide the time necessary to reach stability. As we will see through Enrique's story, time-tables enforced by shelters can actually disrupt pathways to stability.

ORGANIZATIONAL SCHEDULES

When living in a shelter or accessing services at a day center, young adults must follow a rigid schedule (see Table 2.1). Transitional and Emergency Shelters close their doors by 8 or 9 in the morning. Most of the day centers require clients to arrive *before* 9am. For those staying in the residential shelter at *Project Alight*, this is an easy transition from one side of the floor to the other. However, if you are staying at an emergency shelter (most being located on the South and West sides) and want to access a day center, you have to travel early in the morning and hope you are in line before the "cap" (client capacity) is reached[19]. For example, *Project Alight* had a strict 9am cut-off, and it was unlikely that clients would be allowed into the day center after 9am

[19] A note on capacity: there was no standard capacity for day centers—even at the same center. The capacity limit was set every day depending on the capabilities of the staff. If a day center had short staff, they might reduce the capacity to as low as 10 people for the day. Some centers like *Project Alight* would raise capacity if I was volunteering that day. Other centers, notably *Fierce*, would only base their capacity on floor staff.

even if the space was below capacity. *Fierce*, on the other hand, would allow clients into the space after 9am if they were below capacity—but *Fierce* almost always hit their cap for the day.

Once the organization started its daily programming at 9am, there was a fairly regimented schedule[20]. Day centers typically have all their clients come together at 9am to discuss the daily schedule, how each person is feeling, and what their goals are for the day. After the Morning Meeting, the schedule would either lead straight into a group instruction (generally referred to as "group") or a morning "air" break[21]. Group meetings were intended to help clients develop some life or workplace skill (described further below). After lunch, staff led another group meeting until 3pm when the day centers closed.

From 3-6pm, there is little programming, even at temporary residential shelters. At 6pm, however, clients need to be back for dinner. A late client who gave no notice usually forfeited a warm meal. Between dinner and 9pm, there is also little programming[22].

Freedom and Restrictions

Each center had their own way of addressing the fact that an individual's work, education, or other appointments might conflict with the shelter or day center's requirements. At *Fierce*, clients are given three 10-minute "outs." There is a sign-in and sign-out sheet near the door. They tell a staff member they are taking a break, sign out with the time they leave, and then are free to go for 10 minutes. If they leave for a third time, they will not be allowed to return and

[20] *Fierce* was the notable exception, having only three planned activities: breakfast/open @ 9am, lunch at 11:30am, and a youth-led community meeting at noon.
[21] An "air" break was meant for those who wanted to go outside and smoke. Some clients would simply go outside to be outside.
[22] At *Project Alight,* Janice wanted me to start a nightly group meeting from 7-9. However, after recognizing how much the young adults relished this time to simply relax and recharge, I declined. A couple weeks after I started at *La Fortaleza*, the temporary shelter brought in a non-profit to teach restorative healing after dinner.

their spot will be given to someone else. According to *Fierce*, this reduces the number of ins-and-outs (similarly to *La Fortaleza*) and serves to protect other clients in the space.

Fierce, as mentioned above, had very little programming during the 9am-3pm block. One staff member would lead a voluntary "Gay-Ass Art Club" from 1-3pm, which was usually attended by 2-3 people. After 3pm, *Fierce* had a variety of programming that was usually targeted to certain demographic groups that had particular needs, such as a support group for trans folks of color.

As described in the introduction, the lack of programming for *Fierce* was intentional and provided LGBTQ+ youth and young adults of color a safe place to simply *exist*. This allowed clients to rest, relax, and recharge free from discrimination and the repeated stress resulting from their daily, marginalizing experiences. Besides the capacity restrictions on entry, they had few other scheduling restrictions. Furthermore, *Fierce* does not require its clientele to be "progressing" towards employment, work, or education. Most of the clients do, however, meet often with the staff who support clients in reaching employment, work, or educational goals and seek to reduce bureaucratic barriers (like ID, getting on the public housing waiting list, etc.).

At *La Fortaleza*, while there was a specific schedule and topics to cover each day, no client was *required* to sit through group meetings. A former lead case manager at *La Fortaleza*, Luné, described their space as "low-threshold entry"—without any requirement for clients to go through case management or to attend group meeting. If they simply wanted a place to sleep and/or food to eat, there was a "low threshold" to accessing those resources. Luné also explained that, "as we move through the day, they get smoke breaks, they get exit times because they're in and out. I don't want them to just leisurely go in and out of the space. So we have set times that they can exit and that they can return."

In practice, however, clients experienced programming differently based on my observations. At one point, the temporary shelter began a partnership with a non-profit to help clients practice restorative healing. When the group leading this meeting arrived, the staff at the center would run around to get everyone to come participate. After these finished, another staff member implemented nightly check-ins in which she would gather all the clients in the building to come discuss their days and provide 'inspirational' messages of her choice.

Project Alight was the most restrictive of all three centers[23]. Clients were required to be at the day center by 9am or the residential side by 9pm every day. All deviations from the morning entry or nightly curfew had to be pre-approved by a case manager. This approval was contingent upon whether the reason for being late was related to work, education, or housing. However, as we'll see later with Enrique's experience at *Project Alight*, even this was not always enough. During the day, the staff would provide two 'air' breaks, If a client left the day center for any reason (other than air breaks with staff members), they could not return. Between 3-9pm on the residential side, clients could come and go as desired *if* a staff member was available to escort them to or from the security desk. *Project Alight*'s Youth Handbook—which each young person signs when first accessing the space—explains the following:

> "The [*Project Alight*] community has certain things that we expect of all of our community members:
>
> - You will be expected to either be employed, actively and verifiably be seeking the equivalent of full-time employment, maintain part time employment with schooling, or attend school full time.

[23] In an interview with a former *Project Alight* case manager, she described how when *Project Alight* began it was extraordinarily unstructured: "It was like, 35 kids in the space at one time, half of them are high, and there's four staff, so let's figure it out. So my role was very much like: just keep them alive."

> - You will be expected to participate in all [*Project Alight*] groups, structured activities, and attend case management meetings as scheduled. …"
>
> "To participate in [*Project Alight*] programming, you will be expected to do the following: …
>
> - Attend necessary Life Skills meetings and participate fully in all groups assigned by CM unless your school or work schedule prohibits you from doing so."

Some young people would be able to avoid sitting in the group meetings *if* they could show staff that they were working on a job or housing application or something similar. However, I saw this happen only once; every other time, clients were redirected into the main meeting room during group meetings.

CONSEQUENCES OF A SPATIALLY-TEMPORALLY DISPERSED SYSTEM: ENRIQUE

For *Project Alight*'s residential side, residents must return back to the shelter by 9pm or have previous approval from a case manager. If someone does not return by curfew without approval, they lose their residential spot. Their items are bagged and kept in a storage closet until the young person comes to claim them (if they ever return). Once discharged, residents can submit an appeal form which is then reviewed by a team of case managers. That process can take up to a week, and until then, the young person is restricted from the shelter. If the appeal is approved, they do not automatically return to their previous residential room—they are placed back on the waitlist.[24]

Enrique is a tall, Puerto Rican man with long hair tied back in a bun. He started coming to *Project Alight* with his sister after they moved to Chicago from New York. He had been

[24] In a city in which there is there are beds only for approximately 10% of unsheltered young adults, waitlist times can take up to 4-5 months.

working two jobs and coming to *Project Alight*'s day center for a couple of months when he was moved off the waitlist and invited to occupy a bed in their transitional housing. Enrique's workplaces were in the west suburbs doing either factory work or construction, and travel took up a large portion of his day. The following is an entry in my field notes after an evening volunteer shift at *Project Alight's* transitional side:

> I came into the shelter and Sasha (youth advisor) told me that Enrique had been discharged for not showing up [the night before]. I was surprised since Enrique is working two jobs and seemed really invested in what was going on. He had only been [in residential] for a week and didn't seem the type to not take it seriously, even if he didn't like the rules. He also left his stuff at the shelter without telling anyone whether he was going to pick them up.
>
> At around 7p that night, Enrique showed up thinking he was going to be able to stay. No one had informed him that he was discharged (if you are a no-show, you are automatically discharged). Lacie (youth advisor) had gone down to meet him and tell him he had been discharged. Sasha told me that Carla (residential program coordinator) wanted two people talking with Enrique in case there was a confrontation, so I went down soon after.
>
> As I exited the stairwell and entered the building lobby, Lacie was explaining that because he was a no-show (as reported in the system), he was discharged and she couldn't let him upstairs. He was fairly calm, but visibly concerned. He told us his story:
>
> He works 2 jobs - one during the week (J1) and one on the weekends (J2). On Tuesday, J1 let him out early after only working 6 hours. Wanting to make more money, he called J2 and asked if they could use him. "If you get here by 4[pm], you can work." He got there and he realized he was going to work till midnight. But it takes 2 hours to get back to the shelter and then he'd have to wake up by 3am to get to J1 for his 6a shift. So he called and talked to a Case Manager (Natasha) and she said it was ok if he didn't return [Tuesday night].
>
> He just went to J1 and slept outside nearby. "I'm not afraid of being jumped or anything like that. I'm not afraid, I can handle that if it happened."
>
> For Wednesday, a similar thing happened. J1 let him go at 10am because he didn't have work boots (they were still at Project Alight, two hours away) and the rest of the job required those. So, he called J2 and they said the same thing: get here by 4pm and you can work. He tried calling the shelter again, but no one answered. He called the housing complex Project Alight is listed in, but he wasn't able to get ahold of anyone. Natasha had given him a specific number to

call, so he tried it, but got another Case Manager's voicemail. He left a voicemail and went to work thinking that was going to be enough.

He had come back Thursday morning for a meeting with Natasha at 11am before he went off to work. She said nothing about the discharge or where he was the previous night. So, then he showed up at 7pm expecting to be able to come in.

Lacie: “I get that this is frustrating for you. But the information I was given by the staff was simply that you were a no-show and were discharged and I just cannot let you up right now. “

He asked if there was an appeal form and Lacie replied: "If you're interested in staying here and you really want to be here, then yes, I'd say to fill out an appeal. But if you don't want to be here and work on this with us, then there's really no reason and you're better off not filling it out - it would just be wasting your time and our time."

He was indignant at that and said, "Of course I want to be here! I'm working! I’m trying to get back on my feet. I'm doing what I need to."

[It seemed to me, as an observer to this interaction, that Lacie was just saying this matter-of-factly - not trying to suggest that he didn't care about the program. But he didn't notice that she was trying to be objective.]

After hearing him out, Lacie said: I can get you anything you need from your stuff, I can bring you down some sandwiches if you're hungry, and I can even get you some bus fare to get where you need to go (listed a couple of other emergency shelters). He accepted the sandwich, but said he didn't need his stuff at the moment or the bus cards.

Lacie went up to get his sandwiches and appeal form. Enrique and I continued talking and I asked him where he would stay this night since he would not go to the emergency shelters.

"You know, I just know there's gotta be a reason for this to happen. There's gotta be something I gotta see or do or someone I gotta meet. This just can't be happening without a reason. … Things don't just happen for no reason, especially when I'm working and doing everything I need to do, and covering all my bases."

But he didn't say what his plans would be for the night. Lacie returned and gave him the sandwiches. She went over the appeal form and had him repeat that he could return to the day center, give the appeal form to a case manager, and then he’d only be placed on the waitlist.

> Lacie and I return to the shelter and explain to Carla and Sasha what happened. Sasha was very skeptical of his story throughout.[25] She doesn't think she'd miss any of those phone calls nor does she think Natasha would have given Enrique another case manager's office number. Lacie replies that the phones have been acting up, but Sasha is still unconvinced. Carla, as the program coordinator, says, "Well, we'll wait for the appeal and then see if anyone can find the voicemail or any way to prove or disprove the story. Let's do due process and figure it out."
>
> Lacie: "Yeah, that's just his story - but we'll have to wait until we know."
>
> Sasha: "Well, I hope that they don't let him in."

Project Alight's youth handbook outlines choice as a key *Project Alight* principle: "All choices come with consequences. When we talk about choice, we're talking about you understanding your worth and making positive, healthy choices about your life." Enrique's work ethic looked to be exactly in the spirit of their mission. However, despite working two jobs, saving money, and trying to be independent, it was Enrique's seeming failure to comply to very specific protocols that resulted in him being ejected from the transitional housing center.[26] I never saw if Enrique returned the appeals form; although I did see him return to the day center on a variety of weekends with his sister, he never did return to the residential units.

PRESSURE OF THE SCHEDULE

At the Zoning Board meeting for *Project Alight*'s potential move, the CEO told the board that their goal was to get clients off the street and into their own housing as soon as possible in

[25] In previous discussions with Sasha, it was clear she did not have patience for excuses. She was a long-time social worker in homeless centers. Sasha was in her 50s, a Black "south-side Chicagoan" whose daughter was a Winter Olympian. She would remark to me frequently that she refused to give any money to panhandlers on the street: "I've worked in homeless services all my life. There are places to get help! I don't see why they're not there working on their resumes rather than asking for money."

[26] Chapter 4 investigates the consequences of center/shelter rules to a greater extent than this chapter, which focuses on the daily rounds and scheduling of young adults in homelessness.

order to have more room for new clients. They had implemented a 120-day policy for their interim housing, meaning that clients could stay up to 4 months in *Project Alight*'s residential program. After the 4 months, clients would be discharged and (hopefully) have a place to stay. This pressure to get clients into their own housing, however, conflicted with the time it takes to gain stability in the contemporary job and housing market. Here, I recount an experience during my ethnography with quotations from my field notes from January 2020, just before the pandemic hit the United States.

> Fridays at Project Alight were generally more laid back and on one particular Friday a group meeting ended early. The young people took advantage to socialize and the tv was binging Netflix's Lucifer in the background. A newly hired case manager, Jaenelle, came in, visibly annoyed, had me shut off the tv, and then told everyone that we were going to hold an impromptu group: "I'm gonna go around the room and I want everybody to give me your purpose so why are you here?"
>
> The clients take a long pause and finally, one young, Black male says, "Well, I know the reason I'm here today. I'm waiting on Dolores to help me. I'm happy to be here so I just be waiting on Dolores."[27] Then, the young people went one-by-one saying,
>
> "I'm tryna get my life back on track."
>
> "I'm tryna get me a job, and a GED"
>
> "Lookin for a job"
>
> "Work"
>
> "To find my significant other" [laughter among the group]
>
> Jaenelle: "No, that's not what you're here for. So, what are you guys doing to either get your life back on track, hmmm? … Moving forward I'm going to speak with the YAs [Youth Advisors] as we already are getting something lined together, but we really starting tomorrow. Watching TV from 8-3 will no longer be happening. I need for you guys to come in this space and I need for y'all to be productive. That means that everybody in here who said that they're looking for a job or trying to get the GED …that means that y'all need to be in

[27] Dolores is the occupational specialist. She had been hired recently to be the go-to person for job searches, resume writing, and similar activities.

> that computer lab. Apply for jobs. After you apply for jobs, I need for y'all to follow up with the job and find out—okay, when can y'all get an interview? Fill out applications, meet with Dolores, because this right here [gestures at the room] is not getting you to your goal. It's not."
>
> There was an awkward silence in the room as everyone exchanged uncomfortable glances with each other. Finally, one young Black man who had been silent the whole time speaks up, "I just be comin' here to use this space to wash my clothes." A couple of other people laugh. But he continues, "In all reality, though, I do be using this program to my advantage. Not takin' advantage, but it's stuff that I need that y'all actually take care of." He goes on to describe how he's waiting on one staff member to refund him for a large payment he made for a work uniform, how he's waiting on another staff member to update him on a housing lead, and so there's not much for him to do right now.
>
> Jaenelle: "See that—that's how you use these resources and that's what I need for everybody to be doin. … I mean a lot of you guys are working and applying yourselves, but I just don't want this to be an everyday, ongoing thing even after group. I need for y'all to sometimes take the initiative."

This example was striking as I knew the majority of the young people by this point. I knew that most of them *were* working towards something. The majority had jobs, albeit wage labor at mostly fast-food restaurants or coffee shops. The majority already had their GED and were looking for programs to provide them with trade skills or were filling out their FAFSA to go to community college. All were on the public housing lists. I had sat with enough of them, refreshing the Craigslist housing list ads, to know that there were few if any avenues to pursue there. Natasha, a former case manager at *Project Alight,* told me in an interview:

> "There was a big push from [the CEO]: housing, housing, housing. We need to make sure these kids are housed. Okay. And she pushed me and my goals to find market rate apartments and work with landlords. … One day, I spoke up in a [staff] meeting, 'It does not seem feasible [to get these people into market rate housing] because with $15/hr., you cannot afford an apartment that you can find … it's just not ever grounded in reality."

Stabilizing one's life—in the "proper, acceptable" way—takes time. It takes even more time if you've been systematically marginalized from a young age and if wages do not keep up

with housing rates.[28] Natasha, over three and a half years, could remember *one single client* that went through the *Project Alight* program and "successfully navigated the system outside of coordinated entry."[29] His mother had kicked him and his brother out of the house after one of the brothers had been incarcerated. When he came to *Project Alight,* he was already a Certified Nursing Assistant. Natasha connected him to another staff member who was also a CNA. That staff member found him a job, and he started working, saving money, found a Craigslist apartment, bought some furniture, and moved on.

However, for most young adults, "the system does not exist to support [them]," as Natasha explained. To support these clients, shelters would need to help them find and prepare for work that pays above minimum wage. It would require providing the time to heal from trauma. It would require the time to get housing through Coordinated Entry[30] or waiting and saving money for long enough to convince a landlord to accept your application.

Almost every stage of this life-building, or stabilization, takes an application. It takes time to *find* the application, to *fill out* the application (if it's even clear how), to *submit*, and then to *wait* for the result. Far too often, these applications are denied over unforeseen reasons and the process needs to restart. We'll visit these applications in the next section, but what is important

[28] Using HUD's Fair Market rate for 2020, the *lowest rate* for a 1-bedroom apartment in Chicago in the Lower West Side neighborhood was $720. Although a stretch, assume an individual works at minimum wage ($13 in Chicago in 2019) for 40 hours a week and pays Fair Market rate for a 1-bedroom. They still put more than 30% of their income toward housing, which qualifies them as housing insecure under the HUD guidelines. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr.html#2020

[29] She noted that this did not include some individuals who were sent to diversion programs because they were either recently evicted or had other strong supports and simply needed a quick boost.

[30] Coordinated Entry is the system which matches individuals and families experiencing homelessness or are at risk of experiencing homelessness with supportive housing. Each homeless center in a CoC helps individuals complete a housing assessment that is logged in the Coordinated Entry system. This system prioritizes those individuals with the most severe needs and helps match them to openings in permanent supportive housing. This means that individuals without documented disabilities are likely to remain on the waitlist for incredibly long periods.

to note here is the insistence by *Project Alight* that each individual be consistently working—with the assumption that with *consistent effort*, they could exit their present situation.

This logic is the foundation for the schedules that many of these centers and shelters implement: how to keep clients *moving forward* (and out of the center) in some way. It might not be clear what "forward" entails, but clients need to be *moving*. With these applications standing in the way of "forward," it is worth looking at the experiences of staff and young adults with various forms and documentation.

DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING "THE SYSTEM"

Luné, the lead case manager at *La Fortaleza*, is a short, smiling young Black woman who came to work with young adults experiencing homelessness by happenstance. She found a job as a drop-in specialist while in college and moved up the ladder to lead case manager. As a new employee she was "surprised" that youth homelessness even existed, and then spent over five years working face-to-face with these young adults.

In our interview, Luné repeatedly stressed how every client was a completely new situation; sure, training was useful and knowing the variety of resources helped connect the client to programs they needed, but every new client meant starting her work from scratch. At one point, however, she did specify that there were three broad categories of clients she saw come through her center. I was surprised at her answer:

> "I would say there are three major kinds of clients that I see coming through. The first are those mentally ill who have no insight or have little insight and aren't able to navigate for themselves. The others are those who…I don't want to say lazy, but, they're waiting for someone else to do all the work for them and expect, because I've come to a shelter that I'm supposed to automatically receive housing. And then you have those who just like, don't do anything."

We had already talked through how she believed her clients were experiencing homelessness largely out of circumstances beyond their control (poverty, high prices of apartments, difficulties getting work, etc.)—and I was surprised to see her describe the categories of clients in such individualistic terms. But she went on to describe categories two and three in more detail:

> "You will be so surprised by coming in here, meeting with so many of the youth and learning that, that many of them hadn't even got past eighth grade. I have a client here right now who didn't even complete fifth grade. And many of them have been in DCFS [Department of Children and Family Services] and are [moved] from house to house to house to where they have no stability. *So in addition to not feeling comfortable with new people, they don't know how to navigate these systems*." (emphasis added)

She continued to explain how those who come into a shelter expecting someone to "do all the work for them" are not necessarily lazy, but have been buffeted around by social services for so much of their lives that they are simply waiting for the next step to be given to them by the welfare bureaucrats. Those who do not want to do anything (category three) are largely *overwhelmed* by both the amount of trauma they carry with them as well as the intricate systems they need to navigate in order to gain stability.

Documents and Applications

Each center is guided by forms and applications. The institutional logic is straightforward: shelters are required to provide evidence of their actions and successes by law (whether federal, state, or local) by tracking the counts of their clients and resources provided. From entry into the shelter or day center to their exit, staff and clients documented their movements:

- Sign-in and Sign-out sheet

- List of who received each resource: breakfast, clothing, etc.
- Staff notes during morning meeting, group meetings, and night meeting
- Sign-up to speak with case manager
- Action Plan "contracts" designed with case manager
- Applications for: bus cards, to-go meals, exemptions from group meetings, etc.
- List of who attended group meetings
- Case notes from the Case Manager
- Intake
- ISPs
- Comprehensive Assessments (requirement of Illinois)
- Room Checks
- Discharge or Crisis notes

While volunteering at *Project Alight*, I was given access to their electronic system for clients, where I logged my own notes on each client when needed. This included when I learned one of them got a new job at Starbucks, or when one of them told me and another staff member he was beaten by his boyfriend, or when filing a note that one of our young people were placed on suicide watch. Including intake demographics and history, various screenings, and notes from staff, each client can have hundreds of data points logged in the system tracking their movements.

These forms become routine for clients—walking in, scribbling their name and birthdate on the sign-in sheet and moving towards their friends or staff. However, the amount of documentation still takes a toll on the young adults—especially when, in addition to these daily logs, they must apply for a variety of resources. One young person, while filling out an application for a bus card at *Project Alight*, remarked: "Damn! Here they be asking all these fucking questions. Like what time and what bus I need. I don't know yet! I just gotta get to work!"

With the amount of energy spent on documenting their lives on daily forms, it becomes even more strenuous to complete the following:

- Applications for disability insurance
- Applications for unemployment insurance
- Applications for jobs (*Project Alight* required multiple applications finished per week)[31]
- Applications for housing (*Project Alight* again required multiple applications finished per week)
- Applying for an ID (which required a *Project Alight* form to meet with a lawyer who then would work with them on the forms for the ID)
- Applying for official city homelessness status
- Applying for the public housing list
- Applying for other long-term non-profit housing
- Applying for LINK (food stamp system of Illinois)
- Applying for GED, colleges, and other training programs
- Applying for FAFSA and other financial aid

Ray's applications for disability insurance

In an interview with Ray—a biracial transgender man with Ehlers-Danlos, autism, and other disabilities—he described the process of filing for disability insurance:

> Ray: "Yeah, I, you know, this is like my third try. I've been applying for it since I got taken out of my mom's home. How's that for a fire under my ass to like get all my things in check, you know? Yeah."
>
> Interviewer: "So by third try, do you mean that you've been denied twice, or you just haven't finished the application?"
>
> Ray: "I, I can't lie. Yeah, the first application I was denied because it was very confusing. And even the answers I wrote were like, didn't really make sense. Then the second time I got denied because I think I applied for the wrong program. So this is my third time, but I think it's going well, the process is, is I'm going a lot better than it did the first and the second time."

Ray had recently been approved and moved into supportive housing for disabled persons in poverty. The only reason that the third application was "going a lot better" was that this new

[31] The exact number of applications *Project Alight* required depended on an individual's case manager and case plan.

housing program employed a social worker whose full-time job was helping clients complete applications.

Seth's Job Applications

While completing one of my Saturday volunteer shifts, I worked with Seth to complete a job application to work at a FedEx packing facility. Seth was an energetic, short, young, straight black man who consistently had a laugh. He loved attention and would often be given warnings for making jokes during group meetings. Seth came over to me while I was finishing breakfast clean up and handed me his phone asking to help fill out a job application for FedEx. I asked if we could go use a computer rather than his smartphone, but all the computers were taken up (there are only four working computers).

Seth had trouble reading. I would read him the questions, let him answer, and then fill out the form. It was a rowdy afternoon and I had to repeat a couple questions when Seth had become distracted by other clients joking loudly or playing music he liked. He became frustrated when I asked him to go through his work history: "I already put that on the resume! Why they be asking again?" I reassured him multiple times that this is a very common application practice and we just have to do it.

As we finished the application, he received a call from his former employer at the airport, where he had worked loading luggage. They had a friendly conversation—the employer was calling Seth back to confirm that he'd be willing to be a reference for future job applications. I asked Seth why he was no longer working at the airport:

> "It just did not work out. You know, going from shelter to shelter and then trying to show up to work on time. Me and that boss, we got along good. But he can't be letting me always be late."

Unfortunately, that call somehow erased all the information we started on the application. He put his head in hands and said, “Let’s just make this quick,” as I told him we needed to restart.

As we finished, Seth asked me to look over his resume. Once he pulled it up on his phone, I was shocked to see the breadth of workplaces: grocery and retail stores, the airport, delivery, fast food service, etc. There was a story for each time he left work or was fired—he was helping a friend and missed a shift, he had an appointment, and more. However, he had good recommendations from each of his employers. Unfortunately, Seth stopped coming to *Project Alight* and I never found out if he was hired by FedEx.

Seth’s experience demonstrates how a simple application can become a high-stress experience, and his work history showcases the horizontal work movements of a low-wage worker. The shelter setting made concentration difficult, and, even though they provided computers specifically for job applications, there was too much demand for them, leaving Seth to fill out his applications by smartphone. Add his difficulty with reading comprehension to the difficulties of reading from a small smartphone screen on a website not formatted for mobile devices, and the task became almost impossible.

Seth’s employers all enjoyed working with him, but life circumstances kept getting in the way of long-term employment. Each employer was willing to recommend him for another job, but he could never stay long enough at any one place to advance beyond an entry-level pay rate. This kept him in a world where small issues would continue to disrupt his employment, his housing, and his stability—and his ever-growing list of entry-level work never seemed to be enough for a higher paying position. He lived in the precarious work cycle (Kalleberg and Vallas 2018), job-hopping from one position to another whenever external circumstances forced him to move.

LIVES OUTSIDE THE FORMAL ECONOMY AND OUTSIDE THE SHELTERS

What are the alternatives to reliance on shelters for young adults experiencing homelessness? In fact, the majority of those without stable housing do not have access to interim shelter beds. How do the daily rounds of young adults who live outside shelters differ from their counterparts within the residential centers? The experiences of interviewees David (stayed at hotels) and J.T. (found an apartment with his husband) demonstrate how life outside the formal economy and outside the shelter rules still has structure and a logic—albeit not one guided by the classic American 9am-5pm work schedule.

David: Hotels and Drug Sales

I met David, a 21-year-old Black man with a GED, on a Saturday at *Project Alight.* He usually kept to himself and only came to *Project Alight* when he needed to charge his phone or get a couple hours of sleep before work. During our interview, I asked him to describe his typical day:

> "'I'd wake up, in a motel that's close to where I'm jugging at and then I would just get up, smoke, probably take a couple shots of something, shower, leave, make a couple hundred dollars, and then just party for like the rest of the night."

I initially saw what previous scholars saw in this story: a lot of "empty time" or "boredom" (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson and Harris 2020; O'Neill 2017; Simpson et al. 2018; Simpson, McDermott and Hild 2020). However, as we continued to talk about other matters, a clearer picture of his time use came through. David's dream job was to be a professional video gamer—not just a streamer on Twitch with sponsorships, but someone who enters competitions. As someone who amateurly enjoys video games as well, we started a conversation about which

games he played, what his Twitch stream is like, and the small, local competitions he has entered. David explained that he does not just *play* video games, but he *practices* for a couple hours a day.

After practicing, he coordinates a team of up to four marijuana distributors throughout the city: "I go downtown, I'll go far up north. I got clientele everywhere. … My phone is always ringing and my routes are planned." Once he finishes his routes, he finds a nearby hotel or emergency shelter, gets some sleep, and starts over. From morning to night, David has a plan—both in terms of his day-to-day survival, but also his long-term career goals.

J.T.: Apartment and Sex Work

I greeted J.T. and he led me into a small room just inside his front door. There was one table in the room and the rest was empty. He apologized for not having any place to sit and offered a bag of clothes as a makeshift chair. Happy to simply sit on the floor, I set up the recording and paperwork and we started the interview.

J.T. is a 25-year-old African-American male who lives with his husband in a small apartment on the Northside. J.T. answered a gay dating app research ad and he invited me to interview him and his husband at their home. J.T. first entered homelessness at age 14 when, very early on, he found that offering romantic or sexual encounters could help give him both physical resources (food, shelter) and a sense of pride and comfort. While he no longer wants to do sex work, he still receives all of his income from sexual encounters. He described his typical day:

> ”I wake up and I walk our dog. I’ll probably take a bath when I get in. I check to see if anyone has said anything on Jack’d or Grindr[32]. Check my emails. If nothing has come up, I’ll wash dishes, probably drink or smoke marijuana. Watch TV/YouTube.”

Similarly to David’s interview, at first glance this seems like J.T.’s time is “empty” – however, that framing is based on a very particular, normative view of how time *should* be spent: engaging in the formal, neoliberal economy *or* simulating it as much as possible. However, J.T. describes how entry into the formal economy is all but impossible. Due to family circumstances and his own journey through homelessness, he left high school in the 9th grade. Being 25 years old and having no work history makes gaining even entry-level work difficult.

> “It’s hard to want to keep a job that is like … I’m only making $10/hr. or some amount of money for work that is too long. I’m looking for work now because I know I need to get back into it and change things a little bit. I don’t want to be doing sex work. I never want to have to do sex work, but it’s a lot of money.”

J.T. and his husband can make over $200/day. He also has a long-time clients in California and Nevada who will fly him out for a weekend simply for companionship and pay him upwards of $3,000. So, while he does not want to be in sex work, transitioning from that work to low-wage, entry-level positions could threaten his ability to maintain an apartment and the stability he’s finally gained. He felt he had two choices: either start at a low-wage job and move up (but this risked not being able to pay the bills and likely get evicted for the third time), or find a way to get his GED. Despite meeting with a variety of non-profits, J.T. had yet to understand the process for pursuing a GED.

J.T. and David were both entrepreneurs in the informal economy (drug sales and se - work) to survive, even though both aspired to enter the formal economy and move towards

[32] Jack’d and Grindr are both dating/sexual encounter popular for gay men. Both Jack’d and Grindr have explicit restrictions against escorting or financial solicitations—but they are still popular to use for sex work.

greater stability. But recalling Enrique's experience demonstrates that even working in the formal economy—especially when employed in low-wage work—can be just as disruptive towards establishing economic security. Despite legally working two jobs, Enrique still did not make enough money to afford housing on the private market. Furthermore, the work schedules of low-wage labor were fundamentally at odds with the social service scheduling which assumes a typical middle-class, 9am-5pm work day of its clients.

KEPT AT A DISTANCE AND ON HOLD

Small (2009) argued that organizationally embedded networks were an important key to the puzzle of understanding the replication of inequality:

> "[U]nderstanding people's connections—and how much connections generate social inequality—requires understanding the organizations in which those connections are embedded. It requires conceiving of people as organizationally embedded actors, as actors whose social *and* organizational ties—and the resources both available and mobilized through them—respond to institutional constraints, imperatives, and opportunities." (Chapter 1, par. 9)

This analysis of homeless social services forces us to consider two constraints on access and mobilization of resources: first, the spatial distribution of the organizational nodes themselves, and second, the temporal conflicts that pressure clients to quickly gain stability through employment and housing, while ignoring the time it takes to build that stability (and the economic and bureaucratic pressures which create this dilemma).

Young adults experiencing homelessness exist in a spatially-dispersed neighborhood due to a variety of cultural, economic, and political factors that affect the distribution of social services. This likely does not apply to many of the organizations that non-purposefully broker networks (like day-care centers). But in order to understand organizations that *purposefully*

broker network ties, like homeless shelters and centers, we must also evaluate how they create spatially dispersed neighborhoods. In the specific case of these young adult shelters and centers, we see that this organizational network is both spatially dispersed *and* isolated. This lowers the effectiveness of the network brokerage by forcing clients to use resources to simply *access* other resources and reducing their ability to network with surrounding neighborhood establishments.

Further research on organizationally embedded ties must take a spatial-temporal perspective to determine how these dynamics affect resource access and mobilization across services and sectors. For understanding the replication of inequality, we must compare whether the dispersed and isolated nature of young adult shelters and centers is comparable to other populations who seek social services: other populations in poverty and welfare, individuals connected to the criminal justice system, and people with chronic diseases or other conditions.

Considering the Need for Time

When I asked Natasha to describe what clients were doing while at *Project Alight* when chastised by Jaenelle for not being productive, she responded:

> "I believe they were getting respite and rest and community from their homeless situation that was traumatizing to them. I don't believe they were being lazy or not wanting to get better or not wanting to work. I believe they were trying to emotionally recuperate from the life they had. Sure, there was a lot of hanging out and sitting and resting and falling asleep and drooling on the couch and talking. All of that was happening, yes. … But so many of these young people just need time to think and exist beyond their trauma."

As explained in the introduction chapter, young adults experiencing homelessness live through high rates of traumatic experiences: abuse, rejection, poverty, addiction, and more. While time is required to find a good paying job, even more time is required to heal and find oneself capable of building a life. Yet, even with the rise in trauma-informed care (Bransford and Cole 2019) in

homeless shelters, healing is difficult with the temporal conflicts inherent in a neoliberal push for self-sufficiency, with the waiting periods of bureaucracy, and with the economic context that makes affordable housing continuously harder to access.

3. Adulthood as Structure: Liminality of Young Adults in Policy, Practice, and Person

> "I've been locked up. I know what it feels like to be locked up. I don't come here to be in jail. I come here to get helped. I don't need y'all to tell me when I can smoke."

I'm escorting Terrence and his friend Devon out of *Project Alight* when Terrence gets frustrated having a chaperone. The agency requires all clients to be escorted by staff, or a volunteer in my case, in and out of the building. I ask him why *Project Alight* makes me escort him and he responds:

> "I don't fucking know! But I'm not a kid and I'm not a convict!"

This interaction with Terrence happened early on in my volunteer ethnography at *Project Alight*, and I have struggled with it ever since. Why would a social agency, especially one that knows many of their clients have been previously incarcerated, use practices that perpetuate a feeling of incarceration? Why did Terrence, in expressing his frustration, defend himself by saying, "I'm not a kid"?

YOUTH CONTROL COMPLEX, ADULTHOOD, AND WELFARE DESERVINGNESS

Terrence's frustration reflects his experiences within the *youth control complex*: a system in which the organizations and institutions that intersect with young people's lives construct and respond to the actions of young people as criminal (Rios 2011). From the jail to the homeless center—and other contexts—Terrence encounters the collusion of organizations that criminalize his daily actions, even simply walking out of a shelter. The *youth control complex* couples community organizations with criminal justice institutions and a particular logic of treating young people's actions as deviant. In simply entering the shelter, Terrence had to check in with a security guard and be escorted up to the sixth floor. In leaving, he again needed an escort.

Criminalization can act as a way for homeless centers to *frame* their clients in an attempt to manage and regulate the flow of people accessing their resources. As framing institutions (Watkins-Hayes, Pittman-Gay and Beaman 2012), these centers help craft narratives describing the type of people who access their services, why people experience homelessness, and the steps these people need to take to exit homelessness. When policy shifts or other pressures change the nature of an organization's client capacity, demographics, or required treatments, these frames can then help manage the population attempting to access the organization's aid. For example, Lara-Millán (2021) described how hospitals in L.A. experienced shifting legal and policy pressures to change their capacities and treatments. To resolve the new organizational problems created by these pressures, hopsitals began framing as criminal the people in poverty using the Emergency Room in order to justify a practice of restricting access to medicine and resources. This criminalization frame is commonly used to describe homeless individulas in a variety of institutions: from city governments (Kim 2020) to community organizations (Herring 2019, 2020) to police departments (Goldfischer 2020) and homeless centers themselves (Herring, Yarbrough and Marie Alatorre 2020).

In this chapter, I argue that homeless centers working with young adults are grappling with the liminality of young adults in discourses of poverty. To manage this population without clear legal or cultural frames of what "young adulthood" means, these organizations have crafted their own discourse of adulthood (and maturity and independence) by which to manage the young adults accessing their services—especially as funding shrinks and resources become scarce. As organizations pressured young adults to demonstrate independence and maturity by compliance to institutional standards, clients had to choose between paths that would take away ownership of their homeless pathway and had reliably kept them alive or to accept the

governance of staff and organizations. Choosing organizational governance would take away many of those survival strategies and put them at risk of losing what stability they had.

This discourse of adulthood interesects with and compounds the criminalization processes inherent in the *youth control complex*. As Terrence exposed, *Project Alight's* insistence that he have an escort was both criminalizing *and* infantilizing: "I'm not a kid and I'm not a convict!" Following an analysis similar to Risman's (2004) "Gender as a Social Structure," I demonstrate how these cultural and political ambiguities of adulthood operate at the structural, interactional, and individual levels of the lives of young adults experiencing homelessness.

Welfare Discourses of Deservingness and Responsibility

Poverty and homelessness policies in the United States are guided by moral beliefs (both explicit and implicit) of who should receive aid, and how increasingly-constrained state resources should be distributed. This framework of the discourse of deservingness (Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky 2016)—of deciding who is worthy of receiving aid—prioritizes support for those believed to be unable to enter into the formal workforce: children, the disabled, the sick, or the elderly. Those deemed fit to work have potential access to restricted benefits, as seen in the 1996 Welfare to Work reform (PRWORA). A fear that too much welfare contributes to a culture of complacency and dependency pushed lawmakers to impose punitive restrictions such as time limits, behavioral requirements, job-seeking or work requirements, training, and more (Hays 2004).

Scholars have noted how constructions of deservingness create boundaries of who is deemed innocent or worthy along class, racialized, gendered, and other socioeconomic lines. For example, Ronald Reagan infamously constructed images of African-American women who

exploited the welfare system to avoid formal employment (Hancock 2004). The ways in which welfare policies are drafted and implemented actively marginalize people of color (DeSante 2013; Fox et al. 2015; Gilens 2009) and carry gendered requirements that punish family practices outside of the normative white, middle-class, nuclear family (Collins 2002; Gans 1995; Hays 2004; Roberts 2009). With respect to criminality and poverty, even many children and young people of color are systematically denied the perception of innocence (Tilton 2010).

Since state policy and welfare bureaucrats place blame on "able-bodied" individuals for living in poverty, they adopt paternalistic practices to reform those individuals (Bruch, Ferree and Soss 2010; Schram et al. 2009; Schram et al. 2010; Soss, Fording and Schram 2011a). As the US has decentralized homeless relief, non-profits like the homeless centers in this research become the sites at which individual reforms take place. Like other welfare bureaucrats (Hasenfeld 2010; Hays 2004; Rosenthal and Peccei 2006; Watkins-Hayes 2009; Zacka 2017), staff at homeless centers must interpret ambiguous and conflicting rationales of welfare and services, and then regulate their impoverished clients according to their own interpretations and cultural beliefs.

This leads to the crux of this chapter. Young adults are at the nexus of this cultural construction of innocence and deservingness—too young to have shaped their lives and "caused" their poverty, but old enough to be thought of as able to exit poverty through their own efforts. My research demonstrates that this turning point is rarely considered in policy and practice, and creates a vacuum in which staff at homeless centers develop discourses of "adulthood" to frame the "ideal shelter client" and regulate the distribution of scarce resources to an ever-growing group of impoverished young adults.

What is Adulthood?

In describing the process of adulthood, sociologists and other social scientists have "concentrated on social norms and variation around the entry, timing, and sequencing of educational, career, marital, and childbearing transitions" (Tanner 2011:818). These "Classic Markers of Adulthood" (Blatterer 2007; Blatterer 2010) have been used as indicators of maturity since World War II (Tillman, Brewster and Holway 2019). Yet, because of a variety of structural changes since the 1940s—including an increase of young people continuing education, delaying marriage and children, and a more precarious labor climate—scholars have investigated how the "transition to adulthood ha[s] been delayed, desequenced, and individualized" (Tanner 2011:818). During this time, researchers have attempted to describe and name this new phenomenon: post-adolescence, delayed adolescence, protraction of youth, arrested adulthood, erosion of adulthood, etc. Emerging adulthood (Arnett 2007; Arnett 2015) has perhaps become the dominant term of this phase of life characterized by "self-discovery, excitement, and freedom" (Tillman, Brewster and Holway 2019).

However, scholars have also criticized the attempt to define adulthood without noticing how social norms are dependent upon a particular *kind of person* in society. For example, Blatterer (2007) argues,

> "Whether it is the infantilization of the old and disabled, the social construction of childhood as a time of vulnerability as well as harboring the vestiges of delinquency, or the infantilization of women ('babes') or blacks (black 'boys'); whether it is the gradual attrition of working-class 'precociousness' and the universalization of middle-class childhood (Gillis 1981; Perrot 1997), adulthood is a metaphor for membership in society through the attainment of full personhood. … **Adulthood, then, denotes individuals' status in society as full partners in interaction**." (780; emphasis added)

Monitoring young adults in social policy, then, is less about helping them achieve adulthood and more about forcing conformity to a specific norm of American worker.[33] This helps explain why "deservingness" debates about who should receive governmental assistance never quite cover all of the "innocent." Instead, norms of deservingness and adulthood intersect with gender, race, class, sexuality and other structures of power (Bernstein 2011; Thompson 2004). Jennifer Tilton (2010) explains:

> "Not all children today have equal access to the symbolic power of childhood innocence and dependency. Youth of color, particularly black boys and girls, have long been linked with other symbolic associations—criminality or sexuality—that have undermined their ability to make claims on the state. … Young people have not experienced [the last 30 years of policy shifts] equally. … The category of youth itself seemed to split: poor kids, often kids of color, grew up too soon, while the protected children of the middle class never grew up." (11)

So, while scholars and policy-makers assume they are describing what adulthood looks like, they instead are crafting the standards that individuals need to meet in order to be accepted and respected in society. Adulthood operates as a cultural frame to decide which people in society deserve recognition and the freedom to engage in self-determination. As we will see, the cultural standards of adulthood actually reflect requirements for stability: housing, stable jobs, and a family. By constructing a frame of adulthood that reflects these requirements for stability, organizations implicitly categorize people experiencing homelessness as *social children*.

[33] Or as Fraser and Gordon (1994) explain, dependence on capitalist markets rather than dependence on government.

ADULTHOOD AS STRUCTURE

While adulthood is a cultural construction and often used as a stand-in for who is considered "human" or a "citizen,"[34] it also is firmly rooted in the structures governing social life. A variety of legal designations of age of majority exist in the US—each legally providing access to benefits or loss of assured dependency on parental or state support (Hamilton 2016). For example, depending on the state, people can drive as young as 14, give sexual consent as young as 13, purchase and consume alcohol at 21, and vote at 18. Many thresholds are negotiable. When minors are in the criminal justice system, there is often discussion as whether or not they can be "tried as an adult"—and increasingly, we find Black and brown young men being treated as "adults" for the purpose of criminal consequences (Rios 2011; Tilton 2010).

All of the clients I worked with and interviewed were over the age of 18. However, due to definitions of youth by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), these young adults are considered "youth" until age 24. In this section, I describe how young adults exist in a contested and liminal space which sets the stage for interactions and negotiations regarding clients' maturity and independence in these spaces.

Absence of Young Adults in Social Policy

Long-term social welfare policies, from the Social Security Act of 1935 to the Personal Responsibility and Opportunity to Work Act of 1996, have dedicated the bulk of their attention and resources to children, the elderly, and those with disabilities. These interventions have seen

[34] Consider, for example, how African-Americans during the slave and Jim Crow eras were perceived as children who needed to "be taught to obey" and systemically excluded from the dominant civic life (Omi and Winant 2014:116).

marked improvements in poverty rates for these groups, with especially pronounced reductions for children and retired persons (Hawkins 2019; Sironi and Furstenberg 2012; Wimer et al. 2020). Due to the demographically-tailored nature of these welfare systems, however, other age groups have found themselves with markedly less state support. In particular, young adults receive few opportunities for government assistance and also have the highest rates of poverty among any other age group (Wimer et al. 2020).

In looking at which social policy programs are available to young adults, we can divide young adults into three categories to determine which programs they have access to: A) disabled young adults; B) young adults with children; and, C) childless, non-disabled young adults. Depending on their previous work history, Group A may be eligible for Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Group B (young adults with children) can access Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Group C has no access to any cash assistance and can only access in-kind poverty assistance, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; i.e. food stamps), Medicaid (healthcare insurance), housing vouchers, and job training programs (like Job Corps).

Comparing the effectiveness of cash transfers, tax credits, and in-kind assistance is difficult due to changes in requirements, economic shifts, and other concerns. However, there is evidence that direct cash transfers and tax credits have the most immediate and lasting impacts on helping individuals and families get out of poverty (Bitler, Hoynes and Kuka 2017; Pac et al. 2017) Thus, while young adults without children or disabilities have access to a number of programs, they are most often ineligible for the most impactful programs like TANF and EITC.

Overall, this oversight of young adults in social policy has helped lead to an alarming spike in poverty rates for young adults (ages 16-24). When calculating poverty rates at 100% and

50% of the poverty line, young adults have the *highest* rate of poverty compared to every other age group (Hawkins 2019, Wimer et al. 2020). Further, the rates of poverty for young adults have increased since the 1960s, while for every other age bracket they have decreased (Wimer et al. 2020).

Homelessness & HUD

When we consider those who are unhoused or unstably-housed, young adults have few programs dedicated to their age group specifically. Depending on their city, they may find homeless youth programs that serve people up to age 24 (the HUD age limit of "homeless youth") or entry into general adult homeless programs (that serve all people above the age of 18). Each organization can designate the age-range they target, but if they are designated as "youth" shelters or centers, they must cap their clients' ages at 24. In Chicago, there are a couple programs that span from 16-24, but most programs that include young adults focus on the 18-24 age range.

In HUD's definition of "youth," they acknowledge that in practice the category is flexible but provides one universal characteristic distinguishing them from adults: "Youth homelessness is unique because young people are still developing."[35] The assumption here is that youth are still developing (although it is unclear *in what way* they are developing) and that adults are no longer progressing at slower rates or perhaps are less moldable. By grouping all young people from teenagers to young adults, it also assumes that a 22-year-old is still developing in similar ways to

[35] See HUD's Ending Youth Homelessness Guidebook Series, page 3: https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Ending-Youth-Homelessness-System-Planning.pdf

a 14-year-old. These assumptions provide the rationale for paternalistic policy and practice towards young adults in an ambiguous framing.

Labeling "Youth"

From the moment clients look up these organizations or enter their doors, they see signals that these agencies are directed towards *youth*—even though their official target ages are 18-24. *Fierce* has "youth" in its actual (non-pseudonym) title. Mission statements for *Project Alight* and *Fierce* describe clients here:

> Project Alight: *"We who recognize God's providence and fidelity … our efforts together in the community are a visible sign that affects the presence of God, working through the Holy Spirit among ourselves and our kids."*
>
> Fierce: *"Fierce drop-in is a safe space for LGBQIA and TGNC youth experiencing homelessness to access resources and referrals to achieve short and long-term life goals. … By supporting self-empowerment and encouraging self-advocacy and accountability, we serve as a catalyst for positive change to youth that access the drop-in space."*

Fierce includes "self-empowerment," "self-advocacy," and "accountability"; this is a marked difference between *Fierce* and the other two centers, and one that does play out in the actual negotiations of adulthood and their consequences. However, at the start, *Fierce* still identifies its clients as "youth"—even if they are "self-empowered" youth.

Further, staff titles reinforce the categorization of "youth." Staff at *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza* that work directly with the clients are either "Case Managers" or "Youth Advisors." While *Fierce* rejects the titles of "Case Managers" in favor of "Resource Advocates,"[36] other staff titles include "Youth Development Specialists."

[36] During orientation, the director of *Fierce* specifically explained to our group that "our youth are not cases to be managed."

When clients enter *Project Alight,* they sign a contract in the "Youth Handbook." This handbook outlines the rules which include staff-designated and chaperoned smoke breaks, not leaving or entering the space without a staff escort, strict curfews, and more. Clients at *Fierce* are briefed on their rules, called "Keep it Cute!" guidelines. These involve broader concepts such as, "Respect Diversity," "Violence-Free Space," and "Respect Personal Guidelines." When a client at *Fierce* is disrupting the space or breaking any of these guidelines, staff members will often say, "Keep it cute!" or "That's not cute. Let's try again." Staff and clients used "cute," not as a pejorative or infantilizing term, but a slang term for "awesome" or "cool" that resonated with the queer community. Yet, a few clients have rejected the nomenclature. Brandon, a straight Black male specifically told me it felt infantilizing: "We ain't children—so we ain't trying to be cute anyways!" Overall, the signals from the outset posit that clients in the space are *children, kids,* and/or *youth*.

Labeling youth for and by the broader community

Project Alight is preparing to move to a new neighborhood, Garfield Park—which has higher rates of gun violence and drug crimes than most other Chicago neighborhoods. At *Project Alight*'s Zoning Board of Appeals meeting described in Chapter 2, community members referenced this as a reason not to bring a shelter for youth to Garfield Park:

> "You should be giving them normality and stability. I don't think this neighborhood is suitable. … We know the reality; we know the violence– and we need to protect these kids." *Middle-aged, Black woman*

> "I want these kids and young people to be successful. But there's nothing in our community for these kids. They need to look at how much police activity there is and whether this is the place for youth." *Middle-aged, Latino man*

In comments supporting the move, both by the CEO of *Project Alight* and another community member, the youthfulness of clients was described:

> "Everything doesn't happen within our walls. Just like our own children, they go on field trips.[37] They're exposed to many different things in the community, in many cases, that they've never been exposed to. Just a few weeks ago, we had a field trip to the beach! … We are providing experiences so that our youth are well-rounded and have exposure to different things and careers in the community." *CEO of Project Alight, Black woman*

> "These kids need a place to grow up. I like this community and they'd grow up fine here." *60-70s, Black woman*

Concerns about "growing up" and "protecting these kids" dominated the justifications for both positions. In the previous chapter, we also saw how *Project Alight* assured the public and the Zoning Board that they would help keep the youth under control by prohibiting outside loitering—asserting the organization's position as part of the youth control complex.

Returning back to *Project Alight*'s drop-in following the meeting, the clients were frustrated at how the opposition thought they needed to be protected from Garfield Park. Sam, a 20-year-old Black female yelled as we exited City Hall: "I'm from Garfield Park. I know what's going on there. Why they think they know better than me?" As we piled into the van, Queenie, a Black transgender female also laughed at the notion of needing protection: "Girl. I'm surprised I'm still alive. Them folk don't know what it's like being trans and black and here they are telling me they want to protect me. Girl, they don't know nothing."

[37] Readers will note that the CEOs use of "field trips" to describe outings is also infantilizing. Further, the clients would often walk to the beach on their own and multiple interviewees mentioned relaxing by the beach as one of their favorite pastimes. The CEOs notion that "a field trip to the beach!" is something unique and exciting demonstrates her framing of these young adults as children.

Structuring Dependency or Agency[38]

While both *Project Alight* and *Fierce* categorized their clients as "youth" (as per HUD policy), they differed in their approaches towards structuring and providing agentive space with regard to: 1) their guiding principles and frameworks towards working with youth, and 2) the basic rules that ground interactions in each space.

Principles and frameworks

At intake, each client who comes to *Project Alight* is provided with a 17-page handbook detailing their mission statement, principles, and the general rules and procedures. It ends with a contract clients must sign detailing their rights and their expectations. While the CEO remarked in her interview that they are a "low barrier to entry" shelter, the first principle of *Project Alight* in the handbook shows the limits of this low-barrier method:

> "**Choice:** Everything we do is a choice. You choose to be at [*Project Alight*]. You can choose to leave [*Project Alight*] at any time. All choices come with consequences … The inability to make some choices will have negative consequences resulting in not being at [*Project Alight*]. You may not want to stop your recreational drug use or you're not ready to address your addiction or your mental health needs or pound the pavement to get that job or attend those classes. Although these choices may seem out of your control, they are not and they will result in the choice not to reside at [*Project Alight*]. … If you're not fully ready to embrace the level of change needed to leave the streets and you choose to leave [*Project Alight*] that's OK too."

As described in the previous chapter, the assumption that economic security or control over mental health is within each client's capabilities is misleading. We know that using

[38] I focus my analysis in this chapter on these two organizations rather than including *La Fortaleza* as I spent more time with *Project Alight* and *Fierce* (see methodology appendix), the COVID-19 pandemic having halted in-person research at *La Fortaleza*. However, from my ~22 hours working at *Fierce*, my orientation, and my discussion with case managers and staff, *La Fortaleza* seems to have adopted a middle ground between *Project Alight's* strict policies and *Fierce's* agentive approach.

recreational drugs is often a choice to address mental health (Mitchell et al. 2016). But a choice like using marijuana for anxiety or other mental health concerns would not be allowed. In principle 4, the handbook makes clear that clients will need to 'make some changes':

> "**Structure:** A change in our life requires a new foundation. Also, [*Project Alight*] serves a lot of youth and our structure helps us run our programs effectively. There is a lot of structure here. We have a 9pm curfew. Meals are served at a certain time and chores are completed every day. While you are here you will have a "Case Plan" from 8:00am-4:00pm. This structure provides stability and allows you to focus on your own goals. We know that for some people this is a big change, but the structure is in place to help you end your homelessness and it prepares you for the working world—getting up in the morning, dressing for success, going to work or finding work, moving from homelessness to independent living."

The handbook (and *Project Alight*'s procedures in practice) leaves little room for agency in the creation of this structure. While some youth are able to negotiate later curfews for a late college course or an "irregular" job schedule, we also saw from Enrique's story in the last chapter how this often becomes irreconcilable.

Project Alight's other 3 principles include **Immediacy** (providing for immediate needs before creating a case plan), **Sanctuary** (providing physical, emotional and mental safety and "leaving the street at the door"), and **Value Communication** (providing healthy relationships and requesting that clients be respectful and honest).

Table 3.1: Comparison between Fundamental Values of *Project Alight* and *Fierce*

Project Alight's Five Principles	*Fierce*'s 5 Frameworks
Choice	Harm Reduction
Immediacy	Trauma Informed Care
Sanctuary	Anti-Oppression
Structure	Anti-Violence
Value Communication	Transformative and Restorative Justice

Clients entering *Fierce* are not given a handbook when they first enter. Instead, they are given a walking tour and the "Keep it Cute!" guidelines (listed in the next section) for accessing the space are explained. However, in the policies and procedures manual given to staff and volunteers, *Fierce* describes operating on five frameworks: **Harm Reduction, Trauma Informed Care, Anti-Oppression**, **Anti-Violence**, and **Transformative and Restorative Justice**. Altogether, these frameworks attempt to focus on respecting client's choices and not "pre-defining" the outcomes or consequences from those choices.

For example, in their description of **Harm Reduction**, the *Fierce* manual focuses not on enforcement or applying organizational consequences to harmful behavior, but providing "lifesaving information and supplies." The handbook (and organization) recognizes that many methods of survival can also be harmful such as living with an abusive partner, sex work, and drug trade. *Fierce*'s description of **Trauma Informed Care** further emphasizes the desire to keep agency in the hands of their clients:

> "Trauma is experienced when our basic life assumptions are shattered, experienced [as] a loss of choice or control.
>
> What can you do?
>
> It's not about fixing or even addressing a person's trauma. …
>
> Give control back to the person.
>
> Give them options, they get to make the choices."

As we see, a core focus of both the Harm Reduction and Trauma Informed Care frameworks is returning or affirming the client's control and choice without imposing *additional* consequences from *Fierce* as an organization. This differs from *Project Alight*, which emphasizes choice and helping clients recognize their choices in its principles, which not only fails to provide resources to make those decisions (such as full mental health treatment), but adds

organizational consequences on top of the feared potential consequences. *Project Alight*'s choice reduces the options available and enforces both the choice and the consequences under the guise of personal responsibility. *Fierce,* on the other hand, promotes agency—the ability to consider a range of options and make choices that may fall outside of normative behavior (Watkins-Hayes 2019: 154-157). *Project Alight* demonstrates that the consequences of adulthood as a deservingness discourse include additional organizational penalties that contribute heavily to the *youth control complex* and perpetuate the length of homeless episodes.

Fierce's last framework, **Transformative and Restorative Justice**, provides the foundation for understanding how *Fierce* staff respond to instances where clients do break organizational policy—whether that transgression is towards staff, the space, or other clients.

> "**Transformative Justice** uses a systems approach, seeking to see problematic behaviors as a transformative, relational and educational opportunity for folks directly involved, as well as all other members of the affected community. … It is a form of healing justice and an alternative to punitive models of accountability.
>
> **Restorative Justice** is a form of justice that focuses on the reconciliation between the folks involved in a situation/escalation/incident and the community at large. Both justice approaches are utilized as a way of building accountability within the [*Fierce*] youth community."

Accountability at *Fierce* focuses on the event itself and seeks to heal *all* parties involved—both those that 'perpetrated' a wrong and those that were wronged. As we will see, it again avoids various organizational consequences that are outside the scope of the harm (i.e. losing an interim bed because of drug use). It views "unacceptable" actions as responses to trauma and "perpetrators" as needing healing rather than punishment.

Basic Ground Rules

Building on these principles and frameworks, *Project Alight* and *Fierce* have specific applications of the rules they expect for clients to follow. A quick overview of these rules helps describe the difference between an organization focused on structure and an organization focused on agency. At *Fierce*, the only list of "rules" or "guidelines" are on a variety of posters titled, "Keep in Cute!" They list the following 7 guidelines:

- Respect diversity of identity and experience
- Free our space from hateful language
- "Turn down for what?" – Personal awareness (keeping weapons and substances out of sight when in the organization's space)[39]
- Build a community of trust
- Be mindful of personal boundaries
- Help us maintain a violence-free space
- Talk to staff if you are feeling uncomfortable

One of the staff members told me, "Anyone can use our space for what they need as long as it doesn't affect anyone else." During my volunteer time there, other rules were implemented depending on need. For example, staff noticed that *Fierce* was often reaching capacity for the day before they could admit any LGBTQ+ clients. They instituted a policy that reserved a quarter of the day's capacity for LGBTQ+ individuals and another quarter for individuals experiencing homelessness[40]. After a couple days, the staff were notified by surrounding businesses that clients were lining outside of *Fierce* up to 2 hours before opening to make sure

[39] Note how this is distinct from the searches upon entry by both *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza*.
[40] For the purposes of this policy, experiencing homelessness was understood more specifically as *street homelessness*. Meaning: you might not qualify if you had a spot at an interim or long-term shelter, were confident that you had a place with friends and family for the time-being, etc.

they had a spot. As a result, the *Fierce* staff implemented a no-congregating rule until 30 minutes before opening. Other similar rules would pop up or disappear depending on circumstantial need.

After explaining *Project Alight*'s 5 principles, the Youth Handbook then went through five pages of rules and expectations for their clients. First, *Project Alight* explains that all clients are expected to:

- Either be employed, seeking full-time employment, maintain part-time employment with schooling, or attend school full-time
- Participate in all groups, structured activities, and scheduled case management meetings
- Address medical, mental health or substance misuse
- Live harmoniously with all members of *Project Alight*

The other rules and expectations include:

- Curfew at 9 PM: "Even returning to the residential units five minutes late is a big deal. … You can also lose your bed if you disregard curfew. Curfew times are a privilege and can be changed at any time."
- Drugs/Alcohol: "Not one sip of beer, not one toke. … You can't use anything, even if you are straight by the time you are back or you don't use enough to get stoned or drunk. If we suspect you are under the influence we may refer you to get a drug test, which would be required before you are admitted back."
- Meal Times: Breakfast at 8am, lunch at 12:30, and dinner is at 6pm. "We do not save dinners if [tardiness or absences were] not pre-planned."
- Medication Policy: All clients must hand over their medications to *Project Alight* staff, but clients must also be responsible for asking for the medication. Exceptions are if doctor has required the medication to stay on the person (like inhalers or EpiPens).
- Money Policy: *Project Alight* holds 80% of all earnings while at *Project Alight*. "This money belongs to you and you will get it back when you leave but while you are with us we expect you'll save your money. This includes money you earn from a job, any money you receive from welfare, SSI, any money you make selling your possessions, any money you receive as a gift, or any money you find lying on the street. **Do you have money now? Do you have any money in a bank account**?"[41] (emphasis added)
- Physical Contact: "We have a no physical contact policy at *Project Alight*"

[41] I added this emphasis as this was the only rule description that included rhetorical questioning defending the rule – and did so in an aggressive manner.

- Sex Industry/Pornography: There is no pornography at *Project Alight* and "you can't stay here and actively be involved in the sex or pornography industry…because *Project Alight* is not supportive of youth working in any industry that is/can be exploitive of our youth."
- Smoking restriction: "You may not go outside unaccompanied for a cigarette. If you smoke, staff will provide scheduled, 'Air Breaks' for you to smoke."
- Working under the table: "We cannot support any employment that is illegal or a source of undeclared income."

A comparison of *Project Alight* and *Fierce*'s stated rules demonstrate a clear difference in their construction and treatment of clients. At *Fierce*, rules are meant to make sure clients do not harm the space or other clients: they are afforded more freedom in how they spend time and how they choose to address their homeless circumstance. At *Project Alight*, the heavy emphasis on structure is grounded in an assumption that this level of discipline will put clients on the road to stability, or at the very least, maintain order within the organization.

ADULTHOOD IN INTERACTION

Within the structures outlined above in national policy, organizational rules and frameworks, and symbolic labeling, young adults would then move through these spaces and interact with organizations and their staff, negotiating the rules and cultural expectations behind them. When conflicts arose around various rules or when staff were displeased with the clients, the reasoning of adulthood, maturity, and "preparing for the real world" were often brought up to justify staff's actions and the organization's policies.

Not Yet in the Real World

It was my first-time volunteering at *La Fortaleza*'s shelter. I had just made a dinner[42] and the head youth advisor, Jazz, asked me to come sit in for a night check-in. Jazz was a transgender female of mixed African-American and Puerto-Rican descent who had been homeless for much of her teens. She was very outgoing and honest from the outset. As I had been asked to cook during my volunteer shifts, I asked if she had any pasta (which is a favorite of mine to cook). She laughed hard and told me, "These kids don't want to eat no fancy shit." When clients complained about something, Jazz would often launch into a long story from the time when she "shared their struggles."

Tonight's check-in was the first nightly check-in *La Fortaleza* had done: Jazz wanted to provide more community within the shelter and felt that this would help clients become more open with each other. She gathered myself, the four clients who had already arrived for the night, and one staff member in training to a table near the entrance. She explained what she wanted from the nightly meetings and then said,

> "Right now, I wanna know what staff can do—we are here to learn from you."

Dominique (from last chapter) spoke up immediately about how uncomfortable it was to wait outside on the street until someone buzzed her inside the shelter. She had a night job and would often return to the shelter between 4-6am.

> "I don't want no one thinking I'm a prostitute coming home that late. But also, who knows who's gonna come up to me at that hour. I might just be sitting waiting for you all to open the door and get attacked."

[42] I might add that one client said that my cooked spinach was, "The best damn greens" he's ever had.

Jazz said she'd bring it up with Luné, the lead case manager, and then asked if anyone else had thoughts. After some awkward silence, she explained that perhaps they would make this nightly meeting into a group to teach life skills:

> "When you start your adult life, you need to learn how to be organized. We are gonna start some groups on how to clean things, do your laundry, and stuff like…"
>
> Dominque: "To y'all we children. Y'all look at us like children."
>
> Jazz: "I don't look at you like children. I look at you like young adults."
>
> Dominique: "We go through bullshit all day. From the trains, the buses and all that. Last thing we need is to deal with bullshit from you all."
>
> Jazz: "What you mean?"
>
> Dominique: "You make us do pat downs before we come in. You act like we don't know how to do laundry. You say we haven't started an adult life. Girl, I already be livin an adult life since I was small."

Dominique voiced something I heard often in my interviews: "I've been an adult for a long time." As most of the young adults had persevered as children through poverty and family instability (Robinson 2018a), they already had experience making decisions about the future on their own. Being homeless, they've experienced quite a bit of the "real world."

Yet multiple staff members would justify rules created to help streamline the center or as "preparation for the real world." Every morning, residents in *Project Alight*'s transitional shelter had to leave their rooms for the day at 8:00am and could not return until 3:00pm. Thus, they had to take everything they needed for the day with them, even though many would be in the drop-in center down the hall for much of that time. During one of my shifts, Jaxton realized he left his work shoes in the room. Two hours before he needed to leave to for his work shift, he asks Dannika, a Youth Advisor, to return to the room. Dannika refused, saying:

> "You know the rules. You need to learn there are consequences. We are trying to prepare you for the real world."
>
> *Jaxton:* "So, you'd rather me lose my job to teach me some dumbass lesson?"

Dannika and another staff member still refused. They instead told him to devise a new solution. Jaxton stormed off, but Marcus (another client) offered to let him use his shoes since he was staying in the drop-in all day. Of note in Dannika's response to Jaxton was 1) an insinuation that Jaxton doesn't yet know the real world and does not live in it; 2.) an insinuation that Jaxton is not prepared for that world; and, 3.) it is *Project Alight* and its staff who do know the real world and have the ability to prepare others for it.

Conflict Over Finances

As mentioned earlier, *Project Alight* has a policy of keeping 80% of the earnings of the clients in its transitional housing program. The rationale is that this will help clients budget the remaining 20% for immediate use. Once the client finds stable housing, all the money is returned to them with the intention that it can be used as a safety net.

After being jobless for a couple months, Damian (a 22-year-old Black male) was about to receive his first paycheck from a job that he really liked and felt invested in. As a present to himself, he planned on spending half of that paycheck on a $300 pair of Nikes. He asked his case manager, Natasha for an exception to the 80% rule:

> Natasha*:* "Are you crazy? A $300 pair of shoes!?"
>
> Damian*:* "Yeah, man. I haven't had new shoes in years. I finally have a job, it's a good job, I'm gonna keep it. And I think I deserve this."
>
> Natasha*:* "But what if the unthinkable happens? What if you suddenly lose your job. We are trying to help you be responsible."

> Damian*:* "But it's my money. And I'm not gonna lose the job. And if I do, I still got this place."
>
> Natasha: "But we won't always be here. What if you wait until your second paycheck?
>
> Damian*:* "What's the difference? The difference is I'm another month without new shoes."

During this interaction, Damian ended up convincing Natasha to allow him to purchase the shoes by accepting the consequences if he loses the job. Here, we see Natasha using similar assumptions in her reasoning with Damian as we see in the interaction between Dannika and Jaxton. Damian was acting irresponsibly, according to Natasha, and she tried to educate him on thinking long-term with "what-if" scenarios. She, and *Project Alight*, are trying to teach responsibility, but couldn't engage with the possible benefits of Damian purchasing a new pair of shoes for the first time in three years. Damian's request to be able to independently using his money was treated as *immature.* The solution, for *Project Alight,* was for Damian to show his economic independence through *dependence* on Project Alight—allowing the program control over his finances.

Reminder of Personal Boundaries – "I'm not grown!"

As with many homeless centers, *Project Alight* saw more clients in their daily drop-in during the winter. While the number of young adults they would admit every day often depended on whether they had a full team of staff, the main lounge area often became crowded. The computer lab only had 3-4 working computers at a time, so the majority of clients stayed in the lounge. On crowded days, this could lead to high tensions over where people could sit or even just exist.

On a Friday in January 2020, *Project Alight* had over 25 clients in their drop-in center. As I walked into the lounge, almost every seat was taken, with some of the young women sitting on top of each other during the morning meeting. I leaned in the doorway, watching as one client shuffled through her backpack trying to find something—her backpack, jacket and other winter-wear, and another bag were taking up the seat next to her. DeShaun, one of the frequent *Project Alight* day-center clients, had followed me into the center and, after signing in, walked over to the couch and started moving the young woman's bag, asking, "Can I just sit here?" The young woman responded loudly, making the staff member leading the group stop talking and look over:

> "Excuse me, don't you touch my things."
>
> DeShaun: "Well, you ain't supposed to have things on the couch."
>
> Staff Member Dannika: "Y'all are no longer kids - y'all are adults. You know to respect other people's boundaries. Ok? I know y'all are grown, but don't be touching people's things. "

Even though Dannika was clearly admonishing DeShaun, the young woman responded,

> "I don't appreciate you saying I'm all grown, 'cause I'm not. You all keep doing that, but I don't like it."
>
> Dannika: "This wasn't directed to you. Everyone just needs to be respectful."

Dannika could have simply asked DeShaun not to touch other people's belongings. However, she linked her reprimand to an expectation of being "grown up." This led to a point of contention for the young woman, who had no issue with Dannika reprimanding DeShaun, but felt she needed to respond to Dannika's invocation of their maturity.

This example demonstrates that adulthood was not always used as a tool for governance in the form of telling clients they were immature or not ready for the real world. Like a parent, staff members also used expectations of adulthood akin to a parent telling their child, "Come on, you know better." Furthermore, this interaction shows that not all of the clients *wanted* to be seen

as adults. The young woman rejected repeated claims that she was "grown"—although her motivations for doing so were (and are) unclear. I never saw her at the day-center again.

Challenging Adultism at Fierce

The frameworks at *Fierce* demonstrate an alternative model towards working with youth and young adults. These principles led to the mission statement presented earlier, which describes the agency as striving to help young people develop "self-empowerment," "self-advocacy," and "accountability." To demonstrate how harm reduction and accountability work together, the Associate Director, Simon (a queer Black man) described this story at a volunteer orientation:

> "NK (a former client) taught us a lot about our capacity. … For a while, he was coming to the drop-in really regularly—and when he was drunk, he would become highly escalated. … Eventually, we told him that it was beyond our capacity to support him [because] we couldn't rely on him to prevent violence or keep cool. …
>
> Because we never judged his actual use, we were able to maintain an important relationship. When he was really sick, he came to our space so that we could connect him with emergency services."

In Simon's telling of NK, the "problem" was not about NK, but about *the center's capacity* to help him. Contrast this to the wording found in *Project Alight's* Choice principle:

> "All choices come with consequences. … You might not want to stop your recreation drug use…Although these choices seem out of your control, they are not and they will result in the choice not to reside at [Project Alight]. … If you're not ready to embrace the level of change needed to leave the streets and you choose to leave [Project Alight], that's OK too."

For *Project Alight,* the responsibility of a failed relationship between a client and the center is *on the client.* For *Fierce,* the responsibility of a failed relationship is *on the center*. For *Project*

Alight, it is the client's deficit's (unwillingness to change) that presents a problem. For *Fierce*, it's the lack of institutional resources and capacity that presents a problem.

Fierce's policy on drug and alcohol use was simply: if you are not disruptive to the milieu and do not attempt to sell drugs to others while in the space, being under the influence is not a problem. Multiple times, I found staff members and clients discussing drug use, mostly marijuana, and swapping "best practices" and "tips." On one occasion, Noel, a white non-binary client, was chatting with Delphine, a white transgender woman (and fellow client) about being high at the moment. Noel was also recovering from a hangover and a high on another drug. Delphine responded that she was already drunk, having had some alcohol before coming in for breakfast. The staff overhearing the conversation asked if they were "alright" and offered the sleeping room for their use if they needed it. They both shrugged and said they were "fine." This approach allowed clients to make their own decisions about drug use in the space and face their consequences. The guidelines/rules for the agency were simply to protect the milieu from disruption or violence, rather than setting a standard of "proper use" to judge clients.

As another example of *Fierce* permitting clients to take ownership of their decision, the organization recognizes that many of the clients come from dangerous areas and carry weapons with them. Their "Keep it Cute!" guideline simply asks clients to keep weapons out of sight or to leave them with a staff member until the client leaves for the day. This second option was used various times and Rockford, a straight Black male, said:

> "It's cool they don't kick us out for having a knife, you know? Some rules are important for safety or whatever. But at least they are clear. They get us and what we are going through."

Rockford's remarks provide a stark contrast to the *Project Alight* staff's insistence that only the agency knows "the real world." Clients coming from neighborhoods with violence

recognize "the real world" and have their own knowledge regarding how to survive and thrive in it. Allowing them to do so, *Fierce* affords them more "accountability" for their actions—treating them more as "adults."

Media Use

This is not to say *Fierce* never infantilized its clients. All three centers consistently monitored the media that the clients watched in the space. For the most part, the centers would defend their media standards on not wanting to or potentially retraumatize clients, especially when it came to violent films, tv shows, or music. At *Project* Alight, for example, there was a debate between two Black male clients about watching Netflix's *When They See Us*—a series about the five Black teens wrongfully accused of an attack in Central Park in 1989. One client argued that he sees "enough of that shit 'round town" and would rather avoid it in the space. The other client argued "we gotta understand how the system works, man." In an approach taken by most staff at every center, *Project Alight*'s Youth Advisors erred on the side of caution and did not allow clients to watch the show.

But staff did not always provide a clear reason. During one interaction at *Fierce*, Chas (a straight, Black Youth Development Specialist) was searching Netflix for something to "calm the room down." One of the clients yelled out:

"Are we really in the kids' section? Come on!"

Chas: *"Yeah man."*

"At least some Marvel or an action movie."

Chas: **laughs* "Hon, no."*

"Boy, you trippin."

At *Project Alight*, I sat with the clients in the lounge area of the residential center. We were watching a movie when a naked woman came on the screen. A staff member came into the lounge and immediately said, "That's not *Project Alight*-appropriate!" and shut off the television. One of the clients responded, "But this isn't anything we don't see outside. You aren't protecting us." To which the staff member responded, "That doesn't mean it is good. When you're at *Project Alight*, we abide by the mission statement." Repeatedly, staff and clients would disagree about what was "appropriate" to watch or listen to. Sometimes justifications of content that was "triggering" was used (by both sides), but often staff would simply ignore the clients and put on a PG show.

ADULTHOOD: MATURITY OR STABILITY?

In the interviews with LGBTQ+ young adults, participants were asked to define "adulthood," "stability," and "independence" and give examples of when they started experiencing (or not experiencing) each. Overwhelmingly, participants described adulthood as providing for oneself or making one's own decisions. Some participants gave stories of the first time they paid their phone bill, bought their first car, or moved to a new city on their own.

Liam is a 24-year-old I met at *Project Alight*. He is a white, pansexual cis male whose parents worked as a fireman and a paramedic. He described himself as a know-it-all growing up who would fight with most authority figures. At 17, his parents sat him down and said,

> "Alright, since you think you know better, here's the [emancipation] paperwork, you're an adult now."
> Liam: "Okay cool! Fuck you guys, I'm outta here!"

Liam went on to say he first felt like an adult when he was pulled into a meeting with his school counselor asking him why his parents did not come to his 504 meeting which would negotiate

any accommodations he would need for his education (whether extra time on tests, use of a computer, or other resources).[43] At that moment, Liam realized his parents would not provide any better guidance for his education. So, he told the teacher his parents would not be coming and took initiative to comply with the documentation, school 504 meetings, confirmations with physicians, and the like.

Ray, the 23-year-old, biracial trans male we met in Chapter 2, acknowledged the legal threshold of adulthood early in the interview when he said, "Only until I became an adult, like until after I turned eighteen, was I able to ... do more things." Yet, when I asked him specifically what makes one an adult and when he first *felt* like an adult, he related the following:

> "When I was 14, probably, or 16. … [It was when] I was having to advocate for myself about my medical situation in the schooling system. … I stopped going to school in the eighth grade. I started online school because it worked better for me. Leaving school was the best thing I could have done for myself mentally and physically, especially [being autistic], school can be a hellish nightmare for us even without considering the physical disabilities [like Ehlos-Danlos Syndrome]."

A few mentioned that adulthood is the ability or maturity to focus on your goals and avoid "having to be the answer to everybody else's situation" (Jackie).[44] Other themes included being an "old soul", experiencing the death of loved ones, and taking care of siblings and other family members. However, the overwhelming majority focused on the responsibility or ability to make decisions for their own life.

[43] Liam had a prosthetic eye and had trouble writing.
[44] This was consistent with my previous research on homelessness and motivations for exiting (Lovell et al. 2015).

"Stability" as Markers of Adulthood

When defining stability and their experiences (or more commonly, lack of experience) with it, participants would often reference life markers commonly used in the academic literature as markers of adulthood:

> "House, job, career, you know. Actually moving forward." (Kurtis)
> "Just something comfortable for me. I want to be able to say I have my own house, my own car, and my full-time job, that's it." (Damien)
> "I would say to be stable is … receiving some help with the cost of [college] books, some help with the cost of rent. I'm not sure if that's possible." (Azaria)

While social scientists have argued adulthood is achieved by finding a house, landing a job, and starting a family (Arnett 2015), these young adults demonstrate that these markers of adulthood are simply requirements for stability. As Blatterer (2010) argued, these markers reflect a cultural norm of what "denotes individuals' status in society as full partners in interaction" (780). As homeless centers use cultural judgments for determining "adulthood" and "maturity," they mistake the instability of poverty and homelessness as the lack of maturity. The mistaken assumption that *requirements for stability* are actually *markers of adulthood* can have disastrous consequences for those experiencing homelessness.

Regulating Adulthood or Stability?

I argued in the previous chapter how homeless centers and their resource networks are not designed to provide young adults with the wait times necessary to achieve these requirements for stability. As young adults, they are the population with the least access to the social safety net, and very few systems are set up to help them establish stability. Yet, because markers of

stability are *culturally assumed* to be markers of *adulthood*, the very lack of stability experienced by these young adults also labels them immature, irresponsible, and not ready for assistance.

From the moment these young adults enter the shelters, they are labelled 'youth' despite being legal adults—both because of the liminality of young adults in social policy, and because our cultural understandings of adulthood categorize people living without stable jobs, housing, and relationships as *social children.* Returning again to Blatterer's (2007) argument: "adulthood is a metaphor for membership in society through the attainment of full personhood" (780).

If young adults—the age group *most likely* to be in poverty and the age group with the *most reduced access* to the social safety net—are unable to achieve stability by the time they reach 18, my ethnographic research and interviews suggest that they will continue to be infantilized throughout their interactions with institutions like homeless centers and their resource networks. This is likely to make their eventual exit out of homelessness even more difficult, in a critical moment in the life course that can be foundational for their long-term trajectories.

Existing in that liminal space creates a tension between these young adults, who have been controlling their lives and becoming experts in survival since a young age, and institutions that categorize them as irresponsible and seek to govern each step in their homeless pathway. Institutions and staff members create their own standards to judge "independence" and "responsibility" in manners disconnected from clients' own history and survival decisions. Clients are often expected to demonstrate economic maturity by becoming economically dependent on the shelters. Attempts to take control or ownership of their financial situations are met with derision or claims of immaturity. While I have explored in previous sections the tensions and conflicts clients had with staff and institutional rules, the consequences of not

strictly adhering to these conceptualizations of responsibility can lead young adults to lose access to an organization and its resources.

CONSEQUENCES

As organizations pressured young adults to demonstrate independence and maturity by complying to institutional standards, clients had to choose between ownership of their homeless journey and the decisions that had reliably kept them alive, or accepting the governance of staff and organizations. Choosing organizational governance would take away many of those survival strategies and put them at risk of losing what stability they had.

For example, many of the young adults use marijuana as their medication to deal with trauma, depression, or other mental health concerns. During the COVID pandemic and the police brutality protests, Kurtis lost his job, his apartment, and after a couple months staying with his brother, was kicked out of that apartment as well. He told me:

> "[My brother] gave me a couple months to try to get on my feet, but the riot and stuff like that was tough for me and there wasn't really enough time for me. Cause it takes me time to understand and process some things, and get things in order. … I smoke weed … so I could clear my mind from a lot of stuff that was going on, cause at that point I was living in an abandoned building basically and I had got kicked out cause of something that was going on. Yeah, just worn out."

Because of his marijuana use, Kurtis was unable to get a room at *Project Alight* and another shelter on the South Side. To find some safety during the nights, he took to sleeping on the stairs outside of his girlfriend's family's apartment.

At *Fierce,* I met Vasé, a white, transgender female whose mother had kicked her out of the house. She was sleeping on the street at the time while trying to keep up with community college. Vasé was at *Fierce* almost daily and would spend her time mostly by herself—doing

homework, listening to music, or meeting with psychiatrist and doctors. I asked her if she's heard of *Project Alight*'s interim housing program. She said,

> "I can't do it. They say you can't do weed. Well, right now weed is the only thing keeping me afloat. I'm barely allowed to get the little dose of Zoloft because I don't have insurance. And can you imagine trying to go through all this shit? I'd break down if I didn't have something to calm my nerves. Sometimes I'll take a little more because at night—you just need a break from what happened that day."

Vasé confessed to me that she is bipolar, but none of the drugs have helped. Her psychiatrist kept her on Zoloft with the hopes that it would keep her mental health manageable, but also suggested that, "if the [weed] hits work, it's not a bad idea." However, using weed to stabilize her mental health also restricted her access to the services and resources provided by various sites around town.

Even those who were at *Project Alight* felt the consequences of the constraints, both in terms of drug use and other rules. *Project Alight* provided me with the case files of the first 90 clients who stayed in their residential units. I was able to tabulate the reasons for why each person left the agency or was discharged (see Appendix B, Table 3.2). Notably, departing the center because of a stable housing opportunity that the client was able to secure through employment wages was an extremely rare occurrence; the organization's head case manager could only recall one incident. A few left to move back with family members, although this was most often a short-term housing solution.

In fact, most of the discharges were for reasons unrelated to safety: curfew (25%), marijuana use near the property (13.2%), returning to *Project Alight* under the influence of marijuana (10.2%), having sex or watching pornography (2.9%), and other minor rule violations (8.8%). Only 9 of the 68 were discharged for threatening violence or engaging in physical altercations. I witnessed a couple of the discharges because of marijuana use. Most were for

repeat offenders. However, each time, the staff would huddle and discuss whether or not they should let it go. Every time, despite feeling uncomfortable because "the kid was doing so well," the end result was a discharge.

CONCLUSION

When working with young adults experiencing homelessness, it's imperative to understand the ways in which institutions frame and manage young people. Rios (2011) astutely pointed out how the *youth control complex*, a network of organizations that interact specifically with brown and Black youth, operates not just with law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Instead, the *youth control complex* operates in all institutions—from community centers, to schools, to hospitals, and within the family.

Moreover, the *youth control complex* extends beyond when men and women turn 18. In a society where meanings of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are everchanging, young adulthood is as a liminal space in which these cultural tensions are brought to the surface. In the young adult homeless centers, we see a number of intersecting power dynamics: the paternalistic social policy; the limitations of "youth innocence" (Bernstein 2011; Thompson 2004; Tilton 2010) and its connection with age, race, and the housing/employment market shifts; and the mid-20th century white, middle-class ideals of stability set as the standard for adulthood. These all combine as punishments doled out to young, largely Black and brown young men and women for having adopted strategies necessary to survive the economic and social structures they inhabit.

The interaction between federal policies, in which young adults occupy a liminal space, and the homeless centers which then develop frames of adulthood to regulate their clients, demonstrates the governance described by Marwell and Morrissey (2020). The public-private

partnership provides non-profits the power to develop discourses that frame their clients in particular ways, and these organizations can then bring those discourses to city, state, and federal governments. While many of the staff believe they are simply preparing young adults for "the real world," they are unwittingly solidifying a mechanism to identify clients who will easily achieve program goals (Small and Gose 2020) and reform, and expelling those who do not meet "adulthood" standards.

In order to change organizational policies, we must identify the strands of power that intersect at the level of young adults in poverty—such as the ways in which this discourse of adulthood is operationalized within and a part of the *youth control complex*. The next chapter develops these themes by examining the regulation of sexuality in these spaces, and how norms of "proper sexuality" and their intersection with poverty create additional barriers for young adults as they move through their homeless episodes.

4. Homeless Service Network as Sexual Regulator: Restricting the Survival Habitus

"Eatin' ass ain't no different than eating pussy! Just gotta make sure it's clean."

I had just arrived at *La Fortaleza* after my 75-minute, 2-buses-and-a-train commute. As was normal at *La Fortaleza*'s interim shelter, there were three young adults hanging around the staff desks. The topic today: eating ass. Dominique jumped out of her chair laughing and pointing at the young man who endorsed the practice:

"But you never know if they's clean!"

Luné, the lead case manager, walks up from her backroom office and leans against the doorframe for about 30 seconds, listening to the conversation. After grasping the topic, she yelled, "Hey. Y'all knock it off. No more of that here." She then walked back to her office.

The young adults in my field sites often talked, joked, and gossiped about sexual topics. Shelter staff worked to stop and discourage these discussions, especially at *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza*. Handbooks and other guidelines made clear that relationships, sexual topics and language, and revealing clothing were inappropriate. In what follows, I explore the institutional logics and practices (Thornton and Ocasio 2008) of *Project Alight* and its attempts to deprioritize sex and relationships for its clients. Through its documented policies and observed practices, I show that despite attempting to frame sexual regulation as protection from youth exploitation, it continues to operate as a complete repression of sexuality. I then briefly outline the history of LGBTQ+ non-profits and their complicated history in both perpetuating and resisting sexual regulation and explore the practices of *Fierce* within that context. Using *Fierce* as a foil to *Project Alight*, I explore the consequences of different strategies for addressing sexuality in homeless shelters.

I then turn to sexual identities specifically and the ways in which these organizations attempt to provide spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals. As *Fierce* deliberately worked open and positive discussions of LGBTQ+ identities into its programming, conflict arose around what was seen as preferential treatment towards non-heteronormative individuals. This created siloed cliques within the organization's clientele. On the other hand, *Project Alight* only engaged in vague and cursory discussions of sexual identity—largely leaving it to the young people themselves to discuss and navigate LGBTQ+ topics. This led to more cohesion throughout the young adult populations—although some of the LGBTQ+ staff felt uncomfortable with the institution overall.

To demonstrate the consequences of sexual regulation and discussions of sexual identity, I conclude this chapter with an investigation of the sexual habitus (Green 2008). Bourdieu (1990) described the habitus as the socialized norms that guide thoughts and behavior which have become embodied by individuals. These norms, shaped by a history of interactions with people, organizations, and societal institutions, provide individuals with the know-how to move through social settings and leverage their capital to gain advantages over others. Sexuality scholars have demonstrated how, over time, humans develop a *sexual* (or erotic) *habitus* consisting of sexual inclinations, dispositions, and sexual know-how (Green 2013). I argue that the sexual habitus of young adults experiencing homelessness cannot be separated from their habitus of homeless survival. The strategies for survival are intertwined with the sexual lives of these young adults and, thus, the sexual regulation by non-profits and the welfare system perpetuate cycles of homelessness by restricting access to needed resources.

Early explanations of poverty included beliefs that poverty resulted from inadequate moral discipline. Thus, poverty relief in the Western world often tied needed resources to individualized moral reform, including sexual regulation (Katz 1989; Morris 2000). Moral regulation and poverty relief moved from 18th century campaigns against masturbation, to the Charity Organization Society and mother's pensions in the early 1900s, to welfare reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (Katz 2013; Smith 2001). As the state took a greater role in poverty relief (public welfare), it maintained the idea that institutions could not only alleviate poverty but reform the socially and morally deficient. Despite the move to decentralize poverty relief into the current public-private model we see today (Marwell and Morrissey 2020), the discourse of the undeserving poor and the need for moral and sexual regulation has continued (Haney 2010; Hays 2004).

We see sexual regulation justified in a number of moral panics tied to poverty policy. Laws for mandatory child support would require women to provide a full sexual history. Family cap policies as part of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families targeted poor adults and pushed them into family planning programs—even when undesired by the families themselves (Smith 2001). The most recent landmark welfare changes in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) "Explicitly establishe[d] the promotion of two-parent families and heterosexual marriage, and the discouragement of out-of-wedlock births" (Smith 2001: 184; see also Hays 2004, Roberts 1999). The state, through welfare laws and non-profit organizations, intrudes into the sexual lives of people in poverty and attempts to restrict sexuality until these individuals become economically self-sufficient.

This governance through homeless centers and other non-governmental organizations extends to youth. Besley (2010) uses Foucault's (2008) biopolitics to argue how the state—through non-profits—controls young people:

> "If youth cannot or will not control their conduct with or without the assistance of others, the state will control it for them. If youth do not use their agency and autonomy, and DO NOT self-regulate to become docile bodies and subjects that are useful for the state, then the state will administer its disciplinary biopower in the form of the youth justice system." (538)

As an example, the state combined welfare access and state-control of young bodies during the 1990s moral panic surrounding teenage pregnancy. Within the 1996 PRWORA law—regarding welfare programs, eligibility, and funding—legislators diverted welfare-focused funding streams towards abstinence-only education for teenagers (Smith 2001).

Throughout these discourses, three themes of sexual regulation (out of many) are important for the analysis of contemporary practices in Chicago's young adult homeless centers. First, the state constructs its versions of moral citizens through poverty legislation (Carabine 2000). Second, that citizenship is directly tied to one's status as a productive laborer in capitalism. Sexuality is a reward or privilege for those who are economically self-sufficient (Hays 2004).[45] These both relate to themes from the previous chapter in which the ideal version of a "mature, young adult" includes involvement in the labor market and following norms of repressing one's sexuality.

Finally, scholars of sexuality have shown how the state's welfare regulation actively constructs homosexual and gender non-conforming citizens while policing and criminalizing their behaviors and identities (Bell 2020; Canaday 2009a). Within the context of homeless young

[45] This continues despite feminist critiques that the fear of dependency on the welfare state simply redistributes dependency to market forces (Fraser and Gordon 1994).

adults, Robinson (2020a) argues this functions as a *queer control complex* similarly to the *youth control complex* construct developed by Rios (2011). The *queer control complex* is "a system in which institutions and their agents systematically police LGBTQ youth's behaviors, particularly their gender behaviors in relation to policing their assumed non-heterosexuality. … This queer control complex aims to get youth to adhere to dominant notions of gender and sexuality" (56).

Policing and surveillance of non-heterosexual and gender-expansive behaviors (the *queer control complex*) functions uniquely as it relates to LGBTQ+ identities, but also operates within the larger sexual regulatory framework of poverty governance. From my observations and interviews, organizations and organizational staff went out of their way to make non-conforming sexual *identities* feel welcome—even if their missions did not cater to LGBTQ+ persons specifically. However, sexuality as a whole was regulated in connection with the dominant discourses of moral citizens who wait for sexuality as a reward for economic independence.

Deprioritizing Sex and Relationships at Project Alight

Project Alight had the most explicit restrictions on sexuality in and out of the space. This included restrictions on viewing pornography, working in pornographic or sex industries, and even discouraging relationships:

> "This includes prostitution, pimping, dancing, stripping, working as an escort, working on a phone sex line, working in a sex shop, X-rated theater, X-rated video store, or massage parlor because *Project Alight* is not supportive of youth working in any industry that is/can be exploitive of our youth or connected to human trafficking. …"
> "You are not at *Project Alight* because you need a date, you are here to address your homelessness. *Project Alight* discourages dating relationships and/or sexually explicit behavior between youth. We instead encourage you to focus on your case plan." (*Project Alight* Youth Handbook)

The CEO of *Project Alight* admitted in her interview that their shelter "can't totally control [the pursuit of relationships]," but then argued that sexual relationships often end up in pregnancy and "[*Project Alight* is] not interested in supporting generational homelessness." I asked how *Project Alight* supports the sexual and relationship development of her clients and she said, "We connect with other organizations…and we would certainly be able to do that." However, during my time at *Project Alight* I only witnessed one group session that discussed romantic relationships: "Communicating Boundaries with your Partner." It was led by a youth advisor, not an affiliated organization.

The institutional logic displayed by the CEO and *Project Alight*'s policies are that dating and sex are at best a distraction, and at worst exploitative. To minimize these negative outcomes of romance and sexuality, *Project Alight* tried to deprioritize sexuality as a privilege of stability rather than a need or benefit of its own accord.

De-Sexualizing Practices

Because *Project Alight* actively de-prioritizes sexuality in the pathways of young adults experiencing homelessness, it works to de-sexualize its space and its clients as much as possible. While *Fierce* and *La Fortaleza* had no institutionalized policies of deprioritizing sexuality, their staff sometimes took measures to restrict sexuality and potential romances. I demonstrate this through interactions showcasing the regulation of sex in media, interpersonal discussions of sexuality, seeking relationships, and how breaking norms of sexuality can lead to a discharge.

It's important to distinguish between restrictions on sexuality and romance in order to protect individuals from violence or unwanted advances, and the de-sexualization that comes from deprioritizing sexuality as an important aspect of human life. At *Fierce*, the "Keep it Cute!"

guidelines remind clients to be "Mindful of Personal Boundaries" by asking for consent before touching another person. All the providers I interviewed reflected on no-touch rules as preventing harassment or assault at their locations and making sure that all clients felt comfortable.

Media

However, the de-sexualization at *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza* went beyond protection from harassment. As seen in the interactions of both this chapter and chapter 3 (when a *Project Alight* staff member made young adults turn off a Netflix program that showed breasts), it was commonplace for staff to discourage sexual talk and restrict sexual programming. One client at *La Fortaleza,* in February 2020, asked if they could watch Sense-8, an LGBTQ+-focused science fiction show on Netflix. Aaron, one of the youth advisors, told them, "I know that show is awesome, but there's just too much sex in it."

The client rolled their eyes, "Y'all be trippin'. Just fast-forward then." Aaron responded, "You'll be skippin' the whole show. Just pick something else."

Talking Attraction

During the summer of 2019, I escorted five clients at *Project Alight,* four men and a pregnant woman, out for an air (and smoke) break. One of the men started talking about a recent hook-up he had with a white woman. His friend Stephon, a long-term visitor of *Project Alight* on the weekends, laughed and said, "You know it's all about that Black booty. Nothin finer than a Black woman." Nicky, the pregnant woman, started to laugh and said: "That's right boys."

Stephon, as if he suddenly realized I was there, said, "Oh! Was that not *Project Alight*-appropriate? But maybe you like Black women, too? That it? You into Black women?"

Me: "Not quite sure how to answer that."
Stephon: "Oh, come on! You gotta appreciate them Black women."
Me: "Well, you see, I'm just not into women."

Nicky and Stephon's friend start laughing and Stephon gives me a fist-bump: "Aight, I hear ya. But, I thought you was gonna tell us off." I told him I was just a volunteer and would leave the disciplining to the staff.[46]

Stephon's testing whether or not I would censor their talks of sexuality and attraction demonstrate that he recognized the restrictions *Project Alight* was putting in place. He recognized what was "*Project Alight*-appropriate" and knew that he *Project Alight* spaces were meant to be non-sexual. It was not a coincidence that he tested me away from other staff members and when we were outside of the facility.

Trying to Get a Date

Right before the pandemic started shutdowns in Chicago, I was doing a Friday day shift in *Project Alight*'s drop-in center. After morning groups, most of the staff were preparing lunch. It was *Project Alight* policy to have a staff or "adult" in every room that the clients were in—so I stayed in the main lounge where a couple of clients were chatting. Most of the others had moved to the computer room, helping with lunch, or filling out applications for *Project Alight* resources. I was sitting in a chair next to Sam, a former interim housing client. Sam is a Black lesbian who

[46] It was common for clients to test the boundaries of what they could and could not get away with for each staff member. As a volunteer and observer, I preferred to avoid enforcing any rules that were not putting anyone in danger.

had left the interim housing program because her mother was diagnosed with cancer and needed a care-taker. Sam was back for the day to bring her friend, Mallary, to sign up for the *Project Alight* services and possibly a housing spot.

Andre, a straight Black male who was a frequent weekend visitor to *Project Alight*'s drop-in center, came up and started talking to Mallary.

> Andre: "I ain't never seen you before."
> Sam: "She just got here, Andre. Don't you be trying nothin'."
> Andre (to Sam): "I don't do nothin'" (to Mallory): "I just think you're beautiful and I think I'd like to take you out to dinner or a movie if you're ok with that. Do you have a Facebook?"

Mallory laughed and blushed while searching for something in her backpack, "I don't."

> Andre: "Can I help you in any way?
> Mallary: "I'm trying to find my charger!
> Andre: "Well, can I take you to Benny's?"
> Sam: "With what money? You here with the rest of us!"
> Mallary: "You sound like a player."
> Andre: "I ain't no …"

Andre suddenly turned around, sat on the couch opposite Sam and Mallary and started playing with his phone. I looked up and saw that Jaenelle, one of the new case managers, was walking through the lounge to her office. Andre watched her shut the door to the office out of the corner of his eye while Mallary was laughing and still searching for her charger. Andre then got up, grabbed a chair, and sat across from Sam and Mallary. Mallary pulled out two Target gift cards she got from *Fierce* and asked Sam if she wants them. Sam was confused why Mallary would be getting rid of free money.

> Mallary: "I not gonna be using it"
> Andre: "Can I have one? I'll buy you something nice."
> Sam laughs: "Oh geez."
> Andre: "Look, I work all night. I'm a baller. I ain't no stain. I'm a family man. I don't even swear nothing in front of my gramma."

Mallary: “I don’t know you from a can of paint. But I know you a good person”

Andre stood up proudly and began pacing the room.

Andre: “Okay okay okay, you see me.”

But Andre spun around as he heard Natasha say, “Andre, you better not be bothering nobody.” Mallary and Sam laugh.

Andre: “I never bother nobody.”
Natasha: “You focus on yourself.”
Andre: “This is me focusing on myself.”
Natasha: “Oh, so you are bothering somebody.”
Andre: “What, we just talking! Erik, tell her, we just chatting.”

Thankfully, I got to say my shift was up and avoid getting involved. Natasha laughed and left while Andre watched her go. As I got up to leave, he went back to Mallary, saying, “So, when do you think I can take you out?”

Throughout this exchange, we see Andre is keenly aware that *Project Alight* cracks down on people soliciting relationships. He avoids trying to woo Mallary when staff members come into the room. He avoids telling Natasha that he is hitting on Mallary, although he slips up when he reveals that part of him “focusing on [himself]” is trying to get a date. Natasha’s admonition to ‘focus on himself” also reveals that *Project Alight* feels romantic relationships are distractions towards achieving socioeconomic stability.

This also reinforces the idea that sex and romance is solely a privilege and only about attraction or having children. Andre reveals that he sees romance as part of his development: “This is me focusing on myself.” He also tries to convince Mallary that he would not be a liability, despite being homeless: “I work all night. … I ain’t no stain. I’m a family man.” Having discussed Andre’s pathway, I knew that he had a factory job on the Westside of Chicago where

he had been working for over a year. By all accounts and according to *Project Alight*'s standards, he was fairly stable. He simply did not yet have enough money for the housing market in Chicago and instead slept on various friends' couches. However, Natasha and *Project Alight* reinforced that it would be relationships rather than the housing market that would continue his experience in homelessness. The economy was not a danger to his stability; rather, his sexuality and the complications they brought were the culprits.

Dougray's Discharge

In late 2019, I showed up for the night shift to find that Dougray had been discharged. Dougray was well-known at *Project Alight* for being a jokester who loved to tease anyone and everyone. He had just been admitted to the interim housing two weeks prior, had a job lined up, and was feeling good about his situation. Damian, his roommate, was a quiet client who often voiced frustration about Dougray always trying to be the center of attention. I asked Damian what happened to Dougray and Damian said, "I got him out. He was showing me porn on his phone."

Dougray showed up an hour later to pick up his bags. When I asked if he was showing Damian porn, he was like: "That's still what y'all think? It wasn't no porn!" He pulled out his phone to show me his home-screen. It had a picture of a female model in a bikini, but in the motion of taking off her bra. "That's all this was! I asked him if he thought she was hot, ya know?"

While Dougray went to gather his bags, I asked Lacie, a youth advisor on duty when he was discharged, why a picture of a bikini-model was enough to be kicked out. Lacie explained

that he had shown Damian the photo more than once and, "because it's sexual, you know. That's something *Project Alight* is very strict about."

Project Alight and La Fortaleza

These excerpts demonstrate that clients recognize the degree to which these homeless centers are meant to be sexless. *La Fortaleza* and *Project Alight* both refused to allow sexual material in their media and discussions. Stephon knew he had to test whether I'd permit him to talk about his attractions and desires. Andre hoped for a date and navigated around the *Project Alight* staff to get it—flaunting to Mallary that despite being homeless, he was a working, family man. Damian was able to exploit *Project Alight*'s strict anti-porn rules to get Dougray discharged. While we see Andre and Stephon intentionally rebelling against *Project Alight*/*La Fortaleza*, the centers framed sexuality as a privilege: a reward for achieving stability.

In an interview with Natasha, former lead case manager at *Project Alight*, I asked why the specific rules existed against sexuality and relationships. She said although she disagreed with it, *Project Alight*'s stance seems to be that they want the organization to "be the stable girlfriend or boyfriend" of their client. That the staff members are the one to talk to when clients are having a hard time, and clients come to *Project Alight* for a place to stay rather than staying at a romantic partner's place. She said: "I think … an ideal situation if you were dating, you would be dating someone who also was not experiencing homelessness. … Like, my progress does not depend on your survival." She agreed that this approach was not necessarily "best practice" and that there could be benefits to relationships while experiencing homelessness.

It would be tempting to describe queer movements in poverty activism as uniform resistors to sexual regulation. After all, perhaps the most famous of anti-poverty work in LGBTQ+ activism is Silvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson's Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR). Shortly after the Stonewall riots in New York City in 1969, Rivera and Johnson would help people who needed a place to stay sneak into their hotel rooms. While they helped anyone who needed assistance, the majority of those they let in were gay or transgender young people of color. At one point, Rivera recalled, they were sneaking 50 people into two hotel rooms (Feinberg 1998). Eventually, the two activists bought an apartment and housed young people for three years, with affiliated houses popping up in Chicago, California, and England (Feinberg 2006).

STAR maintained its dedication to queer young people of color with the hopes of providing them with the economic and housing security necessary to escape homelessness and societal discrimination. Rivera and Johnson had met as sex workers and many of those they helped house were similarly employed in the trade (Calafell 2019). Through their leadership of STAR and the involvement of other organizations like the Gay Liberation Front, Johnson and Rivera advocated tirelessly for sexual liberation in connection with civil rights groups like the Black Panthers, police and prison abolition, and poverty relief movements (Feinberg 1998). As promising as STAR and the activism and poverty work of Johnson and Rivera was, the demands and logic of public-private welfare and poverty relief would make resistance to the sexual regulation of homeless centers difficult (Bell 2018).

Before STAR and before Stonewall, the gay activists in San Francisco had noticed the connection between poverty and sexual minorities. In 1965, two gay activist groups, the Central

City Citizens Council and the Mattachine Society, designated the Tenderloin—a city area occupied by many queer and transgender transient youth—as a target area for funds from Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty programs (Bell 2020; Martin 2020). In the proposal for assisting the Tenderloin, the Mattachine society argued they would,

> "seek to eliminate preoccupation with sex to the detriment of its more proper role in the total personality, thereby freeing the individual to pursue other attributes necessary for growth and development into full adulthood: Education, earning a living, creativity, cultural and social values, etc. This would free those 'hung up' on their sexuality to help themselves in other ways – including unselfish service to others." (quoted in Bell (2020:11))

The counter-movements to the sexual liberation era further resulted in federal sexual regulation, even among the LGBTQ+ community. As Reagan crafted the image of the "Welfare Queen" as a sexually deviant, Black woman on welfare, LGBTQ+ groups (especially white, gay, and economically stable) tried to distance themselves from association with the welfare state. Race, class, and gender divisions splintered any effective, large-scale approach towards sexual liberation in welfare (Cohen 2019; Mananzala and Spade 2008; Martin 2020).

The legacy of resistance and community support demonstrated by Rivera and Johnson still lives on in queer and trans communities of color throughout the United States. Ballroom culture, which has been brought to popular audiences by the documentary "Paris is Burning" and the recent FX drama "POSE," provides a space for rejected queer people of color to find a home when their family of origin is either unwelcoming or unable to assist (Bailey 2013; Rio 2020). In these communities, established queer and trans "parents" take in children and form a house of queer and trans "siblings." These Houses provide shelter, food, and stability as well as entry into the wider Ballroom culture. New mutual aid programs like *Brave Space Alliance* on the South side of Chicago are pooling resources for other Black and brown queer and trans people in

poverty. Unfortunately, the domination of more traditional and established LGBTQ+ non-profits soak up much of the funding that could be used by these more radical, targeted programs (Beam 2018).

Chicago's LGBTQ+ Non-Profits

Numerous scholars have identified how Chicago's LGBTQ+ non-profits have perpetuated issues originating in the "non-profit industrial complex" described earlier. In *Gay, Inc.*, Beam (2018) describes two LGBTQ+ staples in Chicago's non-profit landscape: the Center on Halsted and Howard Brown Health. He argues that despite these non-profits' celebration of sex positivity, they both crafted racist narratives about young queer people of color as "gangbangers" or other "violent sexualities." Other scholars have likewise noted how sexual communities and sex positivity often is a privilege reserved for white, gay men with money (Orne 2017; Rosenberg 2017). Beam additionally highlights how the Center on Halsted teamed with the Cook County State's Attorney's office to start an Anti-Violence Project. However, this project simply criminalized young LGBTQ+ people who engaged in sex work.

Together, the intersections of race, gender, class, and national welfare politics create a complicated backdrop for the descriptions I give of sex positivity at *Fierce*. I demonstrate how clients and staff routinely celebrate sexuality and sex work in ways not seen in other homeless centers. As most of the staff are queer people of color, they routinely brought up social work principles from activist circles like restorative justice, sex positivity, harm reduction in sex work, and more (Ferguson and Woodward 2009). As harm reduction in sex work is still relatively new in non-profit work (Anasti 2018; Cusick 2006), many of the ways in which *Fierce* staff and the organization worked with LGBTQ+ young people engaging in sex work sets them far apart from

other organizations in the city. Nevertheless, all these elements operate as part of the concerns voiced by scholars who have connected LGBTQ+ organizations (and specifically those in Chicago) with larger regulatory logics (Beam 2018; Bell 2018; Bell 2020; Mananzala and Spade 2008; Smith 2017; Weiss 2020).

Celebrating Sexuality at Fierce

At the orientation for volunteers and staff at *Fierce*, the assistant director Simon, a tall Black man who self-identified as queer, emphasized that sex and body positivity were required approaches for working with clients. When describing how to interact with clients outside of the workplace, Simon told a story of how he was dancing at a gay club for the fetish community when he saw a group of clients walk in. The story was meant to showcase how Simon let clients approach him in public (rather than him identifying them as clients), but it also demonstrates how *Fierce* leadership both lived and practiced positive sexuality for their clients.

While *Fierce* did make sure clients were not engaging in sexual activities in the shower or sleeping room, staff would often participate in discussions of sex with clients. During some down-time in January 2020, Estella, a Black transwoman with long braids and an outgoing personality, was chatting with Chad, a short Black resource advocate. She leans over, whispering a question about another client, "Is she a whore or a hoe?"

> Chad: "Don't talk like that!"
> Damon (another client): "Y'all can call me a hoe, 'cause I'm a good hoe!"
> Amanda (another client): "I'm fun being a whore." [laughs]
> Jackson (trans-male staff): "Shout out to my hoes and my whores! Show your pride!"
> Chad: [laughing] "Now y'all be trying to make me uncomfortable. I'm going back to work."

In October 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court had just heard several cases regarding whether sex discrimination at work included protections for transgender and non-heterosexual individuals. After the oral arguments, Francesca, a Black trans woman, told everyone at *Fierce* during an afternoon check-in, "I quit my jobs yesterday. These people are letting employers do what they want—and I don't want to get censored or fired or have to change how I present or nothing." Jackson, the trans-male youth advisor, asks what Francesca will do without work.

> Francesca: "You know I can get some off Grindr or at the bars."
> Nina (non-binary, Latinx manager of *Fierce*): "Cute! What do we need to get you for that?"[47]
> Jackson: "Maybe we can chat about safe sex-work during Gay-Ass Art Club."[48]
> Francesca: "Y'all know I know what I'm doing. But sure," she laughs, "I can give some tips on how to get them tips, you know."

What makes these examples so striking is their direct contrast with *Project Alight*'s specific rules against sex work. Not only did *Fierce* staff acknowledge and accept the realities of sex work among their clients, they provided a space in which clients could make jokes about sex, talk openly and honestly about the work, and even get into the details of "pleasure." While the majority of homeless centers and shelters operate more in line with *La Fortaleza* and *Project Alight* in the de-sexualization of their clients and spaces, *Fierce* demonstrates how social services operating as sexual fields can accept and even promote sexuality as a vital part of their clients' lives.

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[47] "Cute!" was a phrase often used by staff and long-term clients. It derived from the "Keep it Cute!" guidelines. Sometimes it was used as a reprimand for not following the guidelines, as in, "That's not cute!" However, it was also used as a term of appreciation, approval, or celebration.

[48] "Gay-Ass Art Club" was a voluntary program that Jackson set up a couple times a week. Whoever wanted to go to a back room with Jackson and other clients to do any art projects they wanted. Sometimes, Jackson would put on a movie, some music, or sometimes they would simply talk about whatever was going on in their lives.

Contrasting Project Alight with Fierce

The attempted restrictions on sexuality in *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza* compared to the recognitions and celebrations of sexuality in *Fierce* demonstrate how social services regulate and respond to sexuality. For *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza*, sexuality was constructed and regulated only as attractions and desire that disrupted pathways to socioeconomic stability. *Project Alight* also specifically warned that sexuality opened their clients to exploitation. In sum, sexuality and relationships were constructed by *Project Alight* (and to some extent, *La Fortaleza*) as: privileges, distractions, and dangerous. Scholarship has shown that STDs/STIs are *real* dangers for sexually-active individuals experiencing homelessness (Caccamo, Kachur and Williams 2017), but *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza* instead focused on proposed fears of exploitation and distraction.

Fierce's approach in celebrating sexuality, accompanied by their harm-reduction model, constructed a much different understanding of sexuality. Staff and clients all understood themselves as sexual beings rather than sexuality being seen as either a drive to be suppressed or a privilege enjoyed after stability. Despite the negative connotations outside of *Fierce*, staff and clients re-cast "whores" and "hoes" as valid (and even proud) identities.

Public Health Note

From a public health standpoint, the harm reduction model that accepts individuals where they are has been shown to help prevent the spread of STDs/STIs (Platt et al. 2018; Rekart 2005; Wilson et al. 2015) and reduce the stigma that prevents exploited individuals from seeking assistance (Hickle and Hallett 2016; Marlatt et al. 1976). We see Francesca telling staff and other clients at *Fierce* without shame that she is choosing to move into sex work to avoid

discriminatory employment. Both Nina and Jackson immediately looked for ways to make that a healthy decision: “What do we need to get you to help with that?” and “Maybe we can talk about safe sex-work?” *Fierce* also had a bowl of condoms for their clients to take, had medical staff on duty to discuss any sexual health concerns with clients, and intentionally worked to ensure that clients felt supported in their sexual lives. On the contrary, at *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza,* condoms were not made available although there were flyers on the walls for referrals to medical facilities if someone thought they had an STD/STI.

IDENTITY-BASED PROGRAMMING

While my observations did not reveal a targeted sexual regulation of LBGTQ+ sexualities, there was a contrast in how organizations focused on LGBTQ+ identities and identity-based programming. Surprisingly, *Fierce*’s focus on sexual and gender minorities led to more explicit tensions between the LGBTQ+ population and non-LGTBQ+ identified people in receiving help. *Project Alight,* on the other hand, does little to discuss LGBTQ+ identities and needs other than, “Respect everyone,” and saw few fights based on sexual or gender identity.

Teaching Sexual Identity and Tension

Fierce’s focus on the LGBTQ+ population provided many instances to educate other young adults who were not sexual or gender minorities on the unique difficulties of the LGBTQ+ community. Many times, during a new client’s tour around the facility, staff would attempt to explain what “gender pronouns” were. Any time a client or staff member introduced themselves in a meeting, they stated their name and their pronouns (and often their astrological sign). Occasionally, someone would misgender another person in the space, but staff would always

frame this as a moment to reteach gender-versus-sex and why pronouns and correctly gendering someone was important.

Some straight clients, however, would become frustrated by the agency's clear focus on the LGBTQ+ population. Soon after I started volunteering, the staff decided to assign quotas for who could be let into the space. One-quarter of the day's slots were reserved for LGBTQ+ folk, one-quarter for those experiencing homelessness, and the remaining half could be anyone who needed assistance or a place to hang out for the day. One day, a couple of regular clients (who had been recently housed) were denied entry into the space because the final spots were given to LGBTQ+ clients. These two clients, Rick and John, started yelling outside:

> "You hate me because I'm straight!"
> "That's some sexual discrimination right there!"

Fierce again took this as a teaching moment. Two staff went outside and met individually with Rick and John to help explain why LGBTQ+ folk were especially in need of a safe place during the day. They highlighted racism within Chicago's Northside LGBTQ+ community (Orne 2017), and the fact that many of these people would have nowhere to go as LGBTQ+ folks of color. Inside the center, a Youth Development Specialist, Jasper (a Black trans man), led a history lesson on Stonewall and LGBTQ+ persons of color. He ended by showing a segment of the TV show POSE, in which Blanca, a Latina trans woman, was kicked out of a gay bar full of white gay men.

Although a powerful moment for those clients who identified as LGBTQ+, this highlighted a continuing division between clients. Often, clients would sit in cliques by race, gender, and sexuality: white queer and trans clients, Black queer and trans clients, and non-LGBTQ+ clients. The divides would sometimes become arguments. One afternoon, a couple of

the women in the space were discussing how much they liked Dave Chappelle. Donovan (gay, Black) remarked, "He's transphobic as f*ck."

> Alyssa (*straight, Black*): 'That's not my problem. I like him, I just like his stuff."
> Donovan: "But you're giving money to someone who is hurting trans folk."
> Alyssa: "But it's not my issue. I can't do nothing about it. He's got me a [show for n*****s like me]."

Even between those in the LGBTQ+ community, some rifts would appear. As I told Lydia, a white trans woman, about my research she asked what "GNC" meant. When I described it as "Gender Non-Conforming" she remarked: "Gender Non-Conforming ain't real! It's just people who wear different clothes!"

Silence

Project Alight, on the other hand, took a more subtle approach to issues of sexual identity. Every morning, *Project Alight* had a community meeting led by a staff member where staff would go over three rules: being at drop-in by 9am, the "Kindness Counts Campaign," and keeping the space clean. A staff member would ask the room what "Kindness Counts" meant, and the answer they were searching for was always "no hate speech." This is the only time when the staff initiated conversations about sexual or gender identity, but it never led to more than statements amounting to: "We don't know a person's background and can't shame them for their race, sexual orientation, or gender."

However, where *Fierce*'s focus on LGBTQ+ folk often created friction and division in the drop-in space, the silence in *Project Alight* rarely seemed to cause a visible tension. In fact, there were no cliques divided by sexual or gender identity (despite a good number of LGBTQ+ folk in the space) and LGBTQ+ clients were often asked honest questions about their

experiences. For example, Jari (gay, Black male) walked into the residential lounge during my second week with a flowered Ferrari sweater. Ben, a straight, Black male, remarked, ”I like that sweater!”

Jari: “I’m just doing my part to combat homophobia”

Ben: “What d’ya mean?”

Jari then described being kicked out at 17 for being gay and his need to be proud of who he is. Ben simply responded, “Way to bring yourself back on your feet, man.” At other times, clients were asked questions about hormone use for trans children or what “vogueing” was—yet never did this become a disrespectful line of questioning for LGBTQ+ young adults. It should be noted that at least one-third to one-half of staff at *Project Alight* had identified themselves as LGBTQ+ to me, indicating that staff identities were not the source of the difference between *Project Alight* and *Fierce’s* regulation of sexuality.

These experiences demonstrate how my research cannot conclude the operation of a *queer control complex* similar to the study by Robinson (2020a) in Texas shelters. Practices connected to queer identity and culture like vogueing and gender-bending clothing were not regulated by shelter staff. This is not to say the queer control complex did not exist outside of the shelters, as scholars have shown policing practices in Chicago construct gender and sexuality for young people (Stuart and Benezra 2018). However, within the shelters, surveillance and regulation of any sexuality—from desire to discussion to practice—was ubiquitous.

CONSEQUENCES: SEXUAL REGULATION VS. INCLUSIVE SEXUAL HABITUS

Francesca’s reveal that she was going to start sex-work to avoid gender discrimination at work demonstrates the broader framing of sexuality as a drive, desire, or privilege. Similar to the

trans woman at the *True Colors Summit,* Francesca shows how sex-work can be a choice for achieving or insisting on self-respect. She refused to put herself in a position where she could be discriminated or censored (based on political analysis of how the SCOTUS judges were likely to rule on gender discrimination at work), and sex-work granted her the power to avoid a workforce where transgender discrimination was not only possible, but the norm.

Sexuality, in the form of sex-work, is an economic choice for Francesca. J.T. and his husband, Omar, also used sex-work economically. Their experiences (see chapter 2 for more detail) show the depths of ways in which sexuality exists as a variety of contradictions and difficult truths. J.T. recognized that he *had* been exploited. He had left home at 14 years old to live with a man he found on a sex-chatting website 12 years ago. Yet, his sexual and romantic experiences with this man and various other clients over the years provided him with feelings of security and pleasure. He left this first man after the man started engaging in BDSM-like sexual activities that J.T. did not want. J.T. soon moved in with another man, a high school teacher, when he was 15. Again, J.T. recognized that this relationship was not appropriate, but in it J.T. finally found someone that provided stability, a place to "grow up off the streets," and respect. There was no physical violence, no emotional abuse, but a "sexual father-son kind of relationship."[49]

As J.T. and Omar met, dated, and married, they had been able to pay for an apartment over multiple years. Even though J.T. would prefer a job in the formal economy, he enjoyed times that he and his husband would get a client together: "There's something sexy about getting paid to fool around with your husband." Altogether, sex and sexuality were a complex

[49] Neither J.T. nor I condone pedophilia. J.T. was quick to acknowledge that both of these men were in the wrong to take advantage of him. But he did remark that both situations were better than his previous living arrangements.

intersection of pleasure, stability, exploitation, self-discovery, and escape. J.T. and Omar's stories provide a more nuanced understanding of how sexuality is constructed beyond desire, drive, and attraction.

Relationships Integral to Stability

Maybelle is a 19-year-old bisexual, pregnant Black female. She had been dating Deymaun (22 years old, bisexual Black male) for two years, and the two had recently become engaged. Maybelle had been in and out of homelessness since she was 15, and while Deymaun experienced a short homeless episode at 17, he had only recently become homeless in the last six months. When asked how she navigated being in a relationship (and engaged) while experiencing homelessness, Maybelle said:

> "It's amazing. Yeah. The reason I say it's amazing is because you're not alone and you don't have to worry about being judged. You don't have to worry about being looked at weird. You're right on the same level with the person. And then we are building together. Yeah. That's the best part. We building together."

I opened the *Project Alight* handbook (where she was staying) and we looked at their recommendation not to date while experiencing homelessness. I asked her what she thinks when someone says to wait for a relationship until you are stable, and she responded,

> "I say, fuck it. Because it doesn't matter what situation you're in. You deserve to be happy. You deserve to have someone to be there for you. You deserve it all. You don't have to be stable to get that. You don't. And if you ask me it's a lot better to have someone with you."

Emmanuel, a 35-year-old gay Black man, had dropped out of college and worked minimum wage jobs since he was 22. He found himself homeless for about 3 years during his 20s and, at the time of our interview, had recently been living out of his car. I asked Emmanuel

to reflect on how sexuality played a part in his homeless experiences and the rest of his life. He said sexuality was essentially how he understood his whole life journey:

> "I would say that I was always looking for a stable partner, a stable man to be my life. I never had a father but whatever boyfriend my mother had at the time. And so I was always looking for a stable man. I was always on Jack'd or A4A or Grindr, you know, looking for someone stable. But, I would say that like I knew I was gay and now I have to drop the bi-, but I was always looking for some form of stability in a partner."

Emmanuel characterized himself as someone who got bored at work and often quit jobs that became too routine. He also felt too confined in college, and so returning to finish his degree was not an option. By accepting that his employment would always be somewhat chaotic, he looked for stability in his relationships. His sexuality became the drive for stability in his life where there otherwise was none.

Relationships After Stability

That is not to say everyone felt relationships were essential to stability. Val, a straight Black 24-year-old man, told me, "I got a woman that's interested in me, but then I already can't do what I want to do because of my instability." He's had to rebuff her advances because he believes he cannot handle finding housing, jobs, and managing a relationship at the same time. When I asked why he would even want a relationship if he needs to focus on housing and jobs, he replied: "Well, just for the intimacy. No, well it also helps me escape from my depression and escape from my reality. It helps to have that person close to you."

Both approaches to relationships (as integral to establishing stability during homeless episodes, or as a burden when finding financial and housing stability) provide broader descriptions of sexual drive beyond desire. They include a search for stability in a world that is otherwise outside of one's control. Both Maybelle and Emmanuel felt that their interpersonal

relationships were something that they could count on when housing was impossible to find. Val, instead of using relationships as a mechanism for stability, used sex and intimacy as an escape from that same chaotic reality.

Hierarchy of Desire: Attractiveness is not just Sexiness

When Andre flirted with Mallary, he recognized that a potential relationship between two individuals is complicated when intersecting with homelessness.

"I work all night. … I ain't no stain."

In even trying to get a date, Andre focused on his financial standing. Even Sam questioned his desirability: "With what money? You here with the rest of us!" Desire and attractiveness were clearly part of the exchange with Andre telling Mallary she was beautiful.

Green (2008) provided the language for understanding Andre, Sam, and Mallary's interaction. Before entering and while experiencing homelessness, economic stability has become embedded as part of the *erotic habitus*: "a socially constituted complex of dispositions, appreciations, and inclinations arising from objective historical conditions that mediate the formation and selection of sexual scripts" (614). Both the search for socioeconomic stability as well as the institutional messages deprioritizing sexuality before achieving that stability have incorporated an erotic habitus where money and employment are not just considerations for attractiveness, but are explicitly negotiated and part of one's *erotic work*: the transformation of internalized schemes of the erotic habitus into sexual scripts (615). Andre knows that to woo Mallary, he needs to provide evidence that he is not "dead weight," so to speak, and must refute Sam's suggestion that his economic status as homeless is enough to discredit his attractiveness.

Sexual Habitus as Our Survival Habitus

For many of the young adults I interviewed and worked with at the homeless centers, a habitus of survival is almost indistinguishable from the erotic habitus. The employment of sexual scripts in finding romantic and sexual partners are inherently connected to survival scripts in finding stability, food, and housing. This is not simply a "hierarchy of needs" conundrum in which food and shelter dominate sexual needs—but that these individuals demonstrate the fundamental connections between survival and sexuality within the habitus. The habitus (Bourdieu 1990) providing individuals with the know-how to move deftly through organizations, poverty, and other fields is also inherently *a sexual habitus*: in many ways, sex is tied to their work, mental health, stamina, decision-making, economics, family life, and overall health and stability.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of homeless non-profits' participation in surveillance advances our understanding of contemporary justifications for sexual regulation (protection from exploitation). The restriction of sexuality in both the homeless center and in the lives of young adults limits access to resources and strategies for survival. Indeed, as critical scholars of non-profits have argued (Beam 2018; Mananzala and Spade 2008; Smith 2017), despite the logic of repressing sexuality to guard against exploitation, these homeless centers are themselves perpetuating exploitation by removing sexual scripts and strategies that connect to survival and stability in an economically chaotic world.

By fracturing the LGBTQ+ movement along class, gender, and racial lines, privileged gay communities and organizations have hampered the progress of both sexual liberation *and*

poverty relief. By enforcing a sexual respectability politic through organizations like the Mattachine Society and the Center on Halsted, powerful gay organizations have legitimized tropes of poverty, deviant sexualities, and the need for moral reform. While staff members at *Fierce* attempt to foster a community of sex positivity, harm reduction, and restorative justice, the prospects of moving these practices beyond their organization seem bleak when confronted with *Gay, Inc.'s* notions of their complicity in the wider governance system (Beam 2018).

5. Conclusion: Situating Organizational Effects of Homelessness in the Larger Economic Context

In this dissertation, I set out to accomplish two tasks. First, I sought to combine sociological understanding of how organizations impact people in poverty with research on homelessness. Most of the scholarship and policy interventions on homelessness focus on either individual needs (drug rehabilitation, job trainings, case management, and more) or structural concerns (economic shifts, housing market, federal policy changes, etc.) (Lee, Tyler and Wright 2010). However, with the state's increasing reliance on non-profit and non-governmental organizations to allocate resources and organize agendas for addressing homelessness, it becomes necessary to understand how homeless centers bridge federal policy and economic shifts to individual needs and circumstances.

Second, I hoped to further research on LGBTQ+ homelessness by investigating LGBTQ+ young adults experiencing homeless episodes. Scholars have demonstrated that LGBTQ+ youth are overrepresented in youth homelessness (Choi et al. 2015; Robinson 2020a), and that their experiences put them at higher risk of transitioning into adult homelessness. However, research has yet to move beyond investigations of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness to exploring the transition to adulthood or the prevalence of LGBTQ+ adults in homeless counts (Ecker, Aubry and Sylvestre 2017b; Keuroghlian, Shtasel and Bassuk 2014). Via an organizational analysis of homeless shelters that serve LGBTQ+ young adults, I sought to provide evidence of whether LGBTQ+ individuals were finding exits from their homeless episodes through the traditional pathways afforded by homelessness-relief organizations.

To fulfill these objectives, I demonstrated how organizations have a great influence over the homeless pathways of young adults in Chicago. First, I explained how deinstitutionalization

and the decentralization of poverty management led to a dispersed and siloed network of homeless centers. This geographic spread added barriers to exiting homelessness by pushing individuals to use their time and resources to move throughout the large "neighborhood" of young adult homeless shelters.

Meanwhile, facing enormous financial pressures, homeless centers attempt to respond by pushing their clients to be as productive as possible and exit their programs as quickly as possible. However, these organizations do not account for the realities of the economic market or the time needed to navigate the bureaucracy of poverty and homeless management. As young adults employ creative methods to find stability such as working multiple jobs, working outside the formal economy, and accessing as many resources and programs as possible, the homeless centers operate on a strict time schedule that conflicts with these individually-curated approaches. Instead of working to support these efforts, institutions expel those who do not conform to a predictable, 9am-5pm, formal work schedule (Karabanow et al. 2010). In addition, these homeless centers put caps on the length of time clients can stay in residence—expecting these young adults to address decades of trauma and navigate a time-consuming bureaucratic system in the span of a couple months. Again, if clients are unable to conform, they are often discharged from the few programs available.

Next, I provided an example of how governance (Marwell and Morrissey 2020) provides organizations power in developing discourses to frame, manage, and regulate their client populations. U.S. discourses of poverty make distinctions between innocent youth and responsible adults. As the country now has targeted poverty policies for children and the elderly, young adults have become the age demographic with the highest rates of poverty (Hawkins 2019; Wimer et al. 2020); nevertheless, they are also systematically denied most forms of

poverty relief, including direct cash aid (Bitler, Hoynes and Kuka 2017). Thus, young adults exist within a liminal space in U.S. culture and social policy, and organizations are left with no clear guidance for how to work with them.

As a result and out of necessity, organizations have developed a distinct discourse of "adulthood" by which they judge the deservingness of young adults in order to allocate resources. This implicit logic that guides staff interactions with clients and organizational policies puts young adults in a situation where adulthood is demonstrated by stability—thus, paradoxically, the clients who are most unstable (whether economically or emotionally) and most in need of assistance are deemed too immature to access the resources to achieve stability. Through negotiation of adulthood, maturity, and independence, homeless organizations perpetuate the *youth control complex,* discharging clients from their organizations and restricting opportunities for them to access needed services.

Despite organizations like *Project Alight* attempting to frame sexual regulation as a means of preventing exploitation or helping clients focus on stability, in reality the practice of desexualization restrict clients from employing a survival habitus in its entirety—thus disconnecting them from avenues which may help them achieve stability. It is my hope that connecting seemingly innocuous practices like censuring nudity on TV to a history of sexual regulation in poverty relief can help providers recognize their perpetuation of power dynamics that serve only to manage and control, rather than support and uplift. In fact, sexuality is connected to many aspects of young adults' strategies for both survival and stability. The regulation of sexuality not only provides justification for discharging clients from organizations, but actively prevents young adults from using their personal capital and knowledge (embodied in the habitus) to achieve economic self-determination.

LGBTQ+ organizations like *Fierce*, *Center on Halsted*, and *Howard Brown Health* must remember the history of LGBTQ+ movements—both of resisting power discourses such as sexual regulation, *and* of being complicit in state governmentality as they have been coopted by the power interests of largely white, upper/middle-class gay men. Respectability politics stemming as far back as the Mattachine Society may have provided an avenue towards marriage equality, but left behind a legacy of reproducing and reinforcing discourses of power that constrict the lives of queer, trans, poor, and homeless people of color.

Overall, I provided evidence that connected the historical practices of de-institutionalization and the decentralization of poverty management, the discourse of adulthood shaping organizational practices, and policies surrounding sexual regulation with the movements and short-term outcomes of young adults experiencing homelessness in the Chicago area. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, these organizations replicate and contribute to a system of surveillance and control of people in poverty—albeit forms directed towards young adults and LGBTQ+ persons in particular.

As Natasha reflected on her work as a case manager at *Project Alight*, she recognized that the contemporary economic climate, the city's management, the non-profits that work with young people, and the other organizations they encounter do not *actually* support young adults in poverty. She could only recall one single adult throughout her tenure—spanning 3 years at *Project Alight* and part-time at *La Fortaleza-South*—who came into a program, stayed in the interim housing, and exited within 120 days into self-sustaining stability. She could hint at structures like "racism," "mass incarceration," and a difficult housing market as reasons why their clients rarely found stability through their programs. She even recognized the problematic nature of *Project Alight's* assumption that these young adults could simply "find a job" and "get

an apartment." She ended her interview by saying, "So many of these young people just need time to think and exist beyond trauma." It is my hope that this dissertation provides scholars, organizations and staff like Natasha, and young adults who have experienced homelessness the tools to identify the historical, political, and organizational sources of how homeless pathways are constructed, and why they are so difficult to exit.

AN INCOMPLETE WORK: LINGERING QUESTIONS

As with any work, this research introduced more questions than it answered. To close, I identify five areas for further investigation that would be of interest to both policy-makers and social science.

Longitudinal or Representative Sampling of LGBTQ+ Adult Homelessness

My motivation for this research came from the complete lack of data on LGBTQ+ adults experiencing homelessness. Only three cities in North America include questions on sexual orientation in their homeless counts: Winnipeg, Toronto, and San Francisco. While some institutes, like the Williams Institute and Chapin Hall, have conducted representational studies to estimate LGBTQ+ *youth* homelessness across the US and Canada, no research has done similar for LGBTQ+ adults (Ecker, Aubry and Sylvestre 2017b). As this research not only suggests no clear pathway by which LGBTQ+ young adults might find stability, but also identifies multiple structural and organizational barriers, we can assume that the overrepresentation of LGBTQ+-identified people in youth homeless counts would also extend to their homeless adult counterparts. As seen from the Utah legislature's reluctance to provide relief without data, a

study confirming an overrepresentation of LGBTQ+ adults in homelessness would hopefully provide more political justification for allocating resources to this population.

An original proposal of this dissertation sought to interview up to 120 LGBTQ+-identified young adults who had experienced homelessness by the age of 18. Following the calls of researchers to better understand the heterogeneity of LGBTQ+ youth experiences in homelessness (Shelton et al. 2018), this research would investigate the capabilities of different demographic positionalities to use their marginal identities to gain access to resources for achieving economic stability. For example: how and when may a white, gay youth or young adult use his minoritized sexuality to gain access to resources denied to a Black, gay youth or young adult? The hope was to conduct enough interviews to compare the intersections of race (Black, white, Latinx/Hispanic), gender (cis male, cis female, trans male, trans female, and nonbinary/gender non-conforming), and whether individuals were still homeless or had found a pathway to stability. For scholars of identity and positions of power, this analysis could still contain fruitful insights as to how various groups deploy marginal identities as capital in other Bourdieusian fields.

Broader Cross-Section of Cities

An early version of this dissertation also included a comparison of how multiple cities' policies and politics interacted with organizational attempts to help LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. Research conducted with LGBTQ+ youth outside of Chicago has demonstrated an alarming amount of LGBTQ+-focused exclusion of young people experiencing homelessness (Pyne 2011; Robinson 2020a; Shelton et al. 2018). However, in the four shelters I observed, the staff and organizations went out of their way to affirm LGBTQ+ identities and provide targeted

services. That is not to say discrimination and hostility towards sexuality and gender minorities does not happen in Chicago, but the disparity between this research and that of others leaves open questions regarding the exact mechanisms which perpetuate anti-LGBTQ+ practices in shelters. A multi-city comparison of organizations that target youth and young adult homelessness would allow more insight into this disparity.

Comparison of Regulating Young Adults at Shelters and at University Dorms

While volunteering at the shelters and speaking with young adults, I was astounded by how little leeway young adults experiencing homelessness were given in making mistakes or taking time to recuperate from traumatic events. Patience was often low on the part of shelter staff and welfare organizations—a missed deadline, a poor attitude, or a mistake on an application could mean discipline or expulsion from a resource network.

I reflected on my own experience as a (fairly) young adult at college and in my graduate program. Knowing I struggled with mental health during school terms, I budgeted "two mental health days" in which I could, with no guilt or shame, refuse to go to class, attend meetings, or do any work at all. I would use the time to recharge and recommit myself to the work. Soon after starting the dissertation, my mother passed away from cancer. In hearing the news, my advisor told me not to worry: "I am here to walk this journey with you, not to push you through deadlines. Whatever twists and turns you take, I'm here." She went on to tell me if I needed to take *a month or two* away from work, she would understand. As grateful as I am for the privilege of taking time off and the amazing advisor I had throughout this process, it is difficult to imagine an organization within welfare or homeless social services that would respond similarly for a young adult experiencing homelessness.

One of the young men in I interviewed, David (see chapter 3), earned money largely by coordinating a team of marijuana distributors around the city. I asked him where he goes throughout the city and he laughed, "We usually go to Northwestern. Those kids pay the money, you know?" Referring to the undergraduates at Northwestern, I reflected on how many of them were purchasing and doing marijuana—while technically illegal in the state[50] and prohibited by Northwestern University. While Northwestern undergrads using weed with (presumably) little institutional recourse, young adults at the shelters were being kicked out for coming into the shelter high while using marijuana as a cheap way of managing mental illness.

Together, these reflections demonstrate a wide disparity between the constructions of adulthood in young adult shelters and college campuses. These are two populations of similar age ranges, but with vastly different regulatory systems. An in-depth study comparing a college campus' regulation of adulthood, maturity, and independence with the regulation seen in young adult homeless centers could further elucidate both the mechanisms behind this discourse of adulthood, as well as the inequalities seen when combined with the intersecting power dynamics of race, class, sexuality, and more.

Funding Streams and LGBTQ+ Inclusion

Critical scholars of non-profits and the public-private dimensions of welfare have noted how private donations to non-profits often carry extra demands for regulating clients (Beam 2018; Haney 2010; Mananzala and Spade 2008). As many non-profits are funded by groups with conservative political and social ideologies (like religious institutions), the implications for funding streams are even more important for sexual minorities and gender non-conforming

[50] This was before Illinois passed a law permitting recreational marijuana use.

individuals. This is especially true in the current political environment, in which the rights of transgender individuals are hotly debated by both political and religious institutions (Aultman et al. 2017). Research investigating funding streams and the extra regulation (or lack thereof) required by non-profits working with homeless clients would help clarify the nature of LGBTQ+ inequality in poverty relief—especially in a decentralized poverty relief system like that of the United States. This research may also help explore reasons why some individuals are able to deploy their marginal identities as capital for economic stability. If an organization is receiving funding with requirements to assist a certain percentage of LGBTQ+-identified people, we could investigate which people, with various intersections of identity positions, are able to capitalize on that assistance.

Interactions between Bisexuality, Race, Masculinity, and Poverty

Finally, I found I was unequipped to explain and investigate a number of themes coming through the interviews. The majority of my interview sample comprised of Black, bisexual, cisgender men (Table 1.2). In interviews with these young adults, I noticed a repeated theme where sexual experiences with the opposite sex were specifically tied to moments when the participant was able to break out of a strict masculine identity. For example, Deymaun, Maybelle's fiancé we met in chapter 4, had his first experience with another male after a particularly difficult breakup with a previous girlfriend. He had become friends with another young man at church and was intrigued that this friend was so open with his emotions. After the breakup, Deymaun and his friend were chatting about the experience when the friend told Deymaun, "You know, it's OK to cry about this." Deymaun reflected that he had never before been able to express emotions around another man. Later that day, after smoking some

marijuana, Deymaun's friend offered Deymaun a blowjob. Deymaun consented and from then on considered himself bisexual.[51]

Deymaun's experiences with masculinity and bisexuality were not unique. A number of other Black young men connected the two in their retelling of their developing bisexuality. Unfortunately, my sample was too small and I had not theoretically prepared myself to investigate that line of narrative in relation to other interview questions targeting experiences with young adult homeless organizations. As research into hetero-flexibility and straight men who have sex with men are garnering more attention (Carrillo and Hoffman 2018; Silva and Whaley 2018), research into the intersections of race, heteroflexibility and bisexuality, and masculinity would be a fruitful avenue to pursue. This is especially needed as research on Black male sexuality has commonly pathologized Black males and the "down low discourse" (Han 2015).

SITUATING THIS PROJECT IN THE LARGER SOCIOECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

> "Shelterlessness … is an epiphenomenal form of deeper structural processes, for… homeless people have historically, and not infrequently, been sheltered and housed. Indeed, in the current moment the majority of homeless people in the United States have regular access to shelter, as crappy as it may be. In fact, at this epiphenomenal level, homelessness is precisely a *form* of sheltering in capitalism, just as are suburban tract homes, tiny studios and bedsits, or luxury condos in towering skyscrapers" (Mitchell 2020)

In this project, I have examined how organizational distribution, logics, and regulation affect homeless pathways of young adults—specifically those who are LGBTQ+. Broadly, this analysis has touched on the contemporary governance model of a public-private partnership,

[51] Deymaun did have a couple of experiences with other men, but this friend was the only repeated homoerotic/sexual partner.

organizational theories of inequality, cultural constructions of welfare deservingness, and the sexual and moral regulation engaged in by homeless organizations. I have connected the experiences of homeless young adults to organizational, city, and national policies, as well as larger economic and poverty-relief ideologies. However, this still only captures how organizational distribution, logics, and regulation perpetuate homeless pathways *in a particular political and economic context* in which homelessness *does not have to exist*.

In contemporary capitalism, where wealth is hoarded by a minute few, homelessness is a moral stance that we as a community, city, state, country, and world *choose to accept every day* (Arnold 2012). Homelessness is solvable—and any scholarship that does not engage critically in the structures that make homelessness both possible and necessary continues to perpetuate its existence (Farrugia and Gerrard 2016; O'Connor 2009). What causes homelessness is not so much a complex series of funding streams, tensions on where to build homeless shelters and centers, or the ways in which organizations contribute to a youth control complex. These problems exist within economic and political systems of power that produce and maintain the current class structure.

Scholars have also demonstrated that the politics and construction of homelessness have been a part of state-making and legislating for centuries. Bauman (2013) argued that the 16th and 17th centuries of Europe were full of "feverish legislative activity"—crafting policies and governments in response to the "sinister spectre of the new social danger" (38). This danger was, and is, the vagabond. Contemporary research has demonstrated how policies in urban development and policing are established not to alleviate poverty and homelessness, but to *manage* it (Cresswell 2011; Mitchell 2020; Robinson 2020b; Stuart 2016).

Foucault's analysis of biopolitics and population provide insight into why homelessness constitutes an integral part of state-making. As governments developed new forms of governmentality, like security, they constructed their subjects as populations: "a global mass" reduced to counts of births, deaths, and similar numbers (Foucault 2007: 242). This management of this population operates through a variety of regulatory mechanisms—some of which we see in this research, such as poverty discourses of independence, adulthood, sexuality, and deservingness. Through these mechanisms, the state allows the inferior species within the population to wither and/or die in order for the superior species to thrive "healthier and purer" (*ibid*: 255). Considering the evidence of Western states looking to manage homelessness and poverty rather than restructure society so they do not exist, it is difficult to unsee the poor, Black and brown, LGBTQ+ young adults experiencing homelessness as constructed to be the "inferior species" of the state allowed to wither and die.

And Yet,

That is not to say I feel my dissertation was a waste of time or has no value for policy-makers or activists in addressing homelessness—nor is it theoretically without value for the social sciences in understanding the particular mechanisms of inequality reproduction. However, these mechanisms are not only contingent upon capitalism's continued exploitation of people in poverty, or upon a political atmosphere in which elite interests battle for money or power at the expense of the common people. The mechanisms I have outlined here are also contingent upon the way we have culturally constructed and accepted homelessness as an objective reality that inevitably exists (Berger and Luckmann 1991).

When I teach courses on poverty, social change, policy, or similar topics, I often remind my students of the need for people to push for change at all levels. If those of us seeking to alleviate poverty only volunteered at our local shelters, the economic, political, and cultural structures that perpetuate homelessness would potentially remain untouched. Conversely, we could focus all attention on a revolution against those structures, but with two consequences. First, this approach is a gamble: who knows if we would have the movement strength to finally make systemic change? Second, it leaves many individuals experiencing homelessness in the present without the immediate resources and aid necessary for survival. We need people concerned about poverty working on alleviation at all levels, from supporting the individual to revolutionizing the structure.

I hope that this dissertation provides another mode for understanding and alleviating poverty: the organizational mechanisms that create dispersed neighborhoods with temporal conflicts, the national and organizational policies that create discourses of deservingness based on constructions of adulthood and maturity, and finally the continued sexual regulation of young adults in ways that perpetuate shame and reduce entrepreneurial pathways out of homelessness.

Social movements that want to address poverty alleviation, LGBTQ+ civil rights, and widespread sexual liberation must do so as a unified front with anti-racist and feminist movements (Cohen 2019; DeFilippis 2016; Jones, DeFilippis and Yarbrough 2018). Scholars, activists, and policy-makers must return to the radical politics of Silvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson. As Leslie Feinberg (Feinberg 1998) wrote in prefacing the words and life of Silvia Rivera,

> "An injury to one is an injury to all! When we allow ourselves to be split along lines of oppression, we always lose. But when we put forward a collective list of demands together, and fight to defend each other from attacks, we frequently win." (105)

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Appendix A: Methodology

Throughout my graduate training, I approached research with a very practical and empirical worldview. My unfortunate advisors would often listen to my ramblings about details of social issues I followed and different projects I had in mind to study them. Year after year, I was told, "But let's talk about sociology. What makes this case sociologically interesting or valuable?" I was often at a loss for words—must I really try to defend why studying homelessness is important?

Thankfully, Monica Prasad (2018) initiated a Problem-Solving workshop within our graduate department and later formalized an approach to sociological research: Problem-Solving Sociology. In this approach, Prasad outlines three general principles for social science research that focuses on empirical and practical problems: 1) compare; 2) study causes, not just consequences; and, 3) find the theoretical inside the practical question. This third principle allowed me to justify starting my research with a practical question, finding practical data, and, through that practical analysis, find both theoretically meaningful and practically useful solutions.

CASE SELECTION

I used Prasad's (2018) first and second principles of Problem-Solving research to select my research sites (comparisons) and my level of analysis (study the villains, not the victims).

Compare

I chose my locations on two criteria: their location in the city and whether they had an explicit LGBTQ+-focus or not. *Project Alight* is part of an international Christian charity that

specializes in homeless centers. Located near downtown Chicago, *Project Alight* operates both a day center and a 14-bed interim residential program. My second site, *Fierce*, is run by a large LGBTQ+-focused healthcare non-profit in Chicago. Originally developed independently by Black LGBTQ+ activists to compensate for the racism in the LGBTQ+ neighborhood of Chicago, *Fierce* focuses on providing a day center for LGBTQ+ people without safe spaces during the day as well as non-LGBTQ+ homeless youth and young adults. Finally, I worked with two sites that were operated by the same, Latinx community organization: *La Fortaleza*. It two young-adult centers: one on the West side as part of their main building and one on the South side. Working with these four shelters gave me access to four different areas of the city and three distinct organizational purposes and ideologies that guided their work with young adults.

Study the Villains, Not the Victims

As I mention in the introduction, scholarship on homelessness tends to focus primarily on the life pathways and experiences of people without housing (Mitchell 2020). This level of analysis blinds researchers and scholars to the organizational and structural forces at play in creating and maintaining homeless populations. In the conclusion, I discuss a radical approach to considering homelessness with Mitchell's (2020) *Mean Streets* as a guide. But this study attempts to focus on 1) the organizational practices that create and shape homeless pathways, and, 2) connects these practices to structural power dynamics *and* the effects on individual lives. This organizational analysis and the interactions within each location and with the organizational network as a whole provides an important piece of how inequality and homelessness is reproduced within the city of Chicago. Knowing the "villains" of organizational practices and

logics provides a clearer target for reform rather than studying the lives of LGBTQ+ young adults who enter these shelters.

Scholars have demonstrated how organizations and staff must navigate complex and often contradictory expectations and requirements (Hays 2004; Lipsky 1971). Even organizations with a sincere dedication to improving lives and building-up communities often are pressured into policies and actions due to financial, legal, or regulatory restraints. For example, *Project Alight* received funding from an international consulting firm that provides job training services as part of its charitable outreach. To qualify for the funds, staff at *Project Alight* were required to use the firm's job training manual for group meetings which included discussions on "How to Network Success" and "Dress for the Job You Want." Multiple staff members complained about the manual's clear unfamiliarity with the realities of young adults experiencing homelessness. What would networking look like when you have to carry all your belongings wherever you go? How do you dress for the job you want when the only clothes you can access are donated? Some staff would work off-the-clock to try and mold these lessons into more usable information for the clients. But with little time, not to mention poor pay, most group meetings using the manual would simply follow the instructions and apologize to the clients for a boring group meeting.

Thus, it would be unfair and poor scholarship to simply call the staff or even the organizations as "the villains" of this story. Instead, we should focus on the strands of power operating through the discourses of "adulthood", through moral and sexual regulation, and the consequences of deinstitutionalization and neoliberal social policies. Many of these staff operate something like the middlemen/middlewomen described by Pattillo (2010) in her analysis of Black middle-class residents in Chicago. They operated as brokers between institutional—and

largely white—structures of power and the less affluent members of the community. Staff and organizations as a whole must balance the needs of constituents, the demands of political and social actors with power and resources, and their own capacities. Their previous experiences their structural positions, and identities all inform their professional values and decisions (Watkins-Hayes 2009). Altogether, this is to recognize that the conflicting pressures, positionalities, and values make for a complicated picture and difficult to cast any one actor or organization as "the villain."

NEGOTIATING ACCESS

Although my data collection only started in early 2019 at *Project Alight*, I had started my journey for access with *Fierce* in October 2017. I submitted an application for a research partnership with the parent company and decided to fast-track the process by attending a volunteer orientation in mid-October. The Volunteer Coordinator explained that another application to work at *Fierce* would be required, but she was not sure how the research-partnership would work. While waiting for the research application to be processed, I completed all the requirements to volunteer at *Fierce* (another application, background check, and online trainings for Blood Pathogens, HIPAA, and being a Mandated Reporter). After a month, I emailed and called and could not reach anyone in the volunteer department.

In January 2018, I was finally contacted by a new employee, Jessie, at *Fierce* who was starting a program on transgender health. He asked me to come in for an interview where we spoke about what I could do for their program (anything from sexual education to educational or vocational training) as well as my dissertation research. When I told him my research investigated the pathways of homelessness *after* youth become adults and age out of the system,

he got excited and said: “That’s EXACTLY the information we need!” We ended the interview and he told me that he would get in contact with HBH to get my volunteer information processed.

I never heard from Jessie again.

From 2018-2019, I called, emailed, submitted new applications for research partnerships, submitted new volunteer requests, spoke with the Senior Vice President of External Relations, with the Director of Social and Behavioral Health, and more. No one I spoke to had ever heard of Jessie. I even attended two more volunteer orientations with the hopes of finding someone who made decisions on research-partnerships.

While my frustration grew with *Fierce*, a perfect sequence of events landed me a new center with whom to partner. At an American Sociological Association conference, I met with Dr. Andrew Robinson who had just finished their dissertation on LGBTQ+ youth’s experiences while homeless and they suggested attending the *True Colors United* annual summit. In 2018, I attended the summit in Atlanta and happened to sit at a table with the International Director of *Project Alight.* As we chatted, he mentioned that his organization had just started a new shelter in Chicago and that he’d be happy to introduce me to their new CEO. On the last day of the conference, the International Director introduced me to Judy, the CEO, who was ecstatic to find any and all help in learning more about the pathways of youth homelessness and finding ways in which their center could be improved. In the span of three months—I had access to a new youth homeless center in Chicago that I did not know existed. I started my research there in April 2019.

That same month, a new volunteer coordinator was hired for *Fierce’s* parent company. Lissa had me retake the volunteer training courses and by May she has put me on the list for an interview with *Fierce*. At the end of May, I see a mass-email volunteer request from Lissa

looking for a front-desk attendant for the administration building of the parent company. I opted for a new tactic and offered to volunteer for 8 hours a day, two-times a week. This would put me in direct contact with the CEO, executive team, directors, and hopefully someone who would be able to make a decision on my access at *Fierce*.

During the month of June, I assisted almost anyone and everyone in the administration office. I was soon "promoted" to Volunteer Manager Assistant (still a volunteer position) and I soon was put to work reorganizing the volunteer files, assigning volunteers to various roles, helping with office tasks like creating binders for board meetings, scanning documents for the payroll staff, and creating PowerPoints for the CEO. Soon, everyone in the office knew me and I was often greeted with a, "Thank God you are here today. It's so much better when you're around." The Executive Assistant to the CEO told me to see her once I finished my PhD because she would love to have me as a colleague.

After some prodding, Lissa set up an interview with the drop-in manager at *Fierce*, in mid-June and on July 11, I started volunteering. Unfortunately, at this point, neither my research-partnership nor my background check had been processed. For another 4 weeks, I came twice a week to *Fierce* to organize the clothing closet. The "clothing closet" was a spacious room with three cabinets of clothes, a closet full of hygiene and baby products, and a closet full of dry-foods or snacks. This room would also serve as a "group meeting" room for activities like: "Gay-Ass Art Club."

More than 20 clients a day would come through the clothing closet to try and find anything that would fit and the clothes would end up all over the room. *Fierce* often received large garbage bags or boxes of donations that needed to be sorted, evaluated, etc. For this month, I spent about 4 hours every shift in this room organizing, sorting, and cleaning, sometimes at the

detriment of my own health. Many of the donated clothes were full of pet hair, and, being incredibly allergic, I would start to wheeze and I broke out in hives multiple times. However, I was able to get BYC clean and organized (for the time being). It also allowed me to become familiar with the staff, the site, and many of the clients. When I finally started volunteering with the young adults directly, the shift went smoothly.

I continued working at the administration office—both out of courtesy for Lissa's help and out of the need to get the research partnership approved. I sat-down with the CEO's executive secretary and explained my situation. She laughed, "Why didn't you say something earlier! Follow me." She quite literally strolled right into the Director of the Internal Research Review Board and said, "Dee, meet Erik. Erik, meet Dee. Dee, Erik needs you to approve his research at *Fierce*. Can you take care of this?" Dee had me email my application (for the fourth time) to her—but, using an institutional email, progress was made. In a couple of months, I was granted research access and retroactive permission to use field notes from my volunteering.

The process of working with *La Fortaleza* was surprising simple compared to the journeys for *Project Alight* and *Fierce.* In October 2019, after having established my work at two shelters, I decided to add on sites on the South and West sides to make sure *Project Alight* and *Fierce* were not simply outliers. I had emailed and called most of the young adult shelters throughout Chicago in 2018 and 2019, so I had little hope of success. However, an email to *La Fortaleza* gave me a response from the Vice President that day and forwarded me to Luné—the lead case manager. We set up a phone call for the next day when I described my research and she agreed that a volunteer ethnography could be mutually beneficial. I sent her my approved IRB and my Certificate of Confidentiality from the NIH, completed a one-hour volunteer orientation,

and I started my work at *La Fortaleza*. Unfortunately, I was only able to work for 3 months at *La Fortaleza* due to the arrival of the pandemic.

VOLUNTEER ETHNOGRAPHY WITH HOMELESS CENTERS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

I designed the observations of organizational logics, practices, and negotiations as a volunteer ethnography (Robinson 2020a). As a volunteer, I occupied a nebulous space in which I interacted with staff as part of the team, but without the authority to enforce rules or direct the clients in any way. I found early on that young adults, once learning I was not official staff, would often attempt to skirt the rules and complain about the "stupid-ass" rules at each location. Staff members, similarly, would bring me into conversations with other staff members in which we discussed various rules, clients, and, especially at *Project Alight*, grumble about executives who knew nothing about young adults experiencing homelessness. Overall, conducting the ethnography gave me a recognizable role in the institution, a vantage point to see interactions between clients and staff without being a "fly-on-the-wall" distraction, and entry into both discussions with staff and clients who wanted to "dish" about their experiences.

Each organization gave me a different volunteer role. *Project Alight* rarely had enough staff members to cover the large facility, so I often worked as the person in-between rooms: escorting young adults to and from the sixth-floor center, watching the hallways, lounges, or computer rooms while staff prepped meals, met with clients, or dealt with the expected chaos of the center. Often, young adults would approach me to get help on resumes or applications and I spent many hours scouring through Craigslist ads for cheap housing. During a number of off-site trips, I worked alongside staff as a "chaperone."

At *Fierce*, I volunteered as a front desk secretary and a volunteer assistant at the parent non-profits headquarters for five months. While this was part of a strategy for gaining access, I also met the CEO, other directors, and teams that affected the fundraising, planning, and programs for the young adult drop-in and clinic. I then spent a month sorting their clothing and resource room. During this time, I became part of the drop-in team, learned the organization's range of services, rules, and procedures, and met a variety of young adults who asked for clothing or hygiene products. Once I was processed, I generally served either on food duty (set up the delivered food and hand out plates to the clients) or immediate needs service (organizing schedules for laundry, showers, and the nap room as well as bringing clients back for clothing and hygiene needs).

Finally, at *La Fortaleza*, I became the default chef for the nights I worked at either West- or South-side locations. I would arrive around 6p, see what food was available in the pantry and refrigerator, and create a dinner meal for 4-10 people depending on the night. After dinner clean-up, I would stay until curfew and clean, help clients with applications, or watch a TV show. One of the proudest moments of my fieldwork was a client telling me that I cooked the "best damn greens" he's ever had.

Fieldwork and Interviews With COVID

Although I had conducted informal interviews with clients and staff during the ethnographic period, I had been waiting to conduct formal interviews until I felt comfortable understanding the social service spaces for young adults experiencing homelessness. After starting my fieldwork in 2018 at *Project Alight*, mid-2019 with *Fierce*, and November of 2019 with *La Fortaleza*, I started conducting interviews in February 2020 with LGBTQ+ young adults

I met. I also had other prominent LGBTQ+ and homeless services post recruitment flyers. Soon after, COVID-19 spread across the United States and the world and cities did all they could to restrict the spread of the virus. In mutual agreement with my sites, I ended in-person volunteering and attempted to virtually recruit interviews via phone calls, Zoom, or GoogleDuo. I had planned on interviews with staff and directors after these, but soon found few had the capacity during a pandemic to set aside time. In the end, I interviewed 28 young adults who currently were experiencing homelessness or had experienced homelessness in their youth or young adult life. I also interviewed one CEO and three staff members at *Project Alight* and *La Fortaleza*.

Interviews were crafted to help collect demographic information and common questions in homeless surveys and counts (number of times homeless, foster care history, etc.). Interviewees would then take me through their journey while homeless. I would ask them to tell the story of when they first left home to the first place they slept (whether at a friend or family member's house, a stranger's place, the street, or shelter). As their story mentioned any contact with an organization, I would then ask them to take me through their history and experience. I asked questions like, "Describe to me what it was like walking into the shelter for the first time? Who was the first person you remember talking with? What happened next?" We would proceed through their homeless journey using organizations as waypoints. Toward the end, I would ask them to reflect on their experience, their treatment by organizations, and ask what they would do if given the chance to run the various centers they had frequented. Acknowledging the trauma involved in homeless pathways, I invited each participant to simply skip, pause, or end the

interview at any time. At the end of the interviews[52], participants received $30 in cash (in person or through a cash transfer app).

During COVID-19, my advisor and I received a grant to conduct pandemic-specific interviews on how Chicago's city-pandemic measures affected homeless organizations and pathways. I reached back out to all of the participants who had completed an interview before the pandemic to see if they would like to do a 30-minute follow-up interview for $15.[53] Out of 29 original participants, I re-interviewed 12 for the COVID-19 follow-up. While some of the data from follow-up interviews are included in this dissertation, those interviews served as the basis for a policy brief for the Scholars Strategy Network (Lovell 2020).

Policies and Documents

During each phase of access, I was given binders and packets of organizational material outlining mission statements, rules and regulations, best practices, hierarchies, and contracts. While I was at each center, any time I worked with a client on a specific form or application, I would ask the center if I could have a copy to take home. This would allow me to compare and analyze a range of ideologies and practices that were documented in the paper trail. While I am not sure on the number of documents collected for this project, they fill two 1" binders.

Finding the Theoretical in the Practical

All participants consented for the interviews to be recorded as long as their names were changed in any published material. Thus, all names have been changed to keep confidentiality. I

[52] Interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes.
[53] I chose to assume the maximum potential time for an interview (whether 2 hours for the first interview or an hour for the follow-up). I then calculated the payment to be $15/hr for that maximum potential interview length.

used an online, automatic transcription service to immediately transcribe the interviews. I then hired three RAs to review and correct the automated transcriptions.

During the long commutes home from the volunteer ethnographic sessions, I would type notes in my phone to document important conversations, people, interactions, and anything else that occurred that day. Within 24 hours, I would write up detailed field notes on the experiences using the phone notes I logged immediately after. In addition to writing a description of what occurred, I would also answer three questions for each visit: 1) What surprised me?; 2) What didn't surprise me?; 3) What left an impression today?. I would plan a fourth question before each visit to guide my observations. These included prompts like: "Describe the space" and "Describe staff language when speaking to each other."

I then uploaded all my field notes and interview transcripts into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software. I read through each interview and field note and took notes on themes I noticed. I also reviewed analytical memos (Birks, Chapman and Francis 2008) I had written throughout the fieldwork. Using these, I used grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 2017) in allowing the data to reveal, as much as possible, new insights into the interactions I observed in each space and highlighted in the participant narratives. It was an analytical memo describing Terrence's frustration as a "kid" and a "convict" that led me to start coding for themes of adulthood, infantilization, independence, and maturity. Notes from the initial reading of interviews and field notes provided the themes that coalesced into Chapters 2 and 4: travel, applications, wait times, productivity, sexuality, media, relationships, and more. During the interviews with providers, I used these themes to construct the interviews and press staff and the CEO for their rationale for the various interactions and themes I witnessed during interviews.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

I reflected on my first day at *Project Alight* many times over the past two-years. That day I met Xander and was impressed by his knowledge and skill while playing *Call of Duty* and *Dante's Inferno*. Despite being impressed by all this, there was still something nagging in the back of my mind.

> He's homeless. Shouldn't he be working on a resume or something? I mean, no one is in the computer lab?

Looking back, that internal reaction is both embarrassing and disappointing. I have worked in homeless centers before, was a volunteer ambassador for a local food pantry, had researched the intersections of racism, capitalism, homophobia and cissexism, intergenerational poverty, etc. I *knew* better, but there were deep seeded biases that I still held from my conservative upbringing. One that I had yet to investigate yet was the assumption that pleasure was meant as a reward for the economically self-sufficient.

I use this reflection to demonstrate the potential biases in my research. I knew from the outset that positionality was going to affect the research. I am a white, able-bodied, cismale, and studied at two private universities: BYU and Northwestern. While my dad lived frugally, we were upper-middle class in a white suburban neighborhood in the Southwest. My parents were conservative Republicans as was common for our religious faith. I dress somewhere between business casual and a Postmates contract worker.[54] The first couple visits at the shelters, I understood maybe half of what the young adults were saying—both because of my unfamiliarity

[54] When I visited my partner's work for the first time in a downtown skyscraper, I was wearing jeans and a blue hoodie. After I left, his boss went into his office asking, "So, what did you order to eat?" My partner didn't understand the question and his boss responded, "I just saw you get something delivered from that kid." That is when my partner had to tell his boss that "the food delivery kid" was in fact his boyfriend, a PhD candidate at Northwestern.

with their word choice and my inability to understand the structure of their speech. In summary—there was no way I could hide that I was out of place.

While working with clients, I did my best to explicitly acknowledge my own unfamiliarity with their experiences and their own expertise navigating these organizations. I might be able to provide scientific jargon, but they *already knew* what I would write about. I would not be surprised if some, after reading the dissertation, responded with, "Well, duh."

My "out-of-place-ness" often became humorous as clients would often forget my positionality when starting a joke about "white folk" and then realizing my presence. For example, as I cooked dinner one night at *La Fortaleza*, Dominique came in the shelter laugh-ranting about how a white woman started clutching her purse when Dominique sat next to her on the train. She laughed, "All these white folk just think I'm there to steal stuff. Girl, I'm more afraid of you and your kind than you are of me!" As the jokes continued, she saw me laughing in the kitchen and yelled, "Oh SHIT! You's white!" I could only respond with, "But when you're right, you're right," and she continued joking with the group about white people.

My approach to working with the organization, directors, and staff could be best described—in proper scientific jargon—as "Trust and Friendliness." When staff knew they could rely on me for a variety of tasks, they gave me further access and responsibility within their organizations. This was how I was granted access to *Project Alight*'s internal data and client tracking platform. As I asked questions about why so-and-so no longer had a room in residential or other updates, Janice—the program director—told me, "Why don't we just get you into our system. You can log any notes you think are important for us to know and you can see everything that we are logging when you aren't here." Paired with a general atmosphere of

friendliness and helpfulness, I created spaces for myself in each organization so I had a position to make reasonable research requests and continuously gain greater access.

Attempts to Avoid Pathologizing

Recognizing my positions and biases helped me decide to focus on organizational policies and practices. As discussed in chapter one, social science research has often fallen into the trap of pathologizing or pedestalizing people in poverty (O'Connor 2009; Prasad 2018; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2015). Thus, I focused my narratives on the organizational influences. I hope readers can still see the stories of young adults and staff as agentic and full of success, mistakes, and humanity—all within the context of the power structures constructing their life pathways.

Further, teaching courses on poverty or inequality has shown me how many of us are unfamiliar with policy in practice. Even those who had been through child care and even experienced homelessness were unfamiliar with the 15 US Departments and Offices that make up the United States response to homelessness—and that each of these departments have their own definitions of homelessness, funding requirements, and eligibility guidelines. These then differ from state to state, city to city, and organization to organization. It is important to see how that chaos is navigated on the ground, directed by cultural and political power discourses, in ways that profoundly shape all of our lives—even if we are not the ones in poverty.

This is one of the reasons I chose to focus on organizational practices, logics, and the interactions between federal discourse and policy, organizations, and the clients. I sought to avoid marginalizing and pathologizing LGBTQ+ young adults. Focusing on the organizational practices and the histories that led up to this moment allowed me to bring context to their lives

rather than diagnose. I have probably made many errors along this path towards that goal and I hope my future time, reflection, and engagement will continue to minimize those mistakes.

Appendix B: Tables

Table 1.1. Summary of Volunteer Ethnography

	Project Alight	***Fierce***	***La Fortaleza-W***	***La Fortaleza-S***
Timeframe	04.2019 – 03.2020	09.2019 – 03.2020 02.2021 – 04.2021	12.2019 – 03.2020	12.2019 – 03.2020
Total Hours	190 hours	160 hours	18 hours	18 hours
Type of Center	Interim Housing Drop-In Center	No Shelter Drop-In Center	Interim Housing Drop-in Center	Interim Housing Drop-in Center
Demographic Focus	None	LGBTQ+ young adults; racial minorities	None	None
Parent Organization	International Christian Homeless Agency	Healthcare Network targeting LGBTQ+ and racial minorities	Homeless Org. for Latinx individuals	Homeless Org. for Latinx individuals
Volunteer Role	Youth Advisor	Drop-in Staff	Cook; Drop-in Staff	Cook; Drop-in Staff

Table 1.2. Demographics of LGBTQ+ Young Adult Interviewees

Reason Left	N/(Mean)	%/(Std Dev)
Gender Identity		
Male	21	72%
Female	8	28%
Transgender		
Yes	4	14%
No – Cisgender	25	86%
Sexuality		
Gay	4	14%
Bisexual	18	62%
Pansexual	2	7%
Race		
African-American/Black	24	83%
White	2	7%
Mix: Black+Latinx	3	10%
Average Age	(23.66)	(4.37)
Current Relationship Status		
Single	22	76%
Dating	5	17%
Married	2	7%
Employment Status		
Currently Working	4	14%
Not Formally Employed	25	86%
Current Housing		
Homeless: Shelter	14	48%
Homeless: Street	2	7%
Homeless: Couch-Surfing	2	7%
Housed	7	24%
Education:		
No Diploma	4	14%
High School Diploma/GED	16	57%
College/Associates	8	29%
Average Age Participant Entered Homelessness	(16.43)	(4.00)
Average Total # Experienced Homelessness		
In Months	(40.12)	(33.00)
In Years	(3.34)	(2.72)
Total:	**29**	

Table 2.1: Scheduling of Young Adult Homeless Facilities in the Chicago Area

Time	Day Center	Transitional/Interim	Emergency
7a	Closed	Wake-up Call[55]	Wakeup Call
8 or 9a		Required to leave	Required to leave
	--- Residential/Emergency Shelters Close —		
9a	Staff-led Group Morning Meeting	Closed	Closed
9:30a	"Air" Break		
10a-12p	Staff-led Group Meeting		
12p	Lunch		
1-3p	Staff-led Group Meeting		
	--- Day-Centers Close —		
3p	Closed	Residential opens	Closed
5 or 6p		Dinner	
8 or 9p			Shelter Opens Possible Dinner
9p		Staff-led Group Night Meeting	
9:30p		Lights Out	Lights Out

[55] Important to note that some shelters like *Project Alight* do ask their residents if they would like staff to wake them up at a specific time. For example, if a resident needs to leave for work by seven, they can request a 5a wake-up knock on their door.

Table 3.1: Fundamental Values of *Project Alight* and *Fierce*

Project Alight's Five Principles	*Fierce's* Five Frameworks
Choice	Harm Reduction
Immediacy	Trauma Informed Care
Sanctuary	Anti-Oppression
Structure	Anti-Violence
Value Communication	Transformative and Restorative Justice

Table 3.2. Reasons for Client Discharge in *Project Alight's* Computer System

Reason Left	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Verbal/Physical Abuse	9	13.2%
Sex or Pornography	2	2.9%
Drug-Use Near Property (Marijuana)	9	13.2%
Under the Influence (Marijuana)	7	10.3%
Missed Curfew	17	25.0%
Other Minor Rules	6	8.8%
Self-discharge – unknown location	8	11.8%
Self-harm	1	1.4%
Matched with long-term housing agency	8	11.8%
Found apartment	1	1.4%
Total:	**68**	**99.9%**
Missing Data	9	
Still at *Project Alight*	13	
Total	90	