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"Somewhere I'm Allowed to Exist as Myself": A Grounded Theory Exploration of Queer and Trans Young Adults Navigating Family Rejection and Housing Instability

Jonah P. DeChants
University of Denver

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Abstract

Queer and transgender young people are overrepresented among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Families' rejection of their youth's queer and transgender identities is one of the causes of this overrepresentation, as families force young people out of the home or create a home environment that is so hostile that youth chose to leave. While the relationship between family rejection and queer and trans youth homelessness is well-documented quantitatively, there is not a scholarly consensus on what family rejection looks like, how queer and trans youth experiences that rejection, and how they make decisions about where to live after leaving home.

This dissertation study used grounded theory methodology to examine these questions. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen queer and trans young adults who had experienced both family rejection of their queer or trans identities and housing instability. Study participants reported a variety of rejection behaviors from their families after coming out as queer or trans, including escalating abuse and neglect, heterosexist and cisgenderist conflict, silence and isolation, and controlling youth's appearance. These actions caused youth to feel pain, disconnect from their families, stifled, resistance, and uncertainty. When making decisions about when and how to leave the family home and where to live, youth reported three techniques of resilience: strategizing, coping, and connecting. The findings illustrate how young people are resilient when confronted with the dual stress of family rejection and housing instability and offer implications for social work research and practice.

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Yoli Anyon, Ph.D.

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"Somewhere I'm Allowed to Exist as Myself": A Grounded Theory Exploration of Queer

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by

Jonah P. DeChants, MSSP

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Advisor: Dr. Kim Bender

Author: Jonah P. DeChants, MSSP
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ABSTRACT

Queer and transgender young people are overrepresented among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Families' rejection of their youths' queer and transgender identities is one of the causes of this overrepresentation, as families force young people out of the home or create a home environment that is so hostile that youth choose to leave. While the relationship between family rejection and queer and trans youth homelessness is well documented quantitatively, there is not a scholarly consensus on what family rejection looks like, how queer and trans youth experience that rejection, and how they make decisions about where to live after leaving home.

This dissertation study used grounded theory methodology to examine these questions. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 queer and trans young adults who had experienced both family rejection of their queer or trans identities and housing instability. Study participants reported a variety of rejection behaviors from their families after coming out as queer or trans, including escalating abuse and neglect, heterosexist and cisgenderist conflict, silence and isolation, and controlling youths' appearances. These actions caused youth to feel pain; disconnect from their families; and experience stifling, resistance, and uncertainty. When making decisions about when and how to leave the family home and where to live, youth reported three techniques of resilience: strategizing, coping, and connecting. The findings illustrate how young people are

resilient when confronted with the dual stress of family rejection and housing instability

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Heather Kennedy, Brittanie Atteberry-Ashe, Daphne Boyer Brydon, Jennifer Wilson, and Jon Philips.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I believe that one day, the Lord will come back to get me. Halleluiah.
If I live right, halleluiah, I will go on to that righteous place.
I believe that one day, halleluiah, all my trials, all my tribulations, they will all be over.
I won't have to worry about crying and suffering no more.
I won't have to worry about being disappointed, because my God,
halleluiah, is coming back for me.
Whether I'm a man with a dress and a wig, My God will love me for who I am!
I might not walk like I'm supposed to walk.
I might not have sex with who I'm supposed to have sex with.
My God will love me for who I am!
So don't worry about me, worry about yourself.
Because as long as my God believes in me,
I'm not worried about what folks say, halleluiah.

> —Ali Forney, a homeless transgender youth in New York City, performing at a talent show in 1996. Ali was murdered less than a year after sharing this poem (Ray & Berger, 2007, 8). They were the third transgender sex worker to be killed in Harlem in 13 months. Their murder remains unsolved (Parascandola, 2016).

Growing up is hard. Much has been written about how difficult it is to be around teenagers and young adults—we are taught to see these ages as periods of tumult and conflict. We dismiss young people's passions as "hormones" or "drama." However, less has been written about how difficult and complex of a transformation it is to leave behind the dependency of childhood and become an independent adult. Many of us have people helping us throughout this period of growth: parents; teachers; and friends who provide guidance, emotional support, and material assistance. Many young people, however, do not have supportive adults in their lives. This is particularly true for the young people I met over the course of my research and practice with youth experiencing homelessness.

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Their families are not safe or do not have the capacity to help them. Their friends are similarly disconnected. They don't have access to higher education or well-paying jobs. Learning to become independent, buy your own groceries, read a lease, or write a resume without help is nearly impossible. But these young people are doing it on their own because they have no other options.

Queer and trans youth face additional obstacles in their journeys to healthy and happy adulthood. They live in a society that tells them they are inferior to their straight and cisgender peers, that their needs and experiences are morally wrong, freakish, or unnatural. They hear these messages from the mouths of family, classmates, employers, and strangers. They must work extra hard to unlearn these messages at the same developmental moment when they are just starting to figure out what kind of people they are. Despite these challenges, queer and trans youth demonstrate tremendous resilience and resourcefulness. They build new social networks to replace or supplement their families. They share resources among one another. They find spaces where they can be themselves without reservation. This dissertation endeavors to illuminate the strength and resilience that queer and trans young adults demonstrate when faced with the dual stresses of family rejection of their queer and trans identities and housing instability, so that we as adults and social workers may serve them better on their journeys to happy and healthy adulthood.

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Queer and Trans Youth Homelessness

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Queer and transgender youth are overrepresented among youth experiencing homelessness (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, 2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Morton, et al., 2018). Measuring the prevalence of queer and trans youth homelessness is an inexact

science, both because youth experiencing homelessness are frequently disconnected from service institutions and difficult to count, and because of the complexity of youth disclosing their queer and trans identities to service providers. Nonetheless, youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning are estimated to be 7 to 9% of the general population (Wilson, Cooper, Kastanis, & Nezhad, 2014) but 29% of youth seeking housing services (Choi et al., 2015). Similarly, transgender youth are estimated to be 3% of the general population (Wilson et al., 2014) and 4 to 7% of youth seeking housing services (Choi et al., 2015; Whitbeck, Lazoritz, Crawford, & Hautala, 2015). Therefore, understanding the experiences and needs of queer and trans young people is important to informing how housing instability can be prevented and addressed.

Risks and Disparities Among Queer and Trans Youth

Although homelessness and housing instability create risk for most young people, conditions are often harsher and more difficult for queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness. Finding a place to stay is a first challenge for most youth; with few choices, young people may access limited shelter options or find alternative street locations or couch surfing opportunities. Despite associated risks, queer youth are less likely to stay in a shelter and more likely to sleep in public or at the home of a stranger than their straight, cisgender peers (Rice, et al., 2015). This may be due to experiences of heterosexism or cisgenderism with shelter staff or residents, as studies suggest trans people of all ages report experiencing high levels of discrimination, harassment, and violence when trying to access shelter services (Grant et al., 2011). Life on the streets is dangerous for all young people; however, queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to be victims of physical or sexual assault and are also more likely to

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exchange sex for money, food, or a place to stay than their straight, cisgender peers (Cochran Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Walls & Bell, 2011). Among youth experiencing homelessness, queer or trans identity is a significant predictor of stress (Moskowitz, Stein, & Lightfoot, 2012), suggesting that queer and trans youth encounter stressful manifestations of heterosexism and cisgenderism as they live on the streets or navigate housing services. Given such disparities and adversity, understanding the needs of queer and trans youth is vitally important in order to develop services to help them exit homelessness and become independent adults.

Family Rejection

There are a number of factors that place queer and trans youth at greater risk of becoming homeless than their straight, cisgender peers. Queer and transgender youth experience heterosexist and cisgenderist marginalization in the systems that traditionally support children as they become adults: schools, child welfare, and families. In school, queer and trans youth report high levels of harassment from peers and staff, and 42% of youth report that they are not sure they will finish high school due to that harassment (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). They are overrepresented in foster care, report higher numbers of placements while in care, and are more likely to be living in a group home (Wilson et al., 2014), all of which can contribute to risk of homelessness. However, the first support system that fails to support queer and trans young people as they become adults is their families.

Queer and trans youth are more likely than their straight, cisgender peers to have become homeless because of heterosexist or cisgenderist family rejection (Choi et al., 2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Keuroghlian, et al., 2014). A nationally representative

survey of youth experiencing homelessness found that 64% of queer and trans youth

reported experiencing discrimination or stigma within their families, compared to 37% of

their straight, cisgender peers (Voices of Youth Count, 2018). Staff working with young

people experiencing homelessness recognize this need, with a national survey finding that

staff estimate that 55% of their queer youth clients and 67% of their trans youth clients

are homeless primarily because they were forced out of their family homes due to their

queer or trans identities (Choi et al., 2015). This study replicates findings from previous

work that similarly found 46% of service providers reported youth running away from

home because of their sexual orientation or gender identity and 43% reported youth being

forced out because of their queer or trans identity (Durso & Gates, 2012).

Introduction to the Current Study

Previous research has established, primarily through quantitative methods, that

family rejection is a primary reason for queer and trans youth homelessness (Choi et al.,

2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Keuroghlian, et al., 2014). The nature of this research,

generally collected through surveys of youth housing service providers or youth

experiencing homelessness themselves, establishes a correlational relationship and

subsequently assumes that this relationship is linear. Conventional wisdom among

researchers suggests that youth disclose their queer and/or trans identities, their parents

reject those identities, and youth are forced out of the family home and onto the streets.

However, the process of family rejection and becoming homeless is likely much more

complicated and nuanced than is frequently described in the literature. In an effort to

expand our understanding of the complex and nuanced stories of young people in these

situations, this dissertation utilized qualitative inquiry to answer the following research
questions and add to the existing scholarly literature.

Research Questions

1) What kinds of heterosexist and cisgenderist rejection do queer and trans youth
   experience from their parents or guardians?

2) How do queer and transgender youth experience and react to that rejection?

3) Amidst these experiences of rejection, how do youth make decisions about where
   to live?

Conceptual Model

Figure 1 contains a visual representation of the major concepts of this study.
Further explanation of each concept and its role in the image are presented below. While
it not traditional to begin a grounded theory exploration with a conceptual model, I feel it
is important to name and define the theoretical concepts that impact the research
questions.

Queer and Trans Youth

At the center of the model we can see the queer or trans youth who is
experiencing family rejection of their queer or trans identity and housing instability.
Terminology around queer and transgender identities and scholarship is diverse and
rapidly evolving. Traditionally, research on queer and trans youth has used variations of
the acronym "LGBTQ" to refer to youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual,
transgender, queer, or questioning. In this dissertation, I will use the terms queer and
trans to refer to any youth who identity as non-heterosexual or non-cisgender. I have
selected these umbrella terms to center how queer and trans youth are defined by their

deviation from traditional sexualities and gender expressions. It is important to note that there are a multitude of identities within these categories of "queer" and "trans." While my goal is to illuminate how queer and trans people are impacted by heterosexist and cisgenderist family conflict and housing instability, I do not intend for my use of these umbrella terms to imply that there is one essential queer or trans youth experience of housing instability. It is equally important to specify what is meant by the term "youth." When I refer to youth, I am referring to youth and young adults in the developmental stages of late adolescence and early adulthood, from ages 15 to 24.
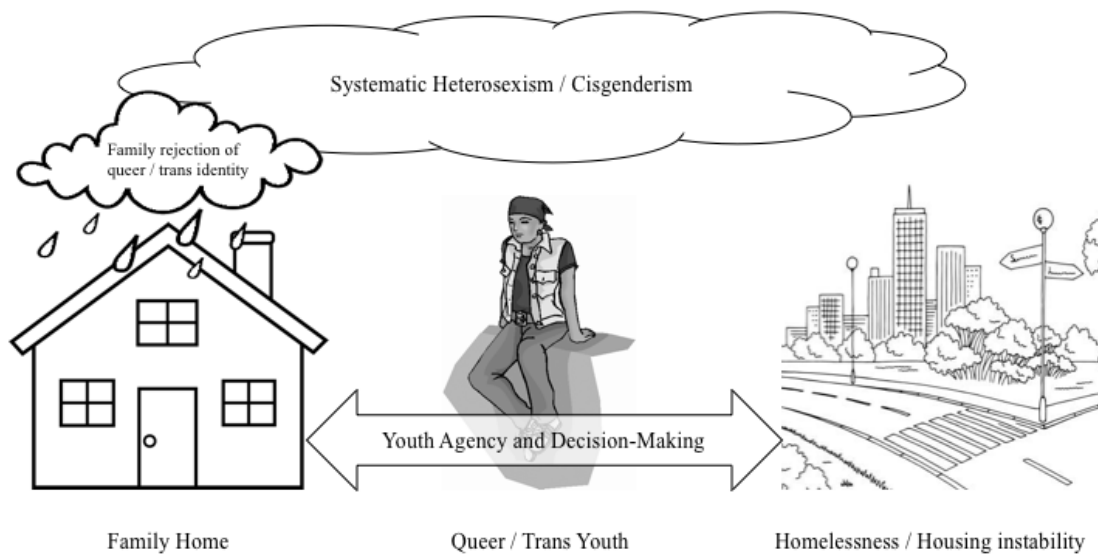
Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Study

Homelessness and Housing Instability

The image at the far right of the model is that of a city street. This image represents the homelessness and housing instability which a queer or trans youth may experience if they are forced to or choose to leave their family home. I include a wide range of housing experiences in my definition of homelessness, including but not limited

to couch surfing or doubling up with friends, staying in a shelter, or sleeping on the streets. While housing services frequently have restrictive limitations or criteria for who counts as a "youth" or "homeless," I have chosen to keep these categories intentionally broad in order to reflect the fact that any degree of housing instability can have a detrimental impact on a young person's ability to establish themselves as an independent adult. For the purposes of this study, I will also include young people who are at risk of, or who worry about, homelessness when I refer to "housing instability" in order to include young people who may choose to not come out or repress parts of their queer or trans identities so as to not be kicked out of their parents' homes.

In comparison to the image of the house, the image of the street represents the instability of not knowing where you are going to sleep at night but also offers freedom from the conflict of family rejection. This concept was explored through interview questions about where youth have lived since coming out, or not coming out, to their parents and about how their family conflict has impacted their housing stability.

Systematic Heterosexism and Cisgenderism

The large cloud floating over the entire model—home, youth, and the streets— represents systematic heterosexism and cisgenderism. Heterosexism and cisgenderism are systematic forms of oppression that target and marginalize queer and transgender people (Ansara & Hegarty, 2011; Smith, Oades, & McCarthy, 2012). Heterosexism is defined as an ideology that both denigrates non-heterosexual sexualities and privileges heterosexuality over homosexuality (Smith et al., 2012). Similarly, cisgenderism is an ideology which "invalidates or pathologises self-designated genders that contrast with external designations" (Ansara & Hegarty, 2011). Similar to racism or sexism,

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heterosexism and cisgenderism can be used to describe a wide range of oppressive actions, policies, or beliefs (Bettcher, 2014). In the model, this cloud hovers over all other images and model components because it represents the systematic nature of heterosexism and cisgenderism, which impact all parts of human society. While heterosexism and cisgenderism are responsible for many forms of discrimination and bias, the small cloud over the house is emerging from the large in order to emphasize systematic heterosexism and cisgenderism's role in family rejection.

It is important to note and define how systems of oppression, like heterosexism and cisgenderism, operate and how they intersect with homelessness and housing instability. Marginalization refers to the process by which oppressed groups and individuals are pushed to the margins of society, excluded from both the labor market and "useful participation in social life" (Young, 2000, 41). Marginality and homelessness are mutually reinforcing constructs: marginalized individuals are more likely to be homeless and homeless individuals are then additionally marginalized (Melnitzer, 2013). This marginality is manifested in a variety of ways, including but not limited to policies that criminalize sleeping or camping in public spaces and employers who discriminate against job applicants without permanent addresses.

Family Rejection of Queer or Trans Identities

The image on the far left of the model is that of a home, representing the family home where a young person is currently living or has lived in the past. While the image of the home represents the stability that a young person may experience there, the rain cloud over the top of the house represents the family rejection that participants in this study have experienced from their parents or guardians due to rejection of their queer or

trans identities. This small cloud is connected to the larger cloud representing systematic heterosexism and cisgenderism, illustrating how families' attitudes toward queer and trans identities are influenced by these overarching systems of oppression. While youth of many identities experiencing homelessness report familial abuse and neglect as causes of their homelessness (Rosenthal, Mallett, & Myers, 2006), queer and trans youths' families struggle to accept their queer and trans identities because they have absorbed messages from a heterosexist and cisgenderist society that denigrates and rejects those identities. Their rejection of a queer or trans youth's identity is caused, at least in part, by society's messages of how sexual orientation and gender identity should be expressed and practiced. The visual representation of these two clouds, therefore, demonstrates how family rejection is a specific, tangible manifestation of a larger societal dynamic.

While there is little theoretical research on the causes of heterosexist and cisgenderist family rejection, there are two concepts that are helpful in considering why families choose to not accept their children's identities. The first concept is that of heteronormativity, which describes the ways in which heterosexuality is constructed as normal and natural (Yep, 2003). Cisnormativity is a similar concept that describes how cisgender identities are normalized through the assumption that all people are cisgender or that their gender identity matches that which was assigned to them at birth (Bauer et al., 2009). Both heteronormativity and cisnormativity can be difficult to identity, since they operate by defining and enforcing that which is already seen as normal: "Cisnormative assumptions are so prevalent that they are difficult at first to even recognize" (Bauer et al., 2009, 356). While heteronormativity describes assumptions around sexual orientation and cisnormativity describes assumptions around gender

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identity, both concepts operate very similarly against queer and trans people, who frequently violate the norms of both sexual orientation and gender identity. Heteronormativity and cisnormativity can both be characterized as forms of marginalization that fall under the larger ideologies of heterosexism and cisgenderism.

For queer and trans homeless young people, relationships with their families can be extremely complex. For some youth, family rejection does not look like an explosive argument or physical violence, but rather a pervasive sense of discomfort that motivates them to leave home in order to express their queer or trans identities more completely (Robinson, 2017; Schmitz & Tyler, 2017; Voices of Youth Count, 2018). Anecdotally, through years of research and volunteering with queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness, I have encountered many young people trying to navigate this complexity. Some youth report that their parents did not reject their identity, but that an extended relative who moved into the family home was heterosexist or cisgenderist and that relative's presence was enough for them to decide to leave home. Other youth have a fluid relationship with their parents' homes, leaving and returning in a dynamic process of trying to reconcile their identities with their familial relationships. Having a better understanding of how queer and trans young people navigate family rejection and its impact on their housing stability will allow practitioners to develop more nuanced and effective housing interventions.

Youth Agency and Decision-Making

The final image in the conceptual model is that of the young person in the middle, between the image of the home and that of the streets. This represents the situation of the young adult participants of this study. They are trapped between a rock and a hard

place—between the conflict-filled stability of their family home and the instability but freedom of leaving home. The bidirectional arrow over the youth's feet represents the agency they have in this tough situation and the decisions they are forced to make as they navigate their options. It is this arrow, this agency, and these decisions that are the primary foci of this grounded theory study. What do youth do when they are forcibly expelled from their homes? How do they react? What factors do they consider as they make choices? On the other end of the spectrum, what do youth do when they are too scared to come out for fear that they will lose their housing? How do they manage the tension between their parents' disapproval and their own self-expression? And finally, what do youth do when they are in the middle, not forcibly kicked out, but leaving home because the situation there is untenable? When do they decide to leave? What factors to they consider in that decision? That is the expression of youth agency I explored through the in-depth interviews.

Relevance for Social Work Research and Practice

This study was designed to contribute relevant insights for both social work researchers and practitioners. By focusing the locus of inquiry on youth themselves and their decision-making processes, this study was designed to honor young people's rights to self-determination. While young people's identities and goals may be at odds with their parents' or guardians', it is social workers' ethical duty to help young people clarify and pursue their own goals (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). Understanding how young people balance the stress of family rejection with the uncertainty of housing instability will help social workers empower these youth to grow into happy and healthy adults. The disproportionate numbers of queer and trans youth

who experience homelessness is also an issue of social justice and equality. Developing a better understanding of the family dynamics that contribute to this disproportionate risk will help social workers and other advocates for queer and trans liberation address the systematic marginalization of queer and trans youth.

Most importantly, pursuing a better understanding of the decisions youth make while navigating family rejection and housing instability can lead to improvements in housing services for queer and trans youth. Developing a theory to explain the complex dynamics of family rejection and housing instability may allow for preventative outreach to youth who are still living at home but fear that they are at risk of homelessness to assess their level of risk and provide them with services before they leave home. Better understanding of families' reactions to their children's queer or trans identities could lead to more opportunities for family counseling, which can maximize the supportive aspects of family relationships while minimizing the stressful or conflictual aspects. Finally, better understanding of youths' decision-making and needs as they leave home can lead to shelter and housing staff being more aware and responsive to those needs.

Statement of Positionality and Accountability

With grounded theory, as with any qualitative research where the researcher is an integral part of the analysis and coding process, it is important to consider one's positionality and how one's own experiences and beliefs may affect data analysis and theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As a White, able-bodied, educationally and economically privileged, queer, transmasculine researcher who has never experienced homelessness, I approach this work with a tremendous sense of accountability to my queer and trans community. I do not know what it is like to be

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homeless, to be in foster care, or to be in jail. But I do know what it is like to live in a society that denies my humanity and forces me and other queer and trans people to fight for our most basic human dignities. As I travel in queer and trans advocacy circles, I am constantly reminded of the tremendous privilege and good fortune that allow me to live freely as an out trans person and a graduate student in the academy. I think often of my fellow queer and trans people who are not included in academic discussions of homelessness because they are too busy struggling to survive its material reality. This study forced me to sit in the space between my insider status as a member of the queer and trans community and my outsider status as a person who has never experienced homelessness. In this dissertation and in my career more broadly, I aspire to conduct research which elevates the voices of queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness and honors their experiences and their perspectives. I hope to create knowledge about how to better serve them as they navigate heterosexism, cisgenderism, and housing instability. Most importantly, I hope to provide queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness with the tools they need to survive, so that they can grow up to join our beautiful, vibrant, and resilient queer and trans community as happy and healthy adults. For this study, I will address my identities and potential bias by using research memos and reflective analysis.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced my dissertation study on the experiences of queer and trans young adults experiencing family rejection of their queer and trans identities and housing instability. It has oriented the reader to the prevalence and impact of family rejection and housing instability among queer and trans youth and young adults. I have

presented my research questions, conceptual model, and relevance for social work

practice. I have also discussed my own positionality and my accountability to queer and

trans people.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Happy is a poor word for someone who's trying to live a rainbow-colored life in a

black-and-white world."

Kate Bornstein, 2006

Causes of Queer and Trans Youth Homelessness

It is well documented that queer and trans youth are disproportionately represented among youth experiencing homelessness. In a study of high school students in Los Angeles, queer and trans youth were more likely than their straight, cisgender peers to report experiencing homelessness (Rice et al., 2013). Estimates of proportions of queer- and trans-identified youth among youth experiencing homelessness were approximately 30% for queer youth (Choi et al., 2015; Whitbeck et al., 2015) and 4 to 7% for trans youth (Choi et al., 2015; Whitbeck et al., 2015). Service providers working with youth experiencing homelessness estimate that there has been an increase in queer and trans youth seeking housing services in the last ten years and note that youth of color are further overrepresented among queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness (Choi et al., 2015).

Conflict with family members has emerged as a consistent reason for youth choosing or being forced to leave home. Queer youth are more likely to be kicked out of their family homes than their straight peers, more likely to be living away from their families before they become homeless, and more likely to become homeless at a younger

age (Bruce, Stall, Fata, & Campbell, 2014; Choi et al., 2015; Ecker, 2016; Saewyc et al., 2017). Trans youth experiencing homelessness were reported to experience even more family conflict that their queer homeless peers (Choi et al., 2015). Queer youth are more likely than their straight peers to have left home due to physical or sexual abuse at home and more likely to be leaving a home where there is alcohol abuse (Ecker, 2016). While much of the family conflict that causes a youth to leave home is tied to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Choi et al., 2015), other sources of conflict include parental substance use and parental disapproval of youth substance use (Ecker, 2016). Other factors contributing to queer and trans youth homelessness include heterosexism in school or housing, intimate partner violence, having no place to go after being discharged from foster care or inpatient treatment, and wanting to live in a more queer- or trans-friendly area (Castellanos, 2016; Ecker, 2016). In fact, one study noted how conflict around youths' sexual orientation or gender identity and other elements of family instability (e.g. youth removal to foster care, conflict over other issues of adolescent development) frequently exacerbated one another, increasing queer and trans youths' likelihood of experiencing homelessness (Castellanos, 2016).

Risks Associated with Family Rejection

A number of studies have documented the impact of families' reaction to youths' queer and trans identities. One of the most influential studies was completed at San Francisco State and found a number of demographic differences in families who expressed rejection or approval of their queer or trans children (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Youth born in the United States and youth who report childhood religiosity both experienced lower levels of family acceptance of their queer or trans

identities, suggesting that religious and cultural norms play a strong role in influencing a

parent's ability to accept their child (Ryan et al., 2010). Ryan et al. also reported that

parental occupational status is positively associated with family acceptance, suggesting

that access to education may also influence positive parental attitudes.

Ryan et al.'s (2010) study illuminated strong impacts of parental acceptance or

rejection. Youth with high levels of family acceptance reported higher self-esteem, social

support, and general health. Conversely, youth who experienced low levels of family

acceptance reported higher rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and

attempts. Dramatically, youths whose families were not accepting were three times more

likely to report suicidal ideation or attempts.

Later studies have continued to explore and document the impact of families'

acceptance or rejection of their children's queer or trans identities. A study of Israeli

queer youth and young adults found that family support is significantly positively

associated with a youth's sense of well-being and self-acceptance and negatively

associated with mental distress (Shilo & Savaya, 2011). Another study found that family

support is negatively associated with psychological distress, but also found that the

positive effects of family support decreased over time as youths moved into young

adulthood. They also noted that the positive effects of family support were not as

important as the effects of peer support (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011).

A number of studies have examined the impact of family rejection or acceptance

of queer and trans youth compared to their straight, cisgender peers. A study that

included both queer and heterosexual youth found differences by both sexual orientation

and gender (Needham & Austin, 2010). Compared to their straight peers, lesbian and

bisexual young women reported both lower levels of parental support and higher odds of suicidal thoughts and recent drug use. Compared to both their straight and bisexual peers, gay men reported lower levels of parental support. They also experienced higher odds of suicidal thoughts than their straight peers. Parental support was found to be a mediator in these negative health outcomes.

Another study compared queer youth who had come out to those who had not (D'Amico & Julien, 2012). While the study did find significant differences among out and not out youth—out youth were less likely to report alcohol and drug consumption—there were not significant differences between the groups in outcomes related to parental acceptance. High levels of current parental rejection were associated with higher levels of psychological maladjustment and higher levels of alcohol and drug use. Another study included youth and parent pairs in their sample and interviewed and surveyed both parties about the youth's queer identity (D'amico, Julien, Tremblay, & Chartrand, 2015). This study found that the more parents struggle to accept their youth's queer identity, the more the youth themselves reported negative attitudes toward their sexual orientation. The more parents attempted to control their child's sexual orientation, the more youth reported psychological distress. Conversely, youth who reported high levels of parental support reported lower rates of suicidal ideation, with the father's struggle with their child's sexual orientation being especially strongly associated with their child's suicidal ideation.

Other studies have also found that parental rejection is associated with youth struggle with identity and mental health (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013; Carastathis, Cohen, Kaczmarek, & Chang, 2017; Kibrik et al. , 2018; McConnell,

Birkett, & Mustanski, 2016). Lower levels of parental support are associated with youth struggling with their queer identities, including internalized homonegativity, concealment motivation, acceptance concerns, and a difficult process (Bregman et al., 2013). Both youth who report low levels of family support and youth who report low levels of family support but high levels of social support experience higher levels of distress, suggesting that social support is not sufficient in replacing the support of family (McConnell et al., 2016). A qualitative study similarly found that family rejection created feelings of negativity toward their queer identity for youth, contributing to poor mental health and self-destructive behaviors (Carastathis et al., 2017). Taken together, the literature suggests that family rejection has serious negative effects on queer and trans youths' mental health and sense of identity. These negative effects may compound the challenges youth encounter when experiencing housing instability and homelessness.

Risks Associated with Homelessness and Housing Instability

The current research literature documents many risks associated with queer and trans youth homelessness. Studies highlight the accumulation of risk factors over the course of a young person's life and demonstrate those factors' relationships to various outcomes, such as homelessness (Laser & Nicotera, 2010). Risk factors may be mediated by resilience, or protective factors, that buffer and protect youth from the accumulation of risk (Rutter, 1987), which will be discussed further in this chapter. Previous studies have highlighted several specific areas of heightened risk.

Mental Health. Queer youth experiencing homelessness report both a high quantity and more recent depressive symptoms than their straight, cisgender peers (Ecker, 2016; Gattis & Larson, 2017; Gattis, 2013). They are also more likely to have

experienced suicidal ideation, made a suicide attempt, or practiced a form of self-harm (Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013; Moskowitz et al., 2012; Saewyc et al, 2017). In one study, queer and/or trans identity was a significant predictor of recent stress, indicating that queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness experience more stress than their straight, cisgender peers (Moskowitz et al., 2012). Queer youth experiencing homelessness also experience higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other forms of psychopathology (Ecker, 2016). A study examining the experiences of Black youth experiencing homelessness with both racist and heterosexist/cisgenderist microaggressions found that Black queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness experience more depressive symptoms and suicidality than Black straight, cisgender youth experiencing homelessness (Gattis & Larson, 2017). Both racial and heterosexist/cisgenderist microaggressions were associated with depressive symptoms, suggesting that the mental health challenges of queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness were exacerbated by their experiences with heterosexist and cisgenderist microaggressions.

Substance Use. Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness use more substances than their straight, cisgender homeless peers. Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness are especially more likely to report use of hard drugs (excluding marijuana) (Gattis, 2013; Kattari, Barman-Adhikari, DeChants, & Rice, 2017; Saewyc et al., 2017). This substance use places queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness at increased risk of violence, with queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness reporting more incidence of being injured or having sex when they did not want to because of substance use (Saewyc et al., 2017). Queer and trans youth

experiencing homelessness also report more barriers to accessing substance use treatment, with queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness being more likely to have been refused drug treatment by a provider than their straight, cisgender peers (Saewyc et al., 2017).

Risky Sexual Experiences. When discussing sexual risk, it is important to note that many of these behaviors, such as having many or multiple concurrent sexual partners, are not inherently dangerous but do increase a person's risk for contracting sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs) such as HIV. Therefore, discussions of decreasing sexual risk among queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness should take care to not shame youth for their sexual practices but rather encourage them to take steps to protect themselves and decrease their sexual risk. Queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report a variety of risk behaviors, including having unprotected anal sex and having sex with a sex worker, an intravenous drug user, or a person living with HIV (Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013; Rice et al., 2013). Some of these sexual risks may come from the influence of peers, with queer youth experiencing homelessness more likely to report a member of their social network who has unprotected sex (Kattari et al., 2017).

Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report engaging in survival sex, or exchanging sex for a money, a place to stay, or other basic needs (Bauermeister, Eaton, Meanley, Pingel, & UHIP Partnership, 2017; Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013; Tyler, 2013). Queer youth experiencing homelessness are also more likely to have been solicited for sex than their straight, cisgender peers (Ecker, 2016). Survival sex and housing instability are deeply connected, as youth use survival sex as a way to

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avoid the dangers of the streets but are instead exposed to other dangers. One study found that 70% of participants who reported engaging in survival sex were also worried about their housing (Bauermeister et al., 2017). Participants who reported one night of housing instability in the last month were also more likely to report transactional sex with a casual partner (rather than with someone in a relationship).

Several studies also found evidence of queer and trans youths' efforts to protect themselves from sexual health risks. Gay and bisexual homeless young men are more likely to use condoms than their straight peers (Ecker, 2016). Queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to have a social network member who talked to them about safe sex, and those who do talk with their peers about safe sex are less likely to have concurrent sexual partners (Kattari et al., 2017). This suggests that peers can be a source of information and pro-safety norms. One study examining the impact of HIV prevention efforts found that participants who reported being homeless in the last four months reported a higher level of HIV knowledge than their housed peers (Nyamathi et al., 2013). This indicates that youth experiencing homelessness are receptive to information about HIV risk and how to keep themselves safe.

Victimization. Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to have been physically assaulted or abused (Gattis, 2013). They are also more likely to have been sexually abused or sexual exploited (Ecker, 2016; Saewyc et al., 2017). One study found that queer youth experiencing homelessness had as many as seven more sexual perpetrators as their straight peers (Ecker, 2016). Much of this victimization came from their families. Lesbian youth in particular were more likely to report physical abuse and neglect at home. Queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report

experiencing parental substance abuse at home (Ecker, 2016) and lower satisfaction with communicating or engaging with their families (Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013). One study examined the experiences of homeless queer and trans youth in comparison to queer and trans college students of the same age (Schmitz & Tyler, 2017). They found that socioeconomic status deeply influenced queer and trans youths' family relationships. While families of both youth experiencing homelessness and college students frequently struggled to accept their children's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, youth experiencing homelessness faced more overt forms of rejection such as being kicked out of the home or the withdrawal of material support, while college students experienced more subtle forms of distance of discomfort. The college students also benefited from being in a structured, resource-rich campus environment, while the youth experiencing homelessness were left on their own to navigate independence with limited social networks and support.

For youth who experience more extreme forms of family victimization, the foster care system can be structure of support and resources. Queer youth are overrepresented among youth in state custody (Ecker, 2016; Wilson & Kastanis, 2015). Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness who report a history of foster care also report higher levels of abuse both before and during their homelessness (Whitbeck et al., 2015). While foster care can be an important support for youth whose families are unwilling or unable to support them, queer and trans youth often experience worse outcomes in child welfare. Queer and trans youth in LA's child welfare system are more likely to be in group home settings rather than foster families, more likely to have been hospitalized for emotional reasons, and more likely to report having been homeless (Wilson & Kastanis, 2015).

Discrimination. Child welfare is not the only system where queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness experience negative outcomes. Queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience both anti-homeless discrimination and heterosexist or cisgenderist discrimination than their straight, cisgender peers (Ecker, 2016; Gattis, 2013; Saewyc et al., 2017). This discrimination comes from both their peers and professionals, such as the police (Ecker, 2016; Saewyc, 2017). Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to have been denied medical care or to have forgone medical care because they were anxious about discrimination (Saewyc et al., 2017). Some of these experiences may cause queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness to internalize negative feelings about their identities—in one study sexual orientation was found to be associated with higher rates of self-blame (Ecker, 2016).

Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness also experience discrimination and harassment when trying to access housing services. Studies examining the bureaucratic barriers that queer and trans youth face in shelters have noted that shelter staff are frequently ignorant about youths' identities and unique needs, few shelter staff are required to attend LGBTQ competency trainings, and systems designed to register complaints with shelter services do not distinguish complaints related to heterosexist or cisgenderist harassment from more general complaints, leaving little data about the prevalence of these issues in shelter systems (Abramovich, 2013; Abramovich, 2017). Few shelters ask about sexual orientation or gender identity at intake, meaning that some queer and trans youth are invisible to shelter staff (Abramovich, 2017).

The harassment and violence experienced by queer and trans youth in shelters comes from both other youth clients (Abramovich, 2017; Ecker, 2016) and shelter staff

(Abramovich, 2013; Abramovich, 2017; Begun & Kattari, 2016; Robinson, 2017;

Shelton, 2015). Straight, cisgender male youth residents are noted as a particular source

of harassment and violence, since they can be quick to police the gender expressions and

enforce hegemonic masculinity through confrontation and violence (Abramovich, 2017).

Queer and trans youth in shelters report that many shelter staff are both unable and

uninterested in intervening in incidents of heterosexist or cisgenderist harassment from

other clients (Abramovich, 2013; Abamovich, 2017; Shelton, 2017). Staff themselves

have also been found to engage in harassment and discrimination against queer and trans

youth experiencing homelessness (Abramovich, 2017; Begun & Kattari, 2016; Shelton,

2015). Few shelters offer training opportunities for staff to learn about queer and trans

identities and youths' needs and there are few enforcement mechanisms in place for

ensuring that staff are not discriminating due their own personal biases (Abramovich,

2017). Perhaps due to these negative experiences, queer and trans youth experiencing

homelessness are less likely to stay in a shelter than their straight, cisgender peers (Rice

et al., 2013) and more likely to stay in a precarious housing situation such as staying with

a stranger or squatting in an abandoned building (Rice et al., 2013; Saewyc et al., 2017).

There is some scholarship on the unique needs of trans youth in particular as they

try to access shelter services. One study found that a trans person's ability or desire to

conform to stereotypical gender expectations drastically impacts their experiences in

shelter (Begun & Kattari, 2016). Trans people who are less visibly conforming to gender

expectations are less likely to seek access to a shelter, more likely to be denied access or

thrown out of a shelter, more likely to be harassed by other shelter residents, more likely

to be physically assaulted by residents or shelter staff, more likely to be forced to live as

the wrong gender in order to feel safe or stay at a shelter, and more likely to voluntarily leave a shelter because they feel unsafe (Begun & Kattari, 2016). Another study examined the challenges that trans youth face in shelter, including unique physical and mental health needs related to gender identity and transition, need for protection from cisgenderist harassment and violence from shelter residents and staff, assistance with getting the hygiene materials and clothes they need to present as their true gender, and assistance with finding trans-affirming education and employment opportunities (Shelton, 2015). Trans-affirming housing programs are seen as important lifelines for trans youth experiencing homelessness, offering places where they can be out (sometimes for the first time) and with peers and targeted resources (Shelton, 2015).

Isolation. While nearly all youth experiencing homelessness are isolated from supportive systems and social networks, several studies have noted the increased isolation experienced by queer and trans youth. Perhaps due to their experiences of discrimination and rejection in school, foster care, and home, queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness are less connected to institutions. Queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to not be in school, to have failing grades if they are in school, and to not have a job (Ecker, 2016). Their friends are also less likely to be in school or have a job and more likely to have run away or to have failing grades (Gattis, 2013). Queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to report being bullied or excluded from groups by their peers and less likely to report parents or professionals as being helpful to them (Saewyc et al., 2017). This isolation, whether it is due to being pushed away or due to queer and trans youths' hesitance to engage, leaves them less connected to supportive individuals or institutions and more vulnerable to housing instability.

Impact of Homelessness into Adulthood

Being kicked out or running away from home has been shown to have long-term impacts on youth as they grow into adulthood. A study examining the lives of queer adults who ran away from home or were kicked out found long-lasting risks for their health, substance use, and educational prospects (Piliavin, Thrane, & Wilkinson, 2017). Queer men and women who ran away or were kicked out reported poorer physical health outcomes, more depressive and suicidal symptoms, higher substance use, and higher levels of sexual victimization in adulthood than their straight peers (Bruce et al., 2014; Pearson et al., 2017). They were also less likely than their straight peers to earn a college degree and reported poorer relationships with their parents in adulthood (Pearson et al., 2017). Queer women who reported running away or being kicked out also reported worse physical health outcomes, while queer men reported higher health risk behaviors (Pearson, 2017).

Resilience Among Queer and Trans Youth Experiencing Homelessness

There is a small but growing body of literature examining the resilience of queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness in the face of the tremendous challenges and risks posed by family rejection, housing instability, and systematic marginalization. There are no significant differences in loneliness, hopelessness, or social connectedness between queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness and their straight, cisgender peers (Ecker, 2016). Queer youth experiencing homelessness are more likely to use STI and HIV testing services and less likely to have been recently arrested (Ecker, 2016). Some youth even report that they prefer the gay community and culture that they find on the street to the abuse and rejection that they experienced at home (Castellanos, 2016;

Shelton, 2016). A study of gay and lesbian adults in Australia found that respondents coped with familial rejection through social supports, connecting with other LGB people, accepting both their identities and their families' unacceptance, and strategically concealing their identities to minimize conflict (Carastathis et al., 2017).

Many studies do not include transgender people in their samples. However, several studies have examined the unique challenges faced by transgender people as they navigate family reactions and housing. One study documented the barriers that trans youth encounter when accessing gender-affirming housing services: concerns about physical and emotional safety when accessing housing services, lack of recognition as their true genders, lack of privacy in shared shelter spaces, feeling misunderstood by cisgender peers and staff, difficulty finding transgender-inclusive employment opportunities, and lack of access to gender-affirming identification documents (Shelton, 2015).

Despite these challenges, trans youth demonstrate remarkable resiliency and ingenuity. One third of participants in a study of trans youth experiencing homelessness reported that they would have committed suicide if they hadn't left home (Shelton, 2016). Leaving home, therefore, was an act of self-preservation and resiliency. Youth in this study also reported that finding community with other queer and trans people was tremendously helpful, allowing them to support one another by teaching each other skills and sharing resources or information. They also stated that being homeless allowed them to access information about resources, transgender identities, and transgender history. Finally, youth reported that homelessness was an opportunity to learn independent skills and practice autonomy as young adults. A subsequent study found that trans youth

experiencing homelessness reported focusing on personal agency through self-definition and future orientation toward their goals to combat the negative messages they received from their families and society at large (Shelton, Wagaman, Small, & Abramovich, 2018). While it is clear that queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness face daunting risks, these studies show that they also possess important strengths which could be leveraged to combat their housing instability.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed the relevant scholarly literature on the experiences of queer and trans youth facing family rejection and housing instability and homelessness. First, it reviewed the causes of queer and trans youth homelessness and housing instability, particularly noting the role of family conflict and rejection of youths' queer or trans identities. It then described the existing literature on how family rejection impacts queer and trans youth, highlighting the negative effects of family rejection on youths' mental health, sense of identity, and risk of substance abuse. It then reviewed the many risks associated with homelessness among queer and trans youth, including negative impacts on youths' mental health, substance use, risky sexual experiences, victimization, discrimination, and isolation. Some of these risks continue to have effects well into adulthood. Finally, the chapter reviewed the small but growing literature on queer and trans youth resilience, which may buffer the accumulated risks associated with family rejection and housing instability.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

We cannot remove ourselves from our world in order to study it.

Dr. Shawn Wilson, 2008

Grounded Theory

This study utilized a grounded theory approach to understanding queer and trans youth's experiences of family rejection, housing instability, and decision-making processes around housing in the face of that rejection.

Origins

Grounded theory emerged as a methodology in the 1960s, largely in response to the social sciences' turn toward positivism and quantitative data (Charmaz, 2006). Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss first used the method to examine the experiences of terminally ill patients and their anticipation of death in hospital settings (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss were worried that the quantitative turn of the mid-twentieth century had widened the gap between data and theory. In a somewhat revolutionary reversal of the thinking of the time, Glaser and Strauss argued that theory could be developed from data, rather than using data to test hypotheses deduced from theory (Charmaz, 2006). In a culture where qualitative methods were increasingly dismissed as unscientific, Glaser and Strauss insisted that qualitative methods could be applied in systematic, scientific ways.

Epistemologically, grounded theory is heavily influenced by the Chicago School's Interactionism and Pragmatism (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Interactionism originated in

sociology and argued that humans make meaning of actions or events through their own interaction with or interpretation of those actions or events. We then respond not simply to those actions or events, but also to our own subjective understanding of those actions (Blumer, 1969, 2012). This understanding of human subjectivity gives grounded theory its emphasis on participant perspectives and makes it a particularly useful method for exploring deeply personal, subjective experiences. Pragmatism, largely developed by John Dewey and George Mead, argues that knowledge is created through action and interaction (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Knowledge produced through inquiry, therefore, cannot be separate from the researcher pursuing that inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is this emphasis on interaction and process that gives grounded theory its emphasis on researchers becoming immersed in their data and looking for interactive processes between concepts or themes.

Characteristics

While there are different schools of grounded theory, each with their own unique methodological emphasis, there are common characteristics across these schools. Kathy Charmaz identifies these characteristics as 1) simultaneous data collection and data analysis, 2) the inductive creation of codes from open coding of data, rather than deductive codes from predetermined hypotheses, 3) the development of theory to explain the process of interest, 4) the use of memo-writing to define and develop codes and categories, 5) theoretical sampling, or letting the research question and the process of theory creation guide the sampling procedures, and 6) delay of the literature review in order to not bias data collection and analysis (2006). These characteristics allow grounded theory researchers to approach their research questions with an open

perspective, collect data that will allow them to examine relationships between concepts and build theory, and ensure that their analysis and theory building are rooted in the data.

There are also different perspectives on how to evaluate grounded theory research. Glaser and Strauss proposed several criteria: close fit with data, usefulness, conceptual density, durability of the theory over time, modifiability, and explanatory power (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz, who developed the constructivist school of grounded theory, offers a simpler list of criteria: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). While these scholars may differ in the language they use, both sets of criteria assert that grounded theory should be connected to the data, be useful to the community impacted by the phenomenon, add new knowledge to the scholarly record, and provide a thoughtful explanation of a given process or action.

Considerations for This Study

Grounded theory is a uniquely well-equipped methodology for this study. Its emphasis on producing theory grounded in the experiences of participants allows for in-depth exploration of how queer and trans youth make decisions about housing while experiencing family rejection. Checking with participants about emerging themes ensured that the final theory is relevant to their perspectives and experiences. Working with relevant agencies to recruit participants and share study findings ensured that findings are useful to both the young people experiencing family rejection and housing instability and the individuals and organizations serving them. And, finally, this study makes an original contribution to the research literature by providing an in-depth, nuanced picture of a phenomenon that has largely been documented through quantitative methods.

Data Collection

Recruitment

Theoretical sampling was used to ensure that the data are relevant to the experience of family rejection and unstable housing and useful for the creation of a mid-range theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theoretical sampling is particularly useful when used with simultaneous data collection and analysis because the researcher can seek out participants whose experiences illuminate different codes or relationships. In this study, theoretical sampling was used to recruit queer- and trans-identified participants of diverse racial and ethnic identities experiencing a variety of housing situations (i.e., those who are still housed with parents, currently homeless, or formerly homeless).

Study participants were recruited through two methods: 1) advertisement and referral from two youth-serving organizations in Denver and 2) online recruitment through social media. For the past three years, I have conducted research with Urban Peak, Denver's only shelter for youth ages 16–21, and volunteered with Rainbow Alley, Denver's youth drop-in center for LGBTQ youth ages 10–21. I recruited study participants through referrals from staff at both agencies, whose relationships with youth allowed them to identify young people experiencing both family rejection and housing instability. I printed business cards with study contact information and gave them to agency staff so they could inconspicuously give them to youth who they believed may qualify for the study. I hung flyers and made announcements at both agencies so that youth who were not comfortable disclosing their identity or housing status to agency staff could contact me directly.

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I also posted advertisements for the study to several Denver LGBTQ Facebook communities in order to recruit participants who were not connected to formal services and agencies. Participants were limited to people living in the Denver metropolitan area in order to control for variations in resources and culture across location. Similar to advertisements with partnering agencies, I advertised the goals of the study and my contact information. I posted my advertisement three times on three different LBTQ-themed Facebook Groups: "CO Queers," "TransSocial CO," and "Denver Queer Exchange." I also posted one time on a social work resource-sharing group: "GSSW and Friends Resources Page."

Once a young person contacted me, having learned about the study through an agency referral or an online post, I administered the study screener (see Appendix B) over the phone to assess whether or not they qualified for the study. Participants who qualified were asked to schedule an interview at the agency from which they were referred. One interview took place in a private room at a public library due to scheduling conflicts with a partner agency.

Of the 18 youth who contacted me about the study, 17 completed the phone screener, with one person contacting me via Facebook and then never responding to my requests for a screening conversation. Of the 17 potential participants who completed the screener, one youth did not qualify for the study, and one youth did qualify but was never able to schedule a research interview. Therefore, 15 youth completed the screener and their research interviews. More information about the screening process can be found in the diagram in Figure 2.

Urban Peak (n=5)
- Referrals from agency staff
- Flyers
- Announcements

Rainbow Alley (n=6)
- Referrals from agency staff
- Flyers
- Social media posts
- Announcements to Youth Leadership Council

Online Groups (n=7)
Posts on relevant Facebook Groups,
- "CO Queers"
- "Denver Queer Exchange"
- "TranSocial Colorado"
- "GSSW and Friends Resources Page"

Youth Contact PI (n= 18)
18 youth contacted PI about study participation

Dropped out (n = 1)
One youth contacted PI but stopped responding before being screened

Screening Protocol (n = 17)
17 youth completed screening protocol

Total Sample (n=15)
Participants who screened into the study and attended study interviews.

Screened/dropped out (n = 2)
- One youth did not meet study criteria and was screened out.
- One youth screened in but was unable to attend research interviews

Figure 2: Diagram of Study Recruitment and Interview Procedures

Screening criteria. Participants were included if they were between the ages of 18 and 26, due to difficulty obtaining consent from minors. Participation was limited to people living in the Denver metropolitan area in order to control for variations in resources and culture across location. Participants were screened prior to conducting interviews in order to determine that they 1) were between ages 18-26, 2) currently lived in the Denver metro area, 3) had experienced family rejection of their LGBTQ identity, and 4) had an imperiled housing situation due to that rejection. To avoid including participants for whom the interview questions might be triggering to their mental health but who were not connected with professional supports, two exclusion criteria were established. Youth were excluded if they 1) had attempted suicide in the last two months or 2) had received inpatient mental health treatment in the last two months and were not, at the time of screening, connected to a therapist or mental health professional. Screening questions can be found in Appendix B.

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Research Interviews

Each participant was be invited to participate in two interviews. At the first interview, I introduced participants to the study and sought written informed consent. Participants were asked if they consented to the interview being tape recorded. If a youth was uncomfortable with being recorded, I intended to ask for their consent to take detailed notes during the interview. No youth chose this option; all gave their consent to be recorded. In order to preserve participants' confidentiality, participants had the opportunity to pick their own anonymous pseudonym to be used in coding and the text of the dissertation. Youth who did not pick their own pseudonym were randomly assigned one. First interviews, which asked participants to recount their experiences with family rejection and housing in detail, took an average of 40 minutes, long enough to collect detailed accounts of their experiences but not so long as to fatigue the participants. I collected their names and contact information (phone number, email address, Facebook contact) in order to get back in touch to schedule the second interview. A second interview, conducted approximate one month after the first interview, took on average 15 minutes, and was an opportunity to conduct member checking about emerging themes and ask if the participant had any new information to share. Youth participants received a $20 gift card for the first interview and a $10 gift card for the second interview, to compensate them for their time and expertise.

As PI, I conducted all interviews in order to have consistency between data collection and data analysis across participants. Given the sensitive nature of the study (i.e. family dynamics, queer and trans identities), interviews were conducted in private rooms at either of the partnering service agencies (Urban Peak or Rainbow Alley). One

interview took place over Skype and one took place at a private room at a local library, due to scheduling conflicts with the partner agencies. Efforts were made to build rapport with participants so that they would feel more comfortable sharing their experiences in their entirety. This including disclosing my own transgender identity so that participants would know I was a member of the queer/trans community. I also introduced the study and explained how their stories would be used in the research process.

In grounded theory, sample size is determined by the research reaching saturation, or no new concepts emerging from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After conducting 15 research interviews with participants, there were several themes that had begun to emerge from my saturated data. I therefore ceased study recruitment and began my data analysis.

Interview questions. Participants were interviewed using intensive, semi-structured interview techniques (Charmaz, 2006). Intensive interviewing "permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic or experience" and gives the interviewer the latitude to pursue lines of inquiry that arise during the interview and are relevant to the theory under development (Charmaz, 2006, 27). A semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure that all participants were asked about the same broad themes: demographic characteristics, family experiences, and housing experiences. The interview guides for each interview can be found in Appendices C and E. These questions covered a few broad themes: participant demographic characteristics, parental reactions to youths' queer and/or trans identities, youths' reactions to those parental reactions, impact on youths' housing stability, and youths' understanding of "home."

Photovoice. In order to capture youths' understandings of "home," I used a modified Photovoice methodology during the second interview (Wang & Buris, 1997). Upon completion of the first interview, I asked participants to bring a photo to their second interview that represented where they felt most at home. At the second interview, I asked the participant to describe and explain their photo to me: What is in the image? What does the image represent? How did they feel when they took the photo? Previous research has been successful in engaging unstably housed youth in Photovoice projects as a means of eliciting self-expression despite the chaotic circumstances of their lives (Bender et al., 2017). In fact, many youth reported being motivated to participate because they wanted to both express themselves through photography and contribute to positive social change (Bender, Begun, Dunn, Mackay, & DeChants, 2018). While the nature of this study did not allow for a social action project with research participants, asking participants to use photography allowed them to use their creativity to explore such an abstract concept, producing richer data. Sharing a photograph was requested but not required for participation in the study; if a young person declined to take a photo or forgot, then I simply asked them the rest of the second interview questions.

Data management. All data, including interview recordings and transcripts, research memos, consent forms, and participant contact information were kept on a password-protected laptop and a password-protected Internet-based cloud service to prevent data loss or unauthorized access.

Risk to participants. There were not any physical, social, or legal risks to study participants. While the topics in the interview were personal, there was little risk of other people (e.g. participants' parents or guardians) finding out about their participation in the

study. When collecting participants' contact information to schedule interviews, I made sure to assure them that I would not let anyone else know about their participation in the study. Participants were free to decline interview questions which made them uncomfortable, which I explained when procuring their informed consent.

Experiences of family rejection are very personal and can potentially trigger negative memories. I therefore made a special effort to protect and support participants' mental health. Participants who had ongoing mental health challenges that may have presented danger to self were screened out by asking about suicide attempts or inpatient hospitalization in the last two months. If a participant became visibly upset during the interview, I would check in and ask them if they wanted to continue. I shared resources about mental health with participants, both through the consent form and verbally at the end of the interview. No participants demonstrated significant distress during the interview. On the contrary, many expressed that it felt good to revisit and share this stressful part of their life with the benefit of hindsight and the opportunities to help others.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was conducted according to the guiding principles of grounded theory, namely, simultaneous data collection and data analysis, the inductive creation of codes from open coding of data, the use of memo-writing to define and develop codes and categories, and the development of theory to explain the process of interest (Charmaz, 1996, 2006). Data analysis was conducted in three phases, described in detail below. The 30 research interviews with 15 study participants yielded 786 minutes, or just over 13 hours, of recorded data. Interviews were transcribed using

Rev.com services to expedite the process. Interview transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose, where all coding took place (Dedoose 8.0.35, 2019). Five youths also submitted photos in response to the photo elicitation prompt during the second interview. Several other youths brought shared photos in response to the prompt, but their photos contained images of people's faces and were not collected as data to protect those individuals' privacy. While youths' discussion of their photos was coded and is included in the themes presented in the follow chapter, the photos themselves were not coded. This choice was made due to time constraints and the desire to remain focused on the study research questions. This section describes the different stages of data analysis undertaken in this study.

Phase One: Open Coding

The first phase of analysis was the reading and open coding of all research interview transcripts. Transcripts from the first interviews were read and open coded in the month between the first and second interviews so that emerging themes or clarifying questions could be discussed with participants at the second interviews. There were two cases where the second interview was conducted before the first interview had been read and coded. These both occurred due to communication uncertainties and having little advance notice before meeting for the second interview (e.g. running into a participant at a service site and conducting the interview). This immediate and in-depth engagement with the data allowed me to develop sensitivity to the data. Sensitivity, as described by Corbin and Strauss, allows the researcher to "[have] insight, [be] tuned in to, [and be] able to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data" (2012, 14). This sensitivity also allowed me to refine my interview questions as the interviews progressed.

Open coding consisted of identifying and labeling excerpts from the interview transcripts that were relevant to the three interview questions. Code labels identified concepts from the research questions, such as family conflict and youth decisions related to housing. A variety of coding techniques were used, including in vivo codes for excerpts when participants' own words provided language for the code label, process codes to label questions or themes that were common to all interviews or that provided detail about the research environment, and simultaneous coding to assign a transcript excerpt multiple labels (Saldaña, 2015). Several themes emerged from open coding of the first interviews and were brought to second interviews for discussion with study participants. This included asking youth to elaborate on how they thought about boundaries with family and how they stayed strong in the face of stress. Some second interviews also included clarifying discussion of details of a youth's housing or family history that were not clear from the first interview. All second interview transcripts were also read for sensitivity and open coded after data collection was complete. Throughout open coding, analytical memos were used to capture research impressions from reading the interviews and questions for future consideration.

Phase Two: Thematic Sorting of Codes

After open coding was complete, there were 754 data excerpts labeled with 736 separate codes. These codes were then reviewed and sorted into groups by theme. The first theme that emerged from the data and was grouped was "Family," followed by "Housing," "Resilience," "Barriers," and then a small group entitled "Other," which included codes and excerpts not included in the other groups. Any code that was ambiguous as to which group it might belong to was examined more closely by looking

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at the original transcript for the context of the code to ensure the code was grouped correctly. Outlier codes that fell into the Other theme were examined and largely determined to not be relevant to the research questions. The majority of codes fit in one of the four groups—Family, Housing, Resilience, Barriers—showing a level of saturation in the data. Codes within each grouped theme were then grouped into subthemes. For example, codes under the theme Family were grouped into "Family Rejection Action," "Sources of Rejection," "Family Stress," and "Family as Support." These themes and subthemes were organized into a codebook. Throughout the thematic sorting, analytical memos were used to document the process and any decisions made when discerning themes and subthemes.

Phase Three: Axial Coding

In the third phase of data analysis, axial coding was used to examine relationships between the themes generated during the second phase. Axial coding involves comparing categories or themes with one another to determine properties, dimensions, and relationships (Saldaña, 2015). Both within-case and across-case comparisons were used in this analysis.

First, research interviews were used to create youth profiles, or one-page summaries of the highlights of each youth's transcript. A template was developed by examining general interview characteristics such as the quality of data in the interview or any notes on ease or difficulty establishing rapport with the participant. Most interviews in the sample were assessed to have high-quality data and ease of rapport with participants. There were some interviews where youth seemed more reluctant to reflect on and discuss experiences with their families and housing. These interviews were

assessed to be of lower data quality. The youth profile template also included questions

about the key questions in each interview and asked the researcher to summarize the

youth's experiences with family rejection, housing, and strategies of resilience. This

within-case analysis allowed me to revisit the interview transcripts and ensure

consistency between each interview.

The youth profiles were also used for cross-case comparisons to look for patterns

across the study sample. After creating a profile for each youth, details from the profiles

were examined for patterns across groups of youth. I looked to see if youth who shared

certain experiences or characteristics had similar outcomes in terms of housing or

relationships with families. No groups or strong patterns were found. Finally, themes

were examined for relationships with one another. Each theme was printed on an index

card. These cards were arranged in various ways as the researcher combined redundant

subthemes that had emerged within separate themes and looked for relationships across

chronology (which themes were relevant prior to youth leaving home versus after youth

had left home). Charmaz has described this process well: "Grounded theory coding

generates the bones of your analysis. Theoretical integration will assemble these bones

into a working skeleton" (2015, 45). The arrangement of the index cards was repetitive

and iterative, with the final arrangements displayed in the models presented in the

following chapter.

Strategies for Rigor

This study used a variety of strategies to develop analytical rigor, from both the

grounded theory literature and the qualitative analysis literature more broadly. Having

multiple research interviews allowed for data triangulation or examining for consistency

of youths' narratives across two time points. Member checking was also used in the second research interview, allowing participants to offer feedback on emerging themes and clarifying elements of their narratives. Both analytical and reflexive memos were used to document decisions made throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Reflexive memos also contained researcher reflections on my role in the process of both data collection and analysis, considering how my own identities as a queer, trans, never-homeless researcher may impact the interviews and analysis. Constant comparison methods were used throughout, particularly during the within-case and across-case comparison analysis, in order to look for similarities and examine outliers for any explanatory significance. Combined, these various techniques contributed to a rigorous process of data collection and analysis.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methodological rationale and procedures for this dissertation study. Grounded theory is uniquely well equipped to examine the experiences of queer and trans youth experiencing family rejection and housing instability, with its emphasis on in-depth exploration of data, constant comparison, and relationships between themes. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the 15 study participants, young adults ages 18 to 26 who reported experiencing family rejection of their queer or trans identities and housing instability. The interviews asked youth to describe their experiences with coming out, family reactions, housing instability, and making decisions about how to find a place to stay. Data analysis was conducted in three phases: open coding, thematic sorting, and axial coding and theory building.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Surrendering is unimaginably more dangerous than struggling for survival.

Leslie Feinberg, 1993

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines.

Dr. Terry Tafoya, 1995

Overview of Chapter

This chapter describes the findings of this dissertation study. First, it describes the demographic characteristics of the study sample. Participant characteristics can be found in Table 1. Then the findings will be presented according to the research question they address. In the process of data analysis and theory creation, I developed two visual models to organize and display study findings. The first model, which can be found in Figure 3, includes the findings from the first and second research questions. The second model, which can be found in Figure 4, includes the findings from the third research question.

Sample Description

Fifteen young adults participated in the study. All research participants completed both the first and second research interviews. When screened for study participation, youth were asked to report their race, gender identity, pronouns, and sexual orientation. The questions about race, gender identity, and sexual orientation were open-ended questions, allowing for more freedom of language as youth self-reported these identities.

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The question about pronouns included four options—"she/her/hers," "he/him/his," "they/them/theirs," and "other"—with participants given the option to select multiple answers.

Age

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 26. Eight participants were ages 18 to 20 and seven were ages 21 to 26.

Gender and Pronouns

Three participants identified their gender as "female," five participants identified as "male" or "cis male," two participants identified as "transmasculine," three participants identified as "non-binary" with one of those also identifying their gender as "queer," one participant identified their gender as "questioning," and one participant identified their gender as "fluctuates." It is important to note that this question only captures participants' current gender identity and not their gender modality (Ashley, 2019). Gender modality is a term which encompasses the entirety of a person's gender identity over the course of their life. For example, a person may have a female gender identity and a transgender gender modality. I chose not to ask study participants about the sex they had been assigned at birth, since all that was required for study participation was self-identification as a member of the LGBTQ community. Details of participants' gender modalities, however, sometimes emerged in the interview when relevant to their housing experiences.

Five participants used "she/her/hers" pronouns. Eight participants used "he/him/his" pronouns. Four participants used "them/them/theirs" pronouns. Participants

had the option to select multiple pronouns, and two youth reported using multiple sets of pronouns.

Race and Ethnicity

Racially, ten participants identified as White or Caucasian, with one participant additionally identifying as Eastern European and Jewish. Two participants identified as Hispanic or Latino. Two participants identified as Black or African American. One participant declined to identify their race.

Sexual Orientation

Participants reported a number of diverse sexual orientations. Five youth identified their sexual orientation as "gay." Four youth identified their sexual orientation as "bisexual." Four youth identified their sexual orientation as "queer." Two youth identified their sexual orientation as "pansexual."

Recruitment Site

Seven participants were recruited for study participation through Urban Peak, an emergency shelter for youth ages 16 to 21 years old. Three participants were recruited through Rainbow Alley, a drop-in youth center for LGBTQ youth ages 12 to 21. Five youth were recruited through posts on social media about the study.

Pseudonym	Age	Race / Ethnicity	Gender Identity	Pronouns	Sexual Orientation	Recruitment Site
Nicole	18	White	Female	She, her, hers	Bisexual	Shelter
Riley	19	Hispanic	Non-binary, Queer	They, them, theirs	Pansexual	Shelter
Lee	20	White	Male	He, him, his	Gay	Shelter
Sammi	19	Declined to answer	Questioning	She, her, hers	Pansexual	Shelter
Blue	20	Hispanic / Latino	Transmasculine	He, him, his	Bisexual	Drop in
Tyler	22	White	Transmasculine	He, him, his / They, them, theirs	Queer	Drop in
Noah	20	White	Male	He, him, his	Gay	Shelter
Hannah	22	White, Eastern European, Jewish	Non-binary	She, her, hers / They, them, theirs	Queer	Online
Alex	19	Black	Male	He, him, his	Bisexual	Shelter
Bryan	21	African American	Cis male	He, him, his	Gay	Online
Lucy	22	White	Female	She, her, hers	Gay	Online
Miley	18	White	Fluctuates	He, him, his	Gay	Shelter
Benjamin	19	White	Male	He, him, his	Bisexual	Drop In
Elena	25	Caucasian	Female	She, her, hers	Queer	Online
Aaron	26	Caucasian	Non-binary	They, them, theirs	Queer	Online

Table 1: Study Participant Characteristics
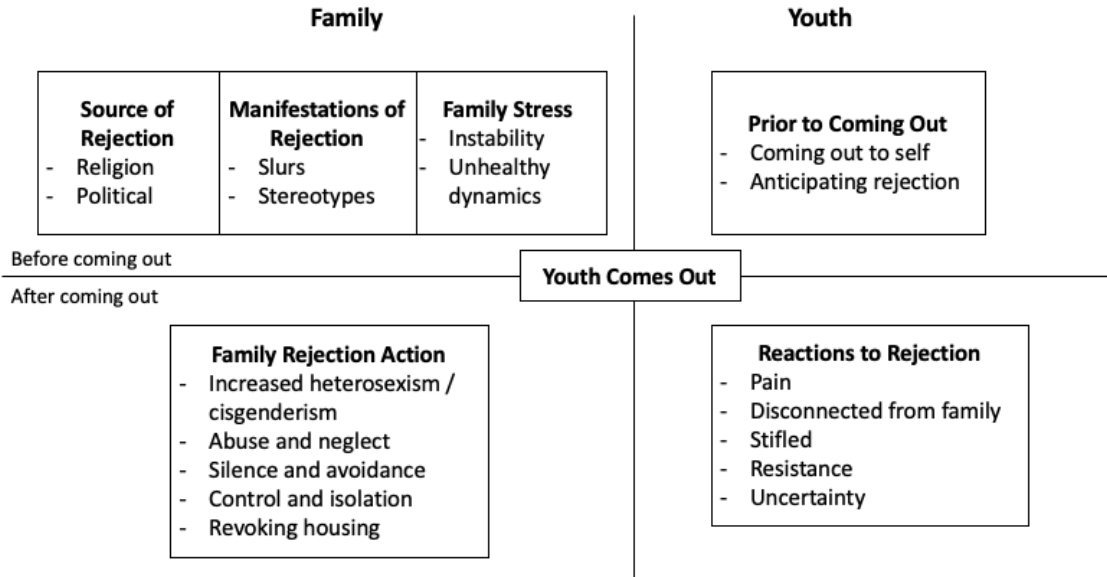
Figure 3: Model of Family and Youth Reactions to Coming Out

What kinds of heterosexist and cisgenderist rejection do queer and trans youth experience from their parents or guardians? How do queer and transgender youth experience and react to that rejection?

Youth reported that their families tended to absorb heterosexist and cisgenderist messages about queer and trans people from conservative political values and religious communities. These beliefs existed prior to youth coming out and intensified after they came out. Youth also reported a variety of family stressors that intensified conflict in the home. After youth came out, families engaged in a number of rejecting behaviors, including increased heterosexist and cisgenderist harassment, changes in youth housing, abuse and neglect, conflict, silence, and control.

This section will present findings from both the first and second research questions. Given the chronological nature of the model in Figure 3, which is split between the time before and time after a youth came out, this section will discuss family

actions (the focus of the first research question) and youth reactions (the focus of the

second research question) chronologically, moving from the top down. The description of

the themes in the model will start in the top left quadrant, covering families' actions prior

to youth coming out, then move to the upper-right quadrant, examining youths' reactions

to families' heterosexism and cisgenderism prior to coming out. It will then discuss the

themes that emerged when youth came out—the critical event that forced families to

confront their children's queer or trans identities. It will then move to the bottom two

quadrants, moving again from left to right and discussing families' rejecting actions after

youth came out followed by youth's reactions to those actions.

Sources of Heterosexism or Cisgenderism

Youth in the study reported that their parents and families held heterosexist or

cisgenderist beliefs prior to their coming out. These beliefs tended to manifest in the form

of talking points or opinions that reflect cisgenderist and heterosexist trends in the larger

culture, reinforcing the idea that systematic heterosexism and cisgenderism impact

families' opinions on queer and trans identities. Youth noted two main sources of their

parents' heterosexist and cisgenderist beliefs: conservative political beliefs or social

values and religious beliefs. Several youths in the study noted that their parents' or larger

communities' conservative views made them feel unsafe as queer and trans people.

Nicole described, "I grew up in a redneck area, so very country people, very conservative

farm area. So, if you told someone you were bisexual or lesbian, you'd mostly get shot

with a shotgun." Blue noted that his mother had previously almost kicked him out of the

house because he had refused to go to a pro-life rally with her. He described how his

mother listened to conservative talk radio in the house and how that seemed to inform her

opinions of queer and trans people like him: "they're those semi-conservative centrist people, like Matt Walsh and Ben Shapiro … She likes to listen to them, and they have a lot of opinions about people like me." Ben described how his parents' conservative opinions had prevented him from learning about queer and trans identities: "I didn't even know what the LGBT community was. I grew up in a conservative, southern Baptist household."

Many young people reported that their parents' religious beliefs caused them to hold heterosexist or cisgenderist beliefs. All of the youth in the study who cited their parents' religious beliefs as sources of heterosexism or cisgenderism were raised in Christian households. Elena described an argument with her mother about her identity: "There was a lot of what's God point of view on it was and therefore that was also my mother's point of view … a lot of biblical words like 'abomination' and things like that were thrown around." Other youth described similar arguments when they came out. After Ben was outed when his parents went through his phone, his parents "decided to start telling me biblical stuff about why it isn't acceptable and shit like that." Alex described, "Last year I came out to them, and they're Christian, so they don't really support that kind of thing, and yeah. It was a really big argument." Parents' religious beliefs intensified the conflict about youths' queer and trans identities.

In addition to family relationships, religious institutions like churches and schools played an important role in youths' lives. Noah attended a Christian high school where they held a meeting about their views on LGBTQ issues: "In that meeting, they were like, 'Whoever belongs to that LGBT community needs to leave now.'… I had to have myself just sit there and … remain voiceless I guess." Lucy came out while attending a Christian

college in the Southeastern United States. Both she and her partner were forced to stay in the closet throughout college due to the school's policy. She described, "Our school had a policy, and still does to this day, have a policy where, if a student is found out to be LGBTQ, then they could be expelled, or forced into conversion therapy." When she did come out to her mother, they got into a religious debate: "she was always trying to give me different resources about how God hated me, and I was trying to give her different resources about how God didn't hate me, so we were just swapping resources." Riley recalled how the church they had attended as a child had kicked out some LGBTQ church members: "I just remember people coming out and kick them out of the church, you know and it was sad, because we've talked to these people, we knew their kids or something like that." After moving in with their grandmother, Riley tried to attend her church but learned that they believed that being queer or trans was a sinful choice. Riley recalled how these beliefs caused them to question their identity for a time: "I was going to church at the same time so it was like maybe this isn't right, maybe I should not be doing this." Religion played an important role in youths' relationships with their families and was a key source of tension and disapproval as youth came out and experienced rejection from their families.

Manifestations of Heterosexism and Cisgenderism in the Home

Youth reported that their families' heterosexist and cigenderist beliefs manifested in two main ways: using slurs or offensive language in the home or holding heterosexist, cisgenderist, or sexist stereotypes.

Using slurs or offensive language. Youth noted a number of heterosexist and cisgenderist actions and statements by their family members. Blue described how both of

his parents used heterosexist slurs regularly in the house: "Saying stuff like, 'These faggots on the TV.' And it was like, guess what? I'm a faggot over here, sorry." Tyler recalled similar language in his family home, "There was a lot of homophobic slurs."

Stereotypes due to heterosexism, cisgenderism, and sexism. Lucy became aware of her families' views on queer and trans identities through the comments they made about other people. She recalled her mother saying, "I just don't know what I would ever do if one of my children came out as gay. I think I'd still love them, but I don't know if I could." Miley's mother compared being gay to bestiality: "She told me one time that she compared different animals and how they don't mate and how it's kind of just unnatural and she tried to get that in my head." His family also told him "straighten up" throughout his childhood: "Or she would always be like 'don't walk that way.' Or she would make fun of me for my voice." Riley's father told them that being queer or trans was similar to being a delinquent: "He just started comparing me to criminals." Riley further noted that their family had heteronormative expectations for them: "They would like to me to get married at a young age and then have kids … And that's all they talked about. 'When are you going to find yourself a boyfriend?'… I'm like, 'Okay.'"

Some youth who had been assigned female at birth also noted that their fathers held sexist and misogynist views, which only intensified their conflict around youths' queer and trans identities. Hannah described, "My father straight up thinks that women shouldn't go to college … His reasoning was that he thinks a man could take better care of me." All of these views—seeing being queer or trans as a choice, viewing it as a deviant action, or believing that women are inherently less capable than men—are echoes of larger heterosexist, cisgenderist, and sexist discourses in American society. Youths'

parents appear to have absorbed these societal messages and then repeated them to their children.

Family Stress

A number of participants discussed stresses that occurred in their family independent of the conflict created by their family's rejection of their queer or trans identities. These stresses included a number of disruptive dynamics: involvement with child welfare, family instability, unhealthy family dynamics, and intergenerational family dynamics. Several youths stated that it was difficult to distinguish between conflict with their families around these preexisting stressors and conflict about LGBTQ identity, leading youth to question how much their identity contributed to conflict with their family members. Family stress is an important concept in the model because it provides the context for youth's relationships with family before, during, and after their coming out process and housing instability.

Family instability. Several youths described how family instability directly impacted their housing. Hannah noted, "My mom, being a serial monogamist, would move us from boyfriend's house to boyfriend's house, and just really get both of us in shitty situations on a regular basis … I was evicted with my mother five times." Hannah later noted that this constant moving motivated them to want their own studio apartment in the future. Blue described how his parents' contentious divorce had impacted his housing long before he came out: "They'll try to pass me back and forth … If they're pissed at me and they want to get back at the other one and I'm being difficult, they'll send me away to the other one."

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Several youths reported being involved in the child welfare system, which contributed to instability as they grew up. Nicole reported that she had been removed from her mother's home at the age of 12: "I got taken away, plain CPS." She noted that growing up in a group home had prepared her for the chaotic environment of emergency shelter, where she was living at the time of participating the study: "People say this is a bad place, I'm like, it's normal for me. I was in a group home, so I grew up ten girls in a bed in a house kind of environment, so I'm used to this environment." Lee reported that he had no place to go after his mother passed away: "I was bouncing from family member to family member … until I finally went in the system." When asked to name all the different places he had lived during his childhood, Lee rattled off a list of states: "Pennsylvania, West Virginia, New Jersey, Texas, Florida, Washington State and then back to Pennsylvania." Like other youth who reported high levels of instability in their families, Nicole and Lee had experienced high levels of disruption and change in their lives prior to coming out and experiencing housing instability due to family rejection.

Two study participants were in a relationship with one another, and the trajectories of their housing instability intersected with family instability and homelessness. Noah had been sent to live with his mother after his unaccepting father unilaterally changed their custody agreement. Noah's mother, however, was struggling with addiction and they became homeless together. When Noah and Lee met online and started dating, Lee invited Noah to come stay with him in his home state where he was living in his car. Eventually, Noah, his mom, and Lee ended up moving to Colorado, where the three of them were homeless. Noah described, "I was hotel hopping with my mom. Me and my boyfriend." Lee and Noah eventually decided to leave Noah's mom

and try to find resources on their own. Lee reported, "We decided to leave her, because she was smoking meth in the hotel, and we just don't want to be around it anymore." Both Lee and Noah reported that this was a difficult decision, but that they felt that they needed to work on their own futures. Lee described, "[Noah]'s mom's most accepting person though … She loves us to death, but she just needs to help herself right now." Noah and Lee eventually found their way to an emergency shelter, where they were living at the time of study participation.

Noah was not the only youth to report family instability due to addiction. Riley described how their grandmother kicked them out of her home after they had, against their grandmother's wishes, invited their mother to stay at the home. Riley's mother also struggled with addiction, and Riley described how they had hoped that their grandmother's home would be a positive influence, as it had been for them: "I was like, 'My mom doesn't want to get help. I want her to come out here to get help so she can live her life better.'" Riley still felt an important connection to their mom and was willing to risk their own housing in an attempt to help her. Other youth did not feel the same level of connection with family who struggled with addiction. Ben, who was open about his own struggle with addiction and work on recovery throughout the interview, noted, "My entire family is in active alcoholism or drug addiction … It's not a healthy place for me to be at, and I recognize that." Ben had chosen to mostly cut off his family due to their active addictions and other unhealthy behaviors toward him.

Unhealthy family dynamics. Many youths in the sample reported unhealthy dynamics in their families prior to their coming out. Some of these unhealthy dynamics were due to parents' histories of mental health challenges and abuse. Aaron noted, "I

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think that a big part of my story, and especially my being homeless, is the history of mental illness and abuse in my family. Those were complicating factors in the situation." Other youth described their parents' behavior as toxic or unhealthy without directly naming mental health as a cause. Blue described that his family had different dynamics and expectations for when they were out in public versus when they were home together: "You have to act a certain way outside of the house. Inside the house, it's free rein to treat everyone else like shit." Blue felt that his family had a number of unhealthy patterns, such as his parents' inability to deal with their own problems: "So they want me to rescue them from their problems, and then when I try to, they lash out at me." This behavior caused him to not have any trust in his parents and other family members: "I still don't trust them, because they're just not trustworthy people." While Blue still lived at home with his unaccepting mother, he did not feel that his parents were role modeling healthy behavior for himself or his siblings.

Other youth echoed Blue's sentiments about their parents not being healthy role models. Hannah described their mother as very permissive and not present: "I would define my mom as like an absent parent." Ben noted that his parents' active additions to drugs and alcohol severely impacted his home environment: "I was very much raised in a toxic household too, where you don't question things. You just do as you're said, keep your head down, don't question anything." Noah described how he felt silenced by his father's abusive behavior: "Whenever I was living with my dad, I wouldn't say shit back to him, because I felt like he would literally hurt me." These unhealthy dynamics contributed to a large part of the conflict in youths' homes growing up and frequently

motivated them to leave home and seek independence from their families and their negative behaviors.

Many youths observed that there were intergenerational dynamics at play in their families. They noted that the stressors their families had experienced were not unique to their parents but could also be traced back to their grandparents or to their parents' own young adulthoods. Aaron qualified their description of their mother's mental illness by stating, "I also know that there are multiple generations of abuse in my family and that my mother witnessed and was victim to multiple generations of abuse in my family." Both Lucy and Ben noted that their strained relationships with their parents were connected to their parents' relationships with their own parents. Lucy described, "My mom and I have never really had a super positive relationship … And I think a lot of it stems from like that was her relationship with her mom and so she doesn't know how to have anything different." Ben described his family, "My parents come from families where they didn't have relationships with their parents. So they didn't know how to. They just kind of shoved money at you and were controlling as hell." Nicole noted that her housing experience was similar to that of her father: "My dad was thrown out, he was homeless, so he understands how I am now. He was thrown homeless at the age of 12 until he was 18 … He treats me the way his father treated him." Several youths described how observing patterns in their family motivated them to change. Aaron noted, "I have spent, pretty much since I left home, trying to figure out all of the things that I have behaviorally learned from being raised by people who were in generations of cycles of abuse." Not all of the intergenerational patterns youth discerned were negative ones. Bryan spent months living with his unaccepting mother, planning to move by transferring

to a university in a different state. He noted that his move and desire for a fresh start was similar to his mother's experiences of immigrating to the United States for a fresh start with her family:

> I have a chance to start over … I thought about it too because my mom basically counted it the same thing, but she did it because she was married, and she was going to move from Kuwait to the U.S. So I was like, "Oh, okay. If we can do that, and we have a big family, like siblings of 12, I think I can do that as well."

These intergenerational dynamics add to the context of family stress and rejection of youths' identities—many parents appear to be reenacting the violence they received from their own parents.

Parsing out LGBTQ conflict. Several youths noted that conflict with their parents was not exclusive to discussions of LGBTQ identity. Lucy noted, "My mom and I have never really had a super positive relationship. And so [coming out] just kind of added another layer on top of all of it." This made it difficult for youth to parse out what elements of their families' behavior stemmed from rejection of LGBTQ identity and which elements stemmed from other sources of conflict. Lee noted that his adoptive mother did not approve of his gay identity, but also became upset when he didn't spend time with her while visiting their hometown: "I didn't even like visit her and that's why she blocked me and stuff. Just not because I was gay, it was just because I didn't go out and spend time with her and stuff." Lee felt that there was a double standard between how his adoptive mother treated him versus her biological children. When asked directly about whether or not he felt her disapproval was due to his sexual orientation or because he was adopted, he answered, "Both, who knows?" Aaron specifically wondered if their

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mother's abusive behavior was intensified by their queer and trans identity: "I definitely think that me being queer was part of my mother's relationship and part of why we could not … But sometimes I wonder, if I wasn't queer, would it be as complicated, would it have been survivable?" These questions of determining the motives behind their families' rejecting behavior held important implications for the youths' decisions about if or when to reengage with their families after leaving home.

Youth Reactions Prior to Coming Out

The themes from the research interviews where youth described their reactions to their families' heterosexism and cisgenderism prior to coming out can be found in the upper-right quadrant of the model in Figure 3. For all youth in the study, there was a period of time between when they realized their queer or trans identities and when they came out to their families. Many youths described observing cisgenderist or heterosexist behavior in their household and realizing that coming out was going to be a conflictual, negative experience. This anticipation set the stage for their subsequent coming out, their parents' responses, and their own emotional reactions to their parents' rejection.

Coming out to self. While there weren't any interview questions about youths' internal coming out process, several youths described moments when they knew or understood their queer or trans identity. Aaron noted, "I always knew that I was queer. The words that I have used have changed over time, but queer feels like the most well-fitting word." For many youth, these moments were frequently accompanied by confusion and fear, due to the heterosexism and cisgenderism they observed among their parents and other family members. Tyler described seeing a news story about a pregnant transgender man on TV for the first time and having a realization about their own trans

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identity: "I was like, 'Oh that totally makes sense. Like, I identify that way. That's so weird, like I want to be pregnant, but I also don't want to be a female.'" For youth in the study, coming out to themselves was the first step in a long process of worrying about and dealing with their families' rejection and disapproval.

Anticipating family rejection. Many youths described how they anticipated their families' disapproval and rejection prior to coming out to them and how that caused them to feel disconnected from their families and modify their behavior to conceal their identities. When asked if he could anticipate how his family would react to his coming out, Alex replied, "Yeah, I could totally picture it. Kind of knew it was going to happen." As Lucy and her partner began to take their relationship more seriously, she described feeling pressure to tell her family about her orientation and dreading their reaction: "We'd been together for 18 months, and we'd been thinking … we can't not tell them. But I knew it was going to be really, really bad." Bryan in particular was aware that his mother's identity as an immigrant from the Middle East may contribute to her rejection of his identity, "I was like I know it's not going to be good because before I even found out about my sexuality I wasn't okay with it. If I'm not okay with it, then my mom who didn't grow up with a Westernized view is definitely not going to be okay with it." Despite suspecting that his mother would not approve of his gay identity, Bryan still described feeling shocked and hurt by her reaction after he came out to her: "I knew how it was going to go down, but it was still shocking." Blue described anticipating being forced to leave home: "I was gonna turn 18, and I was gonna have to run as far as I could as hard as I could away from them, and try to never talk to them again if I could help it."

Several youths described how their behavior changed while still living at home after coming out to themselves but not yet coming out to their families. Bryan described how keeping his sexuality a secret caused him to become quieter and withdrawn: "I kind of shut myself off and isolated myself so I don't accidentally … out myself … I kind of dulled myself, I don't, I guess, get any attention or anything." Lucy censored what kinds of conversations she would have with other people: "I was very conscious to not talk about LGBTQ topics, and any time they brought up anything about anything LGBT, I would just leave or try to change the topic as soon as I could." She also recalled coming out to her best friend and swearing him to secrecy:

> I told him, I was like, "You're the only person who's ever going to know this, I'm never going to tell anybody else, forget that I told you this, and we're just going to go on living our lives. I just didn't want to die with nobody knowing this about me." He was kind of like, "Okay."

Nicole also described how her parents' negative attitudes and abusive behavior toward her and her bisexual identity caused her to stay in the closet: "I kept telling people I was straight after that … Guys would ask me, 'What's your sexuality?' I'd be like, 'I'm straight.'" For many youth, taking action to mitigate the negative effects of their parents' cisgenderism and heterosexism had been a process for many years prior to coming out and experiencing housing instability.

Not all youth were certain that their families would reject their queer or trans identities. Riley recalled trying to gauge their grandmother's openness to LGBTQ issues by recalling other queer and trans people who were in her life, "They had a friend who was openly gay, and did drag and stuff … His wife, this was his wife's friend, and she

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had two gay cousins. She was really close to them. So, I was like, 'Okay.'" Aaron recalled how their mother had several lesbian friends: "So I actually knew that she was okay with gay people because we knew a fair number of gay people who came over to our house and would have different meals with us and do different events." This caused Aaron to be confused about why their mother refused to accept their queer and trans identities. For both these youth, their families' rejection was not entirely anticipated and that made it especially confusing and hurtful.

Youth Coming Out

The next theme can be found in the middle of the model in Figure 3, at the center of the two lines depicting before and after the youth came out and the family and youth reactions. For all the youth in the study, coming out to their family was a key event that forced the family to acknowledge the youth's queer or trans identity. The sample was roughly split between youth who came out voluntarily and those who were outed involuntarily. Youth who outed themselves voluntarily described how they didn't want to lie to their families. Aaron recalled how their mother had confronted them directly and they had chosen to tell the truth:

> I was in the car with my mom, and my mom said to me … "Do you think you're gay? Do you like women?" And I was like, "Yeah, I do." And she was like, "Well, do you like men?" And I'm like, "Sometimes." And she says, "Well, do you think that it's just a phase?" And I said, "No, it's pretty much always been a thing." I spoke with my mom very honestly in spite of everything because I value honesty.

Bryan described how he had chosen to come out to his mother in the middle of a discussion about his mental health: "Feeling impulsive now, I'm just going to add that in there now too. Just slip it under. I slipped it and she heard it. The conversation and the energy in the room just completely changed." Youth who had come out voluntarily described a process of calculated risk, deciding to be honest with their families and then experiencing their families' rejection.

Several youths described how they had been outed when their parents discovered messages, photos, or queer or trans content on their phones. Ben described how his mother found his social media account:

> I had made a big coming out post and shit like that. It was a private account that somehow got word to someone else through the rumor mill or whatever, and my mother heard about it. She acted all accepting for about two minutes, and I had a really good heart-to-heart with her, I thought, and then less than a week later I'm hearing she's talking behind my back.

Elena described how her mom found a photo of her and another girl on her phone: "My mom habitually checked my phone and went through it and stuff like that. She found it and was not happy about it." Miley had been outed when his mom found gay content on his phone. After his mother confronted him, the family tried to act as if everything was normal, but he recalled, "And they weren't telling me that they hated me or anything … And then after that we walked downstairs and then we had dinner, noodles. And so I felt very, very naked even though I had clothes on." For youth who were outed involuntarily, their parents finding out about their queer or trans identities was extremely disruptive to their family relationships and housing. Youth were not given the opportunity to come out

when they were ready and were forced to deal with their families' rejection without any

advanced planning or preparation.

Family Rejection Action

This theme is located in the lower-left quadrant of the model in Figure 3. It

discusses the various actions families took after the youth had come out to express their

rejection of their queer or trans identities. Youth in the study described a variety of

actions and behaviors that families used to express their rejection of youths' identities,

ranging from the silent treatment to kicking them out of the house. All of these actions

contributed to youths' emotional responses and made their family homes uncomfortable

and unsafe.

Increased heterosexism and/or cisgenderism. Several youths described how

their families rejected their queer and trans identities by trying to argue with them that

those identities couldn't be authentic, were temporary, or were a symptom of a problem.

Noah recalled, "My dad tried saying it was a choice, and it was just gonna pass over."

Aaron and Hannah both remembered their mothers telling them that their sexualities were

just a phase, something that they would grow out of. Aaron's mother made it clear that

she hoped their orientation would change to heterosexual: "My mom actually had a

conversation while we were cooking dinner with myself and the girl who I was dating

about how she hoped … that I would not settle for a woman, that I deserved a man, which

is weird." Lucy's mother insisted to Lucy's partner that she was gay because she had

experienced trauma, citing a common but thoroughly debunked theory about how queer

or trans identities develop. Sammi described how her choice to come out to her family

had created a backlash of ridicule: "I came out, very first came out, in seventh grade, was

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opening up, coming out, as myself … I got a lot of hatred from it. I got made fun of by them, and everyone else in that area."

After youth came out to their families about their queer and trans identities, their families found increased opportunities to express their disapproval through avoidance and direct and indirect jabs. Miley described how his mother would mention his identity in arguments, "Basically, it was always if my mom and I got into an argument … But like sometimes she would just bring up the fact that like … Whatever she would bring up, it would make me feel bad about myself." Bryan's mother made her feelings about queer and trans people clear in the home: "LGBT community that shows up in the news she would say something negative. Always has this look of disgust on her face." These increased expressions of heterosexist and cisgenderist disapproval made young people feel very uncomfortable in their homes and increased their motivation to leave home.

Several youths recalled how their parents forced them to disclose their queer or trans identities to other family members as a form of punishment. Elena explained, "I remember when my mom first found out, she was like, 'You have to call your dad and tell him.' She was very much like, 'This is part of your punishment. You have to call him and tell him.'" Blue described how his coming out had been used as a source of conflict between his divorced parents. Blue came out to his father, who then told Blue's mother, who then confronted Blue about why he didn't come out to her. He recalled:

> My mom starts screaming at me and saying all this stuff about, "If you don't trust me, why are you even here? Why do you live with me? Why don't you go live with your dad if you trust him so much? You need to get out of my house, pack up and leave." And then I had to basically force myself to come out to her as well,

even though I had zero comfort to do so, because obviously she was threatening

my safety and my ability to live somewhere safe. So, she basically forced me to

come out of the closet to her.

These examples of forced disclosure demonstrate that youths' families did not allow youth to have autonomy regarding when and how to share their identities with other people. These forced disclosures were used as punishment to deter youth from expressing their queer and trans identities.

Several youths noted that their families rejected their identities as a choice. Hannah noted that their mom viewed their queer and trans identities as a phase: "My mother views my sexual orientation and identity more as a phase." Riley echoed this, describing how their grandmother "thinks it's a personal choice."

Youth reported an increased amount of conflict with their families after coming out as queer or trans. This conflict manifested itself in a number of ways, including increased negative remarks about the youths' identities or choices to express those identities. Riley described how their grandmother would consistently express her disapproval of them using their new name or pronouns, "If I have good news, like my case manager, he's helping me get my name changed. And I told her and she's like, 'That's a foolish decision you're making.'" Lee recalled how his biological family would make "rude comments" when he attended family events: "He's like, 'So you married a man, blah, blah, blah.' And I was like, 'So what if I did? What if I did bro? Like it's nothing to you.' … Just assholes." Tyler recalled how his family kicked him out and then invited him to come to their family Thanksgiving gathering with extended family, only to spend the holiday interrogating them about their trans identity: "I came over for

Thanksgiving a year after everything had happened, and they had flown my grandparents out, and they just sat me down and berated me at this Thanksgiving table." Lucy also experienced negative remarks from her extended family: "We went to see my grandparents while we were there and my grandfather pulled me aside and was like, 'I'm going to write you a letter and you're not going to like it but read it anyways and respond.'" The holidays were also a contentious time when she would come home with her partner: "We went to spend the holidays with them, and it was just like negative comment, after negative comment, after negative comment."

Many youths reported an increase in arguments with family after coming out; these arguments made life at home unbearable. Blue described how living with his unaccepting mother and having to listen to her heterosexist and cisgenderist opinions all the time caused him to lash out and pick a fight: "I can't stand not being able to express my opinion. So I pick a fight." Hannah described how their mother liked to pick fights and how this tense environment motivated them to move out: "It's very obvious my mother cares about me, but my mom also loves to pick fights … Moving out permanently was the best decision I ever made." Nicole recalled how frequently she would argue with her parents about her identity: "I used to have arguments with them every day about how I'm not gay." Riley described how their grandmother would argue with them about their choice of friends and encourage them to be "normal": "My grandma, she's like 'Why aren't you being friends with normal people?'" Lucy was particularly hurt after her parents took her to a family friend who was a pastor, who told her that being gay would prevent her from becoming a social worker: "I was like, that's really not true, and that's

really personal. That's my dream, my aspiration. That's what I want to do with my life, and you're telling me that I can't do it because of who I love."

Some youth reported that the conflict with their families became so bad that families cut contact with them or threatened to cut contact. Lucy remembered, "My mom was basically like, 'I think we need to not talk, like at least a while. We're severing ties for at least now.'" Riley described how their grandmother used the threat of cutting contact to prevent them from pursuing gender transition: "She had told me if I ever tried doing anything … just start any of the process that I want to start, she would never talk to me." For many youth in the study, the increased level of negative comments, arguments, and other forms of conflict with family after they came out created a very uncomfortable home environment and motivated or forced them to leave home.

Abuse and neglect. Several of the youths reported instances of abuse and neglect they felt was related to their queer or trans identities. Nicole described how her father and stepmother treated her: "I was locked outside the house, couldn't leave the property, was told to sit in this chair all day. Had to use the bathroom? Too bad." She recalled that she had tried to call the police herself to report the abuse but that "[the] cops didn't believe it. They didn't believe me." Aaron remembered one of the arguments they had with their mother right before they left home: "She reached into the car, and she grabbed me, and she shook me so hard I had bruises." Noah described how his father's demeanor toward him changed after he came out: "After I came out, I could tell that my dad was … He was more negative towards me, or whatever. He even left me a bruise one time."

Youths also recalled instances where their parents had threatened violence due to their queer or trans identities. After Lucy came out, her mother told her, "Your dad can't

talk to you, because he said if he talks to you he'll hit you." Her mother later confronted Lucy about why she was avoiding her father, confusing Lucy and contributing to confusion about her father's sincere reaction to her coming out. Riley described their father saying "You know if my kids were ever gay, I'd burn them." Riley remembered thinking, "He may not mean it, but it's still I'm not gonna sit out here like at a young age." For both Lucy and Riley, these threats of violence in response to their queer and trans identities made them very fearful of interacting with their families.

Silence and avoidance. Youths also described how their families responded to their queer and trans identities with silence and refusal to talk about LGBTQ issues. They articulated how that refusal to discuss issues made them feel silenced in their homes. Noah's stepmother mother made it clear that she was not interested in hearing about his sexuality: "If I had a crush or anything, I couldn't tell her. She would be like, 'I don't feel comfortable with you telling me that stuff.'" Ben described this dynamic: "My mother and father were not accepting. It was not talked about … You just ignored it." Ben's mother used silence as a tool to express her disapproval of Ben's gender identities: "She stopped interacting with me at all unless I was dressing or acting feminine … Complete and utter silent treatment. If I was expressing myself as who I am, she would refuse to interact with me at all." Miley described how his family's silence made him feel uncomfortable: "In ways of sometimes not even talking to me. I mean, it could be absolute silence and I know what they're thinking." Tyler reported that his family refused to talk about their identity or any LGBTQ issues in the house: "I feel like a lot more of the way homophobia manifested was either completely avoiding it, or just being like, 'This isn't who you are.'" They explained how their family's refusal to acknowledge

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their identity was especially painful: "And that denial is definitely, I feel like, a lot more painful than just being like, told slurs, or cut down in a very different way … I don't even have any way to defend myself from this."

Youths described how their families' silence caused them to feel disconnected and stifled in the home. Riley noted that their grandmother's refusal to talk about LGBTQ issues created a wedge between them: "I like talking about a lot of things and like, she's not down to talk about anything." Blue noted how his mother's lack of interest in discussing his identities damaged his relationship with her: "She doesn't want to talk about it, and when I do, she gets a look on her face just like, here we go. And I'm like, wow thanks. That really encourages me to trust you." Tyler felt frustrated that their family refused to engage in any dialogue about their identities: "That's another place where the silence really is just separating people. Because even if you're going to have a hateful conversation with somebody, at least you can give them something to think about after." Families' silence about youths' queer and trans identities and LGBTQ issues more broadly contributed to youths' discomfort in their family homes and their motivation to leave home or not engage with their families.

Control and isolation. A number of youths in the sample reported that their families exerted control over them as a way to express their disapproval of their queer or trans identities. Many described that their families tried to isolate them from other people after they came out as queer or trans. Several recalled how their families restricted their access to phones and social media as a strategy to isolate them from friends or pro-LGBTQ ions. Tyler described, "They cut off all of my social ties, they made sure, they were like, 'You're not going to be doing marching band. You're not going to have a

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phone.'" Nicole remembered how her parents restricted her technology access: "I didn't have a phone, so I can't communicate with my friend unless it was at school." She was also prevented from consuming popular media: "I wasn't allowed to watch TV. I wasn't allowed to watch movies." Aaron described how his mother's own anxieties about the world caused her to isolate them from the outside world: "I wasn't allowed to go out in public spaces with people my age, because I quote-unquote 'was a woman' and that was dangerous. So I missed out on a lot of social opportunities." When Aaron did get to socialize, his mother would also try to control those interactions: "Her control manifested in she would, even when I was a teenager, contact my friends to arrange meet-ups for us, like without talking to me about it."

In addition to controlling youths' access to technology, media, and other people, families exercised control in other ways. Tyler noted that, while growing up, they were discouraged from questioning their parents and their authority: "I was also raised in a household where we really weren't allowed to ask questions for anything." Ben described how his parents were demanding in their expectations about chores and household labor: "I was conscripted from my mother's cleaning business from the age of 12 to 18. I had to cook the family dinners whenever they asked. Clean this, do that, whatever." Nicole's parents didn't allow her to leave the house: "I was only allowed outside to look for a job, but I grew up in a small desert town that had no transportation at all." Aaron eloquently reflected on the impact of their mother's controlling behavior on their current mental health: "I still chafe under control … I also perceive attempts to exert control as something inherently dangerous to my well-being. Those are thoughts I have to challenge in my life now."

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Youths' families directed their controlling behavior at policing youths' appearances and, frequently, their gender presentations. Several youths were prohibited from expressing any LGBTQ or "alternative" identities or fashions. Noah recalled how his father objected to his gauged ears: "He even called the school one time, told me to take out my gauges. … They made me take out my gauges. They weren't healed at the time." Nicole recalled, "I was not allowed to dye my hair at all when I lived with my father, not even the tips." Ben recounted how he hid his LGBTQ pride gear from his family: "I would leave to go to school, and put all my rainbow bracelets on when I was on the bus."

Many youths in the study reported that their families forced them to present as the gender they had been assigned at birth. This experience was not exclusive to trans youth in the sample; queer cisgender youth were also policed. Many who had been assigned female at birth were prevented from expressing a more masculine gender presentation. Tyler described, "So I always grew up as a very tomboyish individual, and my parents knew that. And it was funny because they definitely tried to force those roles onto me … the more feminine role." Ben recalled, "I wasn't allowed to dress in boys' clothes, or do anything like that. I fought with my mother so hard over cutting my hair." Aaron remembered similar experiences: "We had battles over my physical appearance. I wasn't allowed to cut my hair." Elena and her mother battled about her masculine clothing: "I remember one time I was wearing a pair of cargo shorts, and I came into the kitchen, and she was like, 'You can't wear those. You need to go put something else on.'" Nicole described how her parents policed both masculine and feminine forms of expression: "I wasn't allowed to wear makeup … I wasn't allowed to paint my nails … I wasn't allowed

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to wear jeans. I wasn't allowed to wear shorts. So I mostly wore dresses." Riley recalled how his grandmother would react when they presented as masculine: "She was just embarrassed of me, to go out with me in public, she would tell me to stay home and then I felt like I was doing something wrong." Youths' families exerted extreme amounts of control over their lives, appearances, and gender presentations. They demanded that youth conform to traditional gender expressions and norms, demonstrating the strength of heteronormative and cisnormative values among families. This dynamic contributed to youths' discomfort in the home and their motivation to leave.

Revoking housing. The final theme that emerged was the action families and parents took after youth came out to control or withhold housing or material support. These actions were of critical importance to the youths' stories of housing instability, frequently becoming the catalyst for the youth reactions and decisions described further in this chapter. Many youths in the study reported that their parents' reaction to, and rejection of, their queer or trans identities resulted in negative impacts on their housing. Several reported being kicked out of their parents' homes, sometimes multiple times. Sammi described how her father kicked her and her partner out: "He still ended up kicking me and my girlfriend out, while she was pregnant." Some youth were kicked out suddenly after an argument with their family. Alex recalled, "It was a really big argument between me and my dad, personally, and that was when they said, 'You got to go.'" Tyler noted how their family had both kicked them out of the house and revoked their access to the family car:

> I was out with my friends that night when I had called them, and the only thing
> that my mom could say was, "Where are you going to drop off the car?" And it

was like 10:00 that night, and I was like, "What?" And she was like, "Well where are you going to drop off the car? Because otherwise we're going to have to have the police come and get it." And I was like, "Okay, well where do you want it?" And she said, "Well at the house."

Elena similarly remembered not having any time to prepare to leave home:

We had our really big fight, I went to bed, and then that time I did come home from school, and I remember I went to open the door and it was locked. So I knocked, and my stepdad came out and shut the door behind him on the porch … Yes, and was like, "You're not coming back in."

Elena's family both kicked her out and forced her to come back home, creating a push-and-pull of instability as she bounced in and out of the house: "By the second month my mom was calling me and trying to tell me I had to come home … she started saying that she was going to call the police and get the police involved and force me to come back home, so eventually I just did." Aaron similarly experienced a push-pull dynamic with their mother, who frequently told them to leave home but also encouraged them to move back home: "My mother told me to pack my fucking shit and leave at least once a year every year until I finally left home for good." Nicole echoed this theme of being told to leave: "Every single month, they'd be like, 'You've got to get out.'… They tried to kick me out, I called the cops. The cops would come and say, 'No, she's a minor. You can't kick her out until she's 18.'" Riley noted that their grandmother would kick them out of the house for different reasons, including their gender identity and presentation: "Like, like I've been kicked out a few times of the house, just because she didn't like the way I looked."

Parents' rejection also destabilized youths' housing by revoking economic

support or limiting access to their own belongings. Lucy had left for college by the time

she came out. After her parents withdrew their financial support, she and her partner were

forced to scramble: "We had no support system, so we were just by ourselves, and I got a

job and was working crazy hours, and going to school, trying to get all my work done."

Ben recalled how his parents denied him access to the house and his belongings: "My

parents have a number of possessions of mine that I really care about that they're not

going to return to me. I'm not allowed back in the house … I wasn't allowed to have any

of my photo albums." He discussed how painful and hurtful it was to not have access to

belongings with deep sentimental value. Elena's mother prevented Elena from running

away (despite having kicked her out multiple times) by threatening to destroy her

possessions: "I am an artist, and I had boxes and boxes and boxes of paintings, and my

mom was like, 'I have all of your paintings, and I'm going to burn them if you leave.'"

Elena also recounted how her mother confiscated all of her belongings and then returned

them in exchange for good behavior: "She would reward me for good behavior by letting

me go pick a box out of the garage to put back in my room, slowly but surely." Families

would use their control over youths' housing, belongings, and material support to express

their disapproval of youths' queer and trans identities, dramatically destabilizing youths'

housing.

There were also reports of financial abuse. Blue described how his mother had

access to his bank account and would randomly withdraw money, which made it difficult

for him to save for his goal of moving out:

Because my mom is the one I'm paying rent to, and she has access to my bank

account, which means she can take rent as far in advance as she wants. And she

can spin me all kinds of excuses and if I try to fight her on it, I'm an evil bad

person who doesn't want my siblings to eat.

Blue noted that his parents viewed his belongings as ultimately belonging to them,

"Because I was their kid and therefore their property, which means my property was

theirs … So all my toys, all my things, all my blankets, everything could be taken away if

I didn't do what they wanted." Ben also described how his parents used their health

insurance as a way to keep him dependent on them, even as he was trying to cut contact

with them: "I have a lot of trouble on the health insurance side because my parents are

forcibly keeping me on their health insurance. Unless I legally emancipate myself, I can't

deal with that, until I'm 26." Youths' families used their legal and financial influence

over youth to impact their housing and to attempt to control their behavior more broadly.

Youths' Reactions to Rejection After Coming Out

The themes describing youth's emotional reactions to their families' rejection can

be found in the lower-right quadrant of the model in Figure 3. After coming out to their

families, youth reported a number of emotional reactions to their families' heterosexist

and cisgenderist rejection.

Pain. Many youths described being very hurt by their families' rejection of their

queer and trans identities. Alex described feeling betrayed by his family letting their

religious beliefs get in the middle of their relationship with him: "It was very hurtful,

because parents … You can never come between the child–parent relationship. No matter

what it is." He summed it up by saying, "it kinda breaks my heart." Tyler noted that this

pain continued long after he had been kicked out of his parents' home and impacted his efforts to continue being in touch with them: "It hurts, and it hurts for a long time, but even some of the nights when I would try to call my parents, or they'd call me, and leave messages and stuff, I was like, 'This still hurts.'" When asked about how her parents' actions made her feel about their relationship, Nicole simply stated, "Horrible." Miley described how his mother's comments about his sexuality damaged his self-esteem: "Whatever scenario she put in my thoughts or whatever, it's like it made me feel down about myself." Families' rejection of such a core element of youths' identities caused youth tremendous pain and complicated their attitudes toward their parents and families.

Several youths noted that this pain caused them to reflect on their role within their families. Riley described feeling abandoned by their family, due to both their grandma's rejection of their identity and their mother's struggle with addiction: "I was like, 'Nobody wants to have a relationship with me.' I can't have a relationship with my mom … she's not even there so it's pointless." Bryan discussed how his mother's verbal harassment after he came out caused him to think about how much he was contributing to his family in terms of household help and to wonder if his priorities should shift: "So, that's when I was like, 'Okay. The love I'm receiving, is that unconditional? So, yeah … guess I gotta go.'" Aaron described how their mother's abusive behavior caused them to decide to cut off contact with her, noting, "And I think that in doing that, my mother has missed the opportunity to know me." For many youths in the study, how to deal with the pain that their families' rejection had caused, and particularly whether or not—or how—to have relationships with their families in the midst of that pain, were open, ongoing questions in their lives.

Disconnected from family. Many youths reported that their families' rejections

of their queer and trans identities caused them to feel disconnected from their families

and awkwardness in the home. Riley described the feeling of being different from the rest

of their family: "My family members and a few of my friends, a lot of them just don't

have the same thoughts I do. So it's just hard to be around them." Riley's grandmother in

particular was not accepting of their trans identity, and her own discomfort with their

identity caused them to feel uncomfortable and ashamed: "She was just embarrassed of

me, to go out with me in public, she would tell me to stay home and then I felt like I was

doing something wrong." Miley reiterated this feeling of embarrassment, especially after

he was outed: "It's like that feeling, feeling vulnerable … I felt very, very naked even

though I had clothes on." Alex mentioned multiple times how his family's discomfort

with his trans identity caused him to feel awkward around them: "Whenever we see each

other it's so awkward, because they don't know what to call me. They don't know what

pronouns to use, so it's always awkward." This awkwardness hampered Alex's ability to

connect with his family after leaving home; he described how it felt when he would call

home: "You know when you're talking to somebody and then you're just sitting there and

then you hear crickets … And then you're just looking at each other, and then you're like,

'So …' Yeah." Alex expressed that this awkwardness caused him to withdraw and isolate

himself from his family: "I'm very closed up. I'm a very closed up person … So after I

came out, I was like, 'Leave me alone!' I'd rather be less sociable." Blue noted that his

mother's strong heterosexist and cisgenderist opinions made it extra difficult to be around

her: "So I can't just have an impromptu conversation with her. I need preparation

mentally and emotionally to be able to bring up either serious issues with her or even sometimes casual conversations."

Several youths discussed feeling confused by their families' reaction to their queer and trans identities. This confusion stemmed from trying to reconcile their personal identities with the values and opinions of their families. Both Ben and Tyler noted that the lack of discussion of queer and trans issues in their parents' homes contributed to their confusion and discomfort growing up. Ben described,

> So I just ended up being super, super confused and scared. I remember being probably 11 or so and trying to have a conversation with my mother because I was attracted to other chicks, but I also hated my own chest that was coming out. I was like, how do I equate this? I don't know what's going on. She just told me to forget about it. Never ask her again.

Miley articulated the difficulty of reconciling what he had been taught about gay people with his own identity: "And it's challenging, when you have a war in your head and then that war comes out when you find the love that you wanna be with." His family's lack of acceptance of his gay identity seemed to reinforce his own internalized feelings of heterosexism, of being different and wrong. He felt fatigued by his need to act differently around his family to mitigate their rejection: "I felt like it was always an on, like I have to be on. I have to definitely act a different way." Families' rejection of youths' queer and trans identities caused youth to feel uncomfortable interacting with their families and living in the home. For many youths, this disconnection was a driving motivator in their decision to leave home.

Stifled. Several youths expressed feeling stifled by their parents' rejection of their identities and more general controlling behavior. Blue noted that his mother's strong pollical opinions and overbearing behavior toward him created a repressive home environment: "I don't really have the freedom to express myself in my house verbally at least." This made him feel frustrated: "I just get really sick of it and I poke the bear." Hannah felt stifled by their mom's dismissive reaction to their queer and trans identities. They described their desire to be taken seriously, after their mother dismissed their identity as teenage experimentation: "I was like, okay. I'd like to be taken seriously in this moment." Aaron noted that they felt stifled by the conservative social norms of their rural hometown in contrast to the relative freedom of the boarding school where they spent the school year: "So in every other aspect of my life when I came home, there was an undermining of …'You don't really know who you are.'" For these young people, the heterosexist and cisgenderist actions of their families and sentiments in their communities made them feel stifled and undermined, unable to express themselves or explore their identities freely.

Resistance. Some youth reported that their families' rejection caused them to resist or rebel against their families' views and control over their lives. Elena's mother had kicked her out of the house and then forced her to come back home by threatening to call the police. Elena noted that this coerced reentry into the house caused her to push against her mom's authority: "When I moved back home, I was very defiant." After gaining her art supplies back from her mother, Elena made her feelings of resistance known: "I got a giant canvas from school, and I painted a naked lady on it and put it up on my wall." Hannah also described feeling rebellious against their mother, who they did

not feel took their queer and trans identities and desires for independence seriously: "Definitely rebellious thoughts and rebellious behaviors. Especially when she became more apathetic, I think my rebellion did really spike." Alex noted that his parents' rejection of his trans identity compelled him to begin looking into other housing options: "So, if you're not going to accept me for who I am, I'm not going to be around you anymore. So, I just started looking for options and stuff."

Other youth noted that their families' rejection of their queer or trans identities caused them to feel more invested in their identities and desire for independence. Lee noted that he did not need to be dependent on his biological family or impacted by their opinions: "Like how they feel about me being gay, and it just made me feel like I don't need them … I can just do me." Bryan expressed a similar sentiment about his extended family: "It's not my issue, it's theirs." He also noted that his mother's rejection of his sexual orientation ultimately made him feel more secure in his identity:

> I took six years to basically accept myself and reaffirm myself. This is not a
> phase. I'm not wrong. There's nothing wrong with me. She didn't shake me. She
> did have me question myself, a little bit. Am I right? Or am I wrong? She got in
> my head. Dissecting me. But at the end of the day I knew who I was and I know
> who I am as a person. She shook me a little bit but she didn't change anything
> about me.

Overall, youth observed that their families' rejection caused them to resist their parents' controlling behavior or negative opinions. Sometimes this manifested as defiance of their parents' control or apathy. Sometimes this manifested as renewed confidence in their identity and ability to ignore others' negative opinions.

Uncertainty. Other youths appeared to respond to their families' rejection with a sense of ambiguity. This largely appeared to be in response to members of their family who were not accepting but also not as openly hostile about their queer or trans identities. Miley had been outed involuntarily after his family found gay content on his phone and wondered what his life would be like if that had not happened, "I don't know what my life would be like if that never happened, I don't know if I would have ever told her straight up like this is who I am." He described feeling unsure about whether or not to discuss his romantic life with his unaccepting mom, sister, and grandparents: "It's not like they're gonna be like 'hey I found someone for you,' no they're not like that … I'll be honest with them and tell them if something ever went wrong." Miley expressed some resignation, noting the permanence of family relationships and declaring "the fact that you can come to realize that it's blood and nothing's ever going to change that … the fact that they're your family is never goin' to change even though you want it to." Miley seemed unclear about how his family would react to his identity at any given moment, creating a sense of uncertainty about how hurt he should feel by their rejection and how he should react with them going forward.

Amidst these experiences of rejection, how do youth make decisions about where to live?

The model representing my third research question can be found in Figure 4. The model can loosely be understood to be a wheel, turning from left to right. This cyclical, nonlinear design is intended to capture the messy, nonlinear nature of many youths' housing instability. The center of the wheel contains the three themes of resilience that emerged as elements of youths' decision-making: strategize, cope, connect. These themes

are the hub of the wheel, the axis around which youths' decisions turned. The boxes and arrows around the circle represent youths' decisions to leave home, both planned and unplanned, the places they stayed after leaving home, and their decisions to reengage or not reengage their families after leaving home.

This section is written in two parts: a brief overview of the themes of resilience and then a walkthrough of the different phases of the model. The walkthrough will begin with Home and then proceed clockwise around the model. Each phase of the model will include the story of a young person in the sample whose experiences typify that stage of the model and illustrates how the youth practiced resilience through strategizing, coping, or connection. For emphasis, the themes of resilience will be italicized throughout the walkthrough of the model to help the reader identify them and their connections to the themes in the center of the model.
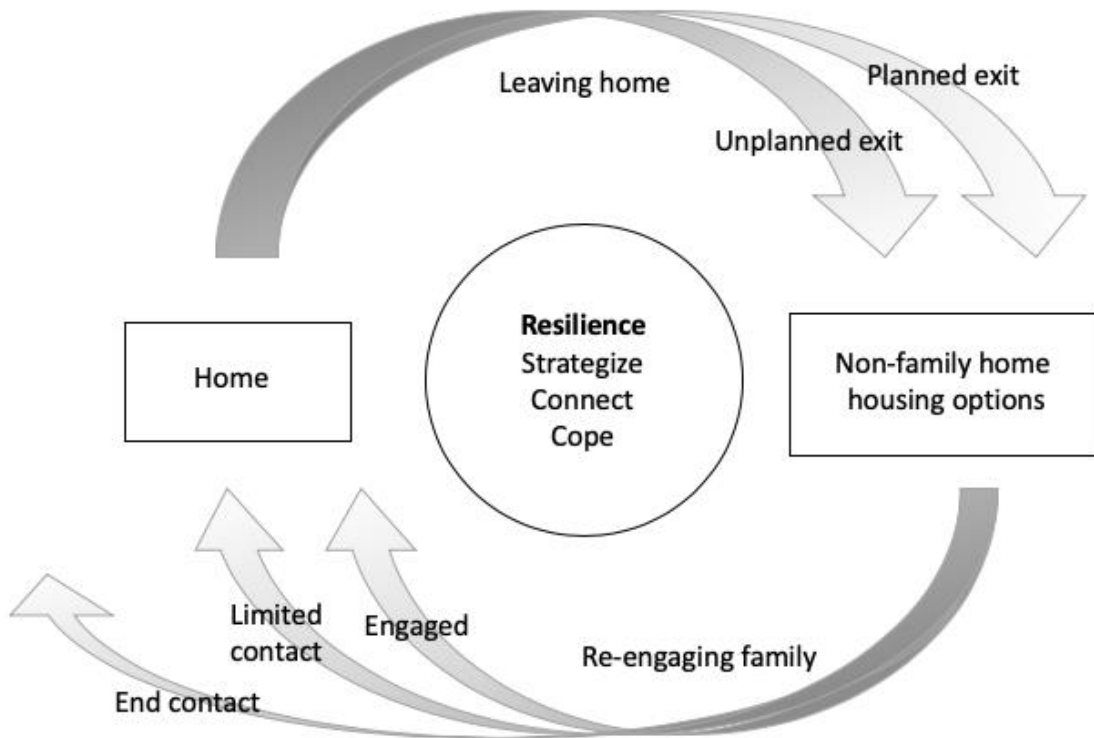
Figure 4: Model representing youth trajectory as they leave family home

Resilience

Throughout the research interviews, youth described the various ways they
survived family conflict and housing instability and how they made decisions about
where to stay and how to meet their basic needs. These themes can be found in the center
of the model. These experiences demonstrated the incredible resilience, resourcefulness,
ingenuity, and passion of the young people in the sample. Through analysis, it became
clear that these resilience techniques could be categorized into three different groups:
strategizing about housing and their future, *coping* with the stress of family conflict and
housing instability, and *connecting* with others for support. This section will contain a
brief summary of these themes. More detail about how each youth in the sample

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experienced and practiced resilience is included in the following section, which walks through the phases of the model.

Strategize. Youth employed a number of strategies to plan and navigate housing instability and meet their basic needs while they were in the process of leaving their family homes. They planned for their housing by searching for shelter resources, roommates, or housing assistance in their communities. Bryan described how he created a contingency plan for when his mother learned of his sexual orientation, "I waited until I was 19, until I knew that if things turned to the worse, if I was kicked out, I made sure I had a designated friend I could stay with. Or if she decided to disown me I had a job and money saved over to try and survive." This planning demonstrates how Bryan understood that he could not, or did not want to, hide his sexuality from his mother forever, but that her negative opinions of queer and trans people would impact his access to her home and support. He strategized about how to minimize the disruptive impact of her rejection on his life and his future.

Youth also strategized by establishing and focusing on both short- and long-term goals for their future. These goals included getting more education, getting a better job, finding better housing, and having more independence and freedom. Blue declared that his most important goal was moving out of his mom's house and having his own space: "I just want to be able to exist and not fear for an inability to eat or live, or have electricity or bathe, even." Youth reported staying focused on these goals and reflecting on how far they had come so far. Riley explained: "I feel like I have come far … Even if I'm not where I want to be right now."

Another strategy that helped youth navigate leaving home and facing housing instability was the act of taking control over their own lives. As described in the previous section, many came from home environments where their parents were very controlling. Youths described how important it was for them to feel in control of their lives and make changes for themselves. Sometimes, this meant learning to focus on themselves and their own needs. Blue explained, "And that's really hard, because I've never been a priority to people before, so letting myself be a priority to myself is super, super hard." Tyler described how all of the difficulty they had encountered since being kicked out of their parents' house was still worth it and still better than living the life their parents wanted for them: "This is a life that I've chosen for myself. As opposed to one that I've been forced into." Sometimes this focus on themselves led youth to conclude that they needed a fresh start, either in a new city or state or simply not in their family's home.

Youth's strategies also included forms of resistance against their families' or society's heterosexism and cisgenderism. Youth reported being engaged in activism and advocacy around queer and trans issues. When asked in the interview about how they would improve services for queer and trans youth experiencing housing instability, they had powerful suggestions about how housing and other systems could be modified to better serve youth experiencing family rejection and housing instability. Riley described how making queer and trans friends had motivated them to be more involved in the community: "I start listening to them and like just like hearing their ideas and I was just like 'Wow, these are the conversations I want to have.'" Alex suggested that there should be more support groups for trans youth in the shelter, because they were frequently misgendered by other shelter residents. Resisting discrimination and oppression and

advocating for themselves and their needs was an important strategy for youth navigating housing instability.

Cope. Youths also reported a variety of coping mechanisms for managing the stress of family rejection and housing instability. Forms of coping included maintaining their sense of motivation and perseverance. Sammi described how her daughter was her biggest source of motivation: "My life can be second, I need taking care of my daughter first, and deal with the other stuff … Getting my family back. Getting the family I have started now, to be there all the time." Several youths noted that they were extremely motivated to move out of the emergency shelter. Nicole explained, "Just trying to get out of here as fast as I can." Riley elaborated that being at the shelter motivated them to persevere in finding better housing: "It's just really tough coming into the situation just kind of having a goal and not giving up. 'Cause if you just give up, you could stay here for years."

Youth also coped by maintaining a positive sense of self and focusing on the growth they had experienced and the lessons they had learned. Ben explained, "I have gotten very good at taking care of myself and finding resources … I could land in any city … and I would still be able to find some way to make it, just because I've had to." Bryan noted that his experiences had made him stronger: "I actually came out stronger and more secure with myself. It just shows how much resilience I actually do have and how much resolve I have and how I can actually problem solve." Noah described how his struggle with housing instability had helped him learn that he had agency in his life, "I've learned I have my own voice. I need to start speaking up for myself. I've definitely been doing that way more than I have [in the past]." Lucy reflected on her own personal

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growth: "I grew so much as a person. I went from being this little girl who couldn't stand up for myself … To now, I can do things on my own, and I can stand up for myself."

Youth used a number of coping techniques to maintain a sense of positivity and optimism. Noah explained, "I try staying positive. I try looking at the good things in a bad situation." Many youths in the sample reported using creativity as an outlet for their thoughts and emotions and a tool to help them focus on the positive. Several youths described their journals as an important survival tool during this period of their lives. Others said they enjoyed drawing, writing poetry, taking photos, or listening to music. Several youths also explained that spending time in nature helped them stay calm and positive. Noah described the woods as a place where he could have privacy and listen to his music, "not having anybody around to judge you or anything." Bryan noted that being in nature calmed him down and reminded him of his home state. Sometimes this coping was a simple as organizing their belonging so that they were easily accessible while they were bouncing between housing situations. These diverse techniques helped young people manage their stress and stay focused when they were experiencing family rejection and housing instability.

Connect. Connecting with other people or with community resources was also an extremely important part of youths' resilience. Youth were very resourceful when looking for and accessing resources and support. They used their smart phones to find agencies and programs and use their services. Aaron described the process of battling with their college's financial aid office because the office did not understand why Aaron wouldn't simply move back in with their mother. Aaron called a local shelter and asked them how they could be legally recognized as homeless to receive financial aid. Other

youth found the local youth shelter via a Google search. Youth named a number of

community resources that were helpful to them, including the shelter, the drop-in center,

crisis lines, mental health centers, needle exchanges, and food banks. Several youths

mentioned that they found there to be more resources to connect with in Denver than the

cities and states where they had grown up. Lucy noted that she and her fiancé felt much

safer in Colorado than in their home states in the Bible Belt: "Like we feel so much safer

here. Like even just being able to like go to the mall and walk around and hold hands

whereas we couldn't do that in Mississippi." Lucy noted that this sense of safety made it

easier for her and her partner to make authentic connections with people and

organizations in Colorado.

Youths also cited their schools or places of employment as sources of support.

Noah went to a Christian school but still felt safer at school then he did in his father's

abusive household: "I felt more comfortable being at school than I did being at home."

Many youth had jobs and wanted to work to become more financially independent. Blue

felt supported at his job, which had policies around gender-neutral bathrooms and where

his coworkers were trained on queer and trans issues. Tyler was excited to build a career

in the technology industry, which they felt was more open to queer and trans people than

other industries. Schools and jobs were not exclusively sources of support—sometimes

youth reported discrimination or harassment at school or on the job. However, school and

employment were important mechanisms for youth to stay connected to society and to

supportive people.

Finally, youth reported that their relationships with other people—friends,

romantic partners, or supportive family members—were integral to helping them

maintain resilience. Ben explained how his mental health suffered when he didn't have a source of community: "When I don't have any community, that kills me … I can isolate and do all that bullshit but it's just going to make me feel worse about myself." He reiterated, "Homeless people help homeless people. So that's how I found out where a lot of the food banks and stuff like that were." Aaron noted that having supportive adults in their life helped them figure out some of the nitty-gritty aspects of adulthood when they couldn't ask their mother: "I did have a couple adults in my life, too, who I at that point could still speak to and bounce ideas off of because there are things like filling out W-2s and tax forms." Friends and romantic partners were also a frequently mentioned and important source of support. Lucy described, "I guess advice I would give to somebody else would just be to find those people who are good, positive supports, and cling to them, because they can be such a lifeline." Some youth in the study specifically mentioned the importance of finding community that could support them in their identities, such as finding other queer or trans people or finding a fellowship of people in recovery. These social connections were an important part of youths' support networks while they navigated housing instability and family rejection.

A number of youths in the study exhibited a strong sense of altruism, which allowed them to feel like they were contributing to the social connections which supported them. Several youths mentioned their goal of starting a shelter specifically for queer and trans youth. Tyler was excited that they and their partner had just moved into a two-bedroom apartment because now there was extra space that they could share with others in need: "That's what it really comes down to, is I've been given a lot of opportunities that I know that other trans people aren't, and it's like, how do I pass that

forward?" Blue echoed this sentiment: "I need to be able to support myself and whoever else is in my life, because it's important to me to give back to the people that love me and who I love." This sense of altruism spoke to youths' capacity to care for and about others even in the midst of incredible chaos and uncertainty in their own lives.

Home

In the model in Figure 4, home is the starting place on the left side of the circle, representing that all youth in the sample left their family homes at some point (per study inclusion criteria). The contexts of youths' home lives, including the conflict and challenges faced related to coming out, has already been described in the previous research questions. This section describes how youth demonstrated resiliency while facing adversity at home.

Blue's experiences living with his mother typified many of the challenges that youth reported while still living at home (sometimes after having run away and returned) and illustrated the themes of resilience. Although Blue left home after his mother's verbal harassment escalated after he came out, staying with his sister briefly, he returned to his mother's house shortly after. At the time of the interview, he had been staying with his mother and paying her rent for two years. Blue demonstrated all three important sources of resilience that informed the decisions he made about his housing: *coping*, *connections* to other people, and *strategizing* about his long-term goals.

Blue described how he *coped* by minimizing uncomfortable interactions with his mother by primarily staying in his own space in the home's basement and limiting his communication with her: "I keep everything very surface, I don't like to talk to her for very long about anything that's important to me because I know that she's going to have

an opinion on it." He also *coped* by decorated his own space, hanging pride flags on the wall despite his mother's disapproval, "I have my flags and everything, which are [a] small comfort, where I can't speak my mind. So at least I can see it there as a small beacon of life, I still exist despite being a little muffled right now." In the face of verbal abuse, Blue sought safe and calm spaces for relief.

Blue described how he countered the negative messages he received from his mother by focusing on the positive *connections* in his life. Specifically, he cited his relationship with his younger siblings and his *connections* to a local LGBTQ youth drop-in space. Blue described how his older siblings had escaped their parents' unhealthy divorce and conflict by moving away after they turned 18 and staying away. He noted that he didn't want to leave his younger siblings in an unhealthy dynamic and recalled how he had almost just packed up and left several times: "And I've almost done that too many times to count, but it's just like, I worry too much about my little siblings and leaving them there." He stated that it was important to him to be a role model for his younger siblings: "I want to give them me as an example that they don't have to be carbon copies of our parents with their shitty opinions and their shitty lives, and their lack of ambition for something nicer." His sense of *connection* with his siblings motivated him to put up with his unaccepting mother and stay in her home, despite tremendous discomfort: "It's just not an option for me, because I have other people to take care of, whether or not any of them agree that I have to take care of them."

Blue was also effusive about the support that he received from *connections* with youth and adults at the local LGBTQ youth drop-in program. He stated that being around other LGBTQ people who gave him affirmation in his queer and trans identities helped

counter his discomfort at home. When asked to bring a photo of something that made him feel at home, he brought a photo of his closest friends he had met at the program: "they make me feel like I'm allowed to exist, and that feels pretty homey to me." He also cited his relationships with queer and trans adults in the program as being a powerful antidote to his mother's negativity: "I have other queer adults being like, 'You're not being sensitive, that's bullshit, you don't deserve that.' And I'm like, oh thank God. If I was doing something wrong and I deserved all this shit?" Blue described the program: "So it's people that make me feel like I have a place in this world, and even if I don't have a physical home right now, I have an emotional and mental home with these people."

Blue also practiced resilience by *strategizing* and focusing on his long-term goal of moving out of his mom's house. He cited lack of affordable housing as the biggest barrier in his way, "I don'' have anybody to room with and I don't have the finances right now to be able to do that in the first place." He was also concerned that leaving before he was ready and being homeless would "throw that big of a wrench in my future plans, because it doesn't exactly read well on any type of record for you to have been homeless at some point." In the meantime, he was very intentional about preparing for that goal. He treated the basement in his mom's house as his own small apartment and started accumulating home supplies: "I have a habit of collecting little things for when I'm able to move out. So right now I've collected Tupperware, a kitchen set." Blue's focus on his future goal of moving out motivated him to stay in his mom's house, despite discomfort from his mother's heterosexist and cisgenderist political beliefs. He relied on his sense of *connection* to his siblings and the validation he received from people at the LGBTQ drop-in program to help him manage living in his uncomfortable environment.

Leaving Home

After home, the next concept in the model in Figure 4 is leaving home, represented by the two arrows arching up and to the right. These arrows show youth have two main types of departures from the family home: planned and unplanned. These categories, however, were not mutually exclusive. Several youths left home multiple times and experienced both planned and unplanned departures. The distinction between planned and unplanned remains noteworthy, since they differ greatly in youths' capacity to prepare for leaving home. Two youths' experiences typified and illustrated the experiences of unplanned and planned departures from the family home; their experiences are shared here.

Planned exit. Several youths in the sample shared how they planned and then executed their departure from the family home. Several had made the decision to leave home months or years before they actually did and had time to plan and leverage resources for support.

Nicole's story exemplified the planning process as a *strategy* for resilience and agency. Nicole planned on leaving her parents' abusive home on her eighteenth birthday. In her own words, "Oh yeah, I was planning. I was extremely planning." Prior to turning 18, she researched options. Her boyfriend was from her home state but had moved to Colorado and she planned on flying out to move in with him and his sister. She described, "Oh, my parents knew. I was like, 'Okay, I'm leaving. Bye. I'm leaving in a couple of months.'… I'm like, 'Dad, how much would it cost for a flight?'"

The relationship with her boyfriend fell apart a few months after she arrived in Denver and her *strategy* of planning came in handy again. She recalled, "I used Google

… I said 'homeless shelters in Denver', and then it said [shelter name] … I called them and I said, 'What are the qualifications? What can I bring? What can I not bring?'" Nicole expressed gratitude that she had found the youth shelter—she was scared of both adult shelters and the streets: "Definitely a good thing I didn't go on the streets. I had planned on sleeping on the streets for 14 days, and then moving in with my roommate and getting my apartment, but my job did not pay me enough."

Nicole also *strategized* by planning what she could bring with her to the shelter and organizing her belongings. She started by paring down her belongings: "I became a minimalist and literally threw all my stuff out that I didn't need." She then organized a backpack: "I came here with a JanSport backpack for the big one full of stuff I needed, my hygiene, my clothes, my computer, my paperwork. That's about it." Nicole was proud of, and eager to describe, her planning and organizing process during our interview; she clearly felt that it had served her well. She never expressed any regret about leaving her home state or her family, despite the uncertainty that followed.

Nicole *coped* with her housing instability by reflecting on her own skills and the lessons she had learned. When asked to bring a photo of something that made her feel at home, she brought a photo of herself in middle school and reflected how much she had changed. She described, "It was kind of a rough year for me … that I was a totally different person than I am now." She described herself as adaptable and mature: "I adapt to situations easily, like when I came [to the shelter]. I get comfortable easily." She reflected that staying at the shelter had helped her realize that she was "more independent than [she] thought [she] was." Nicole's capacity to reflect on all the growth she had

experienced helped her *cope* with her housing instability and stay resilient throughout her housing instability.

Unplanned exit. Several youths in the sample reported that they had not planned on leaving the family home. Some youth were kicked out by their parents and told to not return home. Others reported that they had run away from home at various points in their housing instability. Alex described, "I just wanted to be away from my family for a while," demonstrating some youths' spontaneous decisions to leave home with little to no planning or forethought.

Ben's story illustrated how youth can exit the family home with little to no opportunity to prepare. Ben was honest and up front about the role that his history of substance abuse played in leaving his parents' house, where he had witnessed their own active addictions and was subjected to their heterosexist and cisgenderist harassment and abuse. He recalled, "It just made me feel really terrified and really shut down … For the most part, I just did nothing at all but just float and use a shit ton of drugs." He described how, as his substance use escalated, he spent less time in the family home: "I was living at home and going to school. By the time Christmas rolled around, I was spending six nights a week out of the house." He instead slept in abandoned buildings or walked around Walmart at night to keep warm. He eventually packed up and moved into a sober living facility. He described the journey that brought him to Colorado after a relapse and a breakup with his romantic partner: "I lost both my jobs … and got kicked out of my sober house before noon … I was like, let's just start driving, what have I got left?" He arrived in Denver, got back into recovery, and was living in his car at the time of our first

interview. Ben's departure from the sober house and journey across the country was the most dramatic and impulsive example of an unplanned departure in the study sample.

Ben reported two main forms of resilience and agency throughout his experience of housing instability: his *connection* to the recovery community and *coping* by practicing his Wiccan faith. The *connection* to a community of other people working on recovery from substance abuse was an integral part of Ben's life and an important source of both emotional and material support. He described the emotional support he received in the fellowship: "I can walk into a meeting anywhere in the country and find support. Which is pretty amazing to me. I don't really have support in other areas of my life." This support ranged from support in maintaining sobriety to having people to spend important holidays with: "I don't ever have to spend a holiday alone. I've made actual real, genuine friends … Some people have their church, I have my fellowship."

Ben also described his *connection* to the recovery community as a source of information or material support. He recalled how he had gotten advice about how to find sober living programs from other folks in the fellowship. At the time of our second interview, he updated me that he was no longer living in his car but now was staying on the couch of someone he had met through the recovery community. He was pleased and proud to be paying rent and to have received his own key. He also noted that people in recovery face unique barriers to accessing housing resources, since they frequently have small crimes or poor credit on their records. He elaborated that these barriers could be intensified by someone's queer or trans identity, describing how the selection criteria for housing programs could be informed by heterosexist or cisgenderist bias: "[A sober living program] is trans inclusive, but you have to get voted in to be allowed to stay at the

house. You go for an interview process and everybody has to say yes." For Ben, however, he had found an inclusive and affirming recovery community in Denver and was vocal about their role in his goal of finding and maintaining stable housing and maintaining his sobriety.

Ben also cited his Wiccan faith as an important *coping* practice during his housing instability, which included very difficult circumstances such as sleeping in public, living in his car, and exchanging sex for a place to sleep. He explained how his faith gave him a sense of agency and empowerment: "A lot about practicing Wicca is that you have the power to make change in your own world with spell work and different stuff. A lot of that to me is empowering." Ben was the only youth in the study to describe a defined spiritual practice as a *coping* mechanism. For him, it was a source of comfort and direction amidst experiences of chaos and uncertainty.

Non-Family Home Housing Options

The box on the right side of the model in Figure 4 represents the different places youth sought shelter after leaving their family homes. These housing locations varied greatly in terms of quality and stability. For many youths in the sample, the trajectory of their housing instability was messy and nonlinear as they used a variety of different options to meet their housing needs. The following sections describe the most commonly reported housing options, youths' stories of those options, and the themes of resilience they illustrate.

Shelter. The most commonly reported housing situation after leaving the family home was shelter. Six of the youth in the sample were recruited through Denver's emergency shelter and two more youth reported using different shelter services, one for a

temporary place to stay and the other as a source of information about housing services but not as a place to stay. Several youths described how shelters were scary or intimidating. Aaron did not stay at their local youth shelter because "they were frightening to walk up to, and often in bad parts of town." But they did call them and ask for information about how to meet the legal definition of homeless for financial aid purposes. They noted that shelters were extra intimating to them as a trans person. Other youth noted that they were uncomfortable seeking services at traditional adult shelters. Lee described how he and Noah had felt during a visit to an adult shelter: "But we didn't stay the night there because like, I didn't feel comfortable staying the night there." When asked why she felt uncomfortable staying with adult homeless clients, Nicole noted, "Just because of the age difference, and then mental difference between us … They have mental problems, and they just act crazy."

Alex's story typified the experience of being dependent on emergency shelter and the challenges that creates. While experiencing cisgenderist harassment at the shelter, Alex *coped* and focusing on the future and a sense of positivity and was *connected* to other shelter residents and his child. Alex described feeling very supported by Urban Peak staff but having some difficulty with other youth staying in the shelter respecting his gender identity. He described a variety of pushback, ranging from invasive questions to deliberate misgendering. He explained, "[it is] a struggle because every day we get new people and stuff. And every time I use the male bathroom, they're like, 'Oh, there's a female in here.'" Pronouns were a particular source of frustration and harm "because, they're scared. Because, people here a lot use pronouns against us. Purposely calls us

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pronouns that we're not supposed to be called." He concluded, "It's really frustrating and tiring."

Alex employed a variety of *coping* mechanisms to deal with issues at the shelter and his housing instability more broadly. He had a strong future orientation: "I would always tell myself, I shouldn't look back on the past, because I'm only going to get pulled back farther than how I was … So, I just want to move forward." He also used forms of creativity like drawing and listening to music to keep his spirits up and focus on the positive.

He reported that he also had a *connection* to a group of friends who would listen to music together regularly at the shelter: "Yeah, we listen to music every Friday night and stuff … It's kind of a little support group kind of. Our own little support group." Most importantly, Alex described how he was motivated by his son: "When I look at my son, I'm pretty much doing everything for him … Yeah. I'm doing everything for him, nobody else … I have to get up every day, do what I gotta do, just for him." Alex's focus on what was going well in his life, on the future, and on his child helped him *cope* with the difficulties of his housing instability and difficulties at the shelter. He concluded, "I feel like I'm just myself. I'm proud to be who I am. It's only my opinion that matters. I don't really care about any other people's opinions."

Sleeping in car or public. A number of youths reported spending the night in their car or in an outdoor public place like a park at some point in their housing instability. Ben was living in his car at the time of our first interview. Noah and Lee slept in Lee's car for a month before coming to Colorado to meet Noah's mother. Several youths briefly mentioned nights spent in parks or outside in the midst of their narratives

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about conflict with their families. It was difficult to tell if this brevity was because youth did not consider these short-term occurrences as significant in the longer-term trajectory of their housing, or if because they perhaps felt embarrassment or shame about the experience and therefore did not want to elaborate.

Tyler's experiences of navigating the streets during the year between when their parents kicked them out of the house and when they were taken in by an uncle illustrated the resilience themes of *connection* to community resources and *coping* by practicing self-care. Tyler described the struggle to find safe places to stay while living on the streets: "And so I started to find other ways of just finding safe spaces. So that was park benches or finding individuals who would allow me to stay somewhere for a night." They were well-*connected* to community resources in Denver and mentioned using text lines, food banks, and local crisis centers to meet their basic needs. They recalled of the crisis centers: "If I ever needed somewhere to stay during the day because I didn't feel safe, that was where I would go." They also described how they volunteered at the food bank where they received food as a way to have something to do and give back: "I was like, I have nothing better to do with my time, and I would love to help other people who are struggling with this."

Tyler credited his phone as being the most important tool in helping him *connect* with resources: "Getting a phone was definitely my first priority, because I figure if I had access to that then I could essentially get access to anything else I needed … Like, 'Oh. How do I get in contact with other individuals or other resources?'" Tyler noted that heterosexist, cisgenderist, and anti-homeless stigmas were barriers to accessing community resources. They explained how that stigma caused them to be very mindful of

their appearance and how they were being read by other people. They described changing their gender presentation to try and find a place to stay:

> I did a lot to make sure that I passed in one way or the other. So, if somebody was assuming that I was male, then I would just roll with it … If that meant dressing more effeminately so that I could stay somewhere for the night, then that was what it kind of just came down to.

Tyler also described how they were mindful about their appearance outing them as homeless: "I was like, I'm going to make sure that I don't look homeless." Other people's stereotypes and misconceptions about queer and trans identities and homeless people made it more complicated for Tyler to find and access services and supports.

Tyler also described how they *coped* with the pain of their parents' rejection and the stress of living on the streets/in their car by being very intentional about self-care. While living out of a backpack, they organized and prioritized their belongings: "I definitely had a backpack that had any emergency contacts … if something happened to me, then police would know who to call." They carried a small box around with items to help them stay grounded and calm,

> I also had, it was shaped like a shoebox, but it was just a small box that had different sensory things in it. So I had, somebody had given me a bottle of lavender. And then I had Play-Doh, and then I had just a little notebook. And that was what I always had with me at the bottom of my bag. Just because like, instead of turning to drugs, and that stuff, you need something to mentally occupy you.

They described journaling being a particularly helpful practice for them, allowing them an outlet for their thoughts and a place to track their successes: "So you get all of those

thoughts out on paper, and you sometimes look back, and you're like, 'Oh, I didn't realize that I was struggling with this that much.'" Tyler possessed a remarkable ability to remain optimistic and focused, even given the chaos of their housing instability. Their ability to *cope* helped them remain resilient.

Couch surfing. A number of youths in the study sample reported temporarily staying with friends after leaving their parents' home, an arrangement referred to, both by the youth and in the literature, as "couch surfing." The quality of this arrangement varied widely, with some youth moving frequently and others staying for weeks or months at a time. Elena and Aaron described similar processes of rotating through a couple of friends when their parents kicked them out of the house. Aaron expressed gratitude for the fact that they knew of several families whose children had left for college and so had extra rooms. Aaron noted that these rooms did come with a price: not being out about their queer and trans identities and trying to blend in with another family's dynamic: "You try to be non-intrusive. You try to stick to … they were more conservative Mormon families, so it was one of those things where I tried to blend in, become wallpaper, as much as possible."

Elena's experiences managing a rotation of welcoming couch hosts illustrates the theme of resilience through *strategizing* and proactively finding and maintaining alternative housing through her social network. She described three main friends whose families welcomed her into their homes when she was not able to stay at her mother's house. When asked about why she had chosen those friends' homes, she reflected on the fact that they each had stable home lives: "kind of replacing my own instability with their

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stability." She recalled how each friend provided a different kind of support: an ex-boyfriend whose mother was supportive, a friend who also identified as lesbian and with whom she could process her anger about her mother's heterosexism, and a childhood best friend who had known her a long time. She described being mindful of overstaying her welcome, "Having three different options was good for when one parent was getting sick of having an extra kid at their house. Like, 'Okay, time to move on.'" Elena described how bouncing around to different homes made it difficult to keep up with school work. When asked if she ever told her school about her housing situation, she shared that she had worried about her family getting in trouble: "I had one teacher that I was really close with … So I think I talked to her about it a little bit, but, I don't know, I think I didn't want to get anyone in trouble, either."

During this time of stress, and when the stress continued after her mother forced her to move back home and confiscated all her belongings, Elena described how creativity helped her *cope*. She is an artist and recalled how art—listening to music, painting, and journaling—gave her an outlet for her emotions. She recalled how a friend would share music and books, which Elena's mother would not let her have access to: "They were constantly just giving me bags full of old CDs and magazines and graphic novels … being like, 'Here is this … little bit of exposure to a culture that you're being completely blocked from.'" She also remembered being a prolific writer: "I have a big milk crate full of just journals that are just from that time period, 'cause I was filling them up one right after the other." The journals helped her *cope* because they gave her a place to think about her life after leaving her mom's house: "But there's a lot of writing for future planning and, 'This is what I'm going to do first when I get out of the house.'"

These creative outlets gave Elena a place to *cope* with her emotions in the controlling environment of her mother's home and a place to plan for her future departure and life.

Exchanging romance or sex for a place to stay. Two youths in the sample reported exchanging sex for a place to stay. They were also the same two who reported sleeping in public, underlining the connection between rough sleeping and survival sex. Tyler stated that he started using survival sex for a place to stay after he lost his job and described a sense of frustration at his lack of resources and the risk of survival sex: "Because youre like, well I'm putting myself at risk, but nobody else is giving me an opportunity." For both youth in the study, survival sex represented a last resort option and a strategic decision to avoid sleeping in a more dangerous environment, such as on the streets.

One young person in the study did not report exchanging sex for a place to stay but did use his romantic relationships as a frequent escape from his mother and grandparents' home. Miley described how he bounced between a series of "toxic" and sometimes physically abusive relationships and his family home. In our research interviews, Miley seemed to vacillate between a clear-eyed understanding of the risk of moving in with a partner who he didn't know very well and a youthful optimism about finding love and affection. He explained, "You gotta know which one's safe but then it's like … You don't know what may come of it … Or like if it's even a bad situation before you go into it." He recalled how his relationships, and therefore his housing, "never really planned out and panned out the way I wanted to." Nonetheless, he described a persistent sense of discomfort at the family home, where he did not feel safe discussing or being very open about his gay identity.

When asked how he made decisions about whether or not to move in with a new partner, Miley reported that he was seeking safety and affection: "That I might have some security and that I trusted someone to take care of me." Similar to Elena reporting that she chose to stay with certain friends because of the stability their family homes offered, Miley also desired stability. He explained, "I was thinking about is if I'm going to be okay and in a safe place and in a safe environment." Miley's pursuit of safety and stability was a *strategy* he used to determine whether or not a potential partner was a suitable housing option.

Despite feeling uncomfortable with his mother and grandparents' reaction to his gay identity, Miley described being very *connected* to, and invested in, his family. He seemed very invested in the concept of blood *connections* and maintaining family relationships, "You can go out and find your own family if you want to in the world and it's friends and have Friendsgiving and stuff like that, but it's not necessarily always going to be your family and … I know that firsthand." Miley described wanting to be more open about his life and romantic life with his family but feeling uncomfortable with discussing it. He was unhappy with the prospect of censoring himself or lying about his identity or romances to his mom or grandparents, whom he relied on for support after experiences of intimate partner violence. When asked about his goals for his relationship with his family, he expressed a desire for more openness and dialogue: "Being more vocal and I want to be open with their views too." Despite a sense of discomfort, his *connections* with his family were a support and source of hope and resilience in his life as he navigated housing instability.

Living with romantic partner. A number of young people reported living with a romantic partner at some point in their housing instability. Several youths in the study left the family home to move in with a partner, which frequently resulted in the youth being forced to find housing again after the relationship ended and experiencing housing instability with a partner. Youth reported a wide diversity of experiences while living with a partner—for some it was the creation of a new, supportive family and for others it intensified an unsafe or unhealthy relationship.

For many youths, their partner was one of their biggest supporters, and moving in with them was a relationship and housing goal. When asked to bring a photo of what made them feel at home, Tyler brought a selfie of them and their partner on a hike: "Everyone has a photo of their family on their desk and that was kind of what it reminded me of … I'd set this on my desk and look at it all the time to remind me that this is what I'm doing this for." Alex described how he felt supported by his partner's respect for his pronouns: "He doesn't have a problem with it at all. He knows my pronouns, he has never misinterpreted my pronouns, which is good." Lucy relied on her partner after her parents withdrew financial support: "I would say my girlfriend was a huge support with that. I definitely couldn't have handled rent and groceries and all of that without her."

Not all of the youths' relationships were sources of support, however. Several described romantic relationships that were unhealthy or unsafe. Tyler recalled how he stayed with a partner after being kicked out of his family's home but how the power imbalance tainted the relationship: "Any relationship that's based on the dependency of, 'I'm looking to you for resources' does not work well." Both Hannah and Nicole shared stories of how they were eager to leave their parents' homes and move in with partners.

These relationships ended and both reported having to scramble to find new housing. For some youth, living with a romantic partner offered only a short-term solution to their housing instability and increased their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse, or instability.

Two study participants were in a relationship with one another and had experienced housing instability together. Their story illustrates the resilience themes of *connection* and the *strategy* of focusing on themselves and their future. In terms of *connection,* each of them named the other as one of the primary supports and sources of hope in research interviews. When asked what about his relationship with Noah gave him hope, Lee responded, "Everything. I mean just because I love the kid." They both described their relationship as a focal point of hope in their shared future. Lee stated, "I only worry about me and [Noah]." Their *connection* with one another was a support as they navigated life at the shelter and trying to find housing.

Noah and Lee also reported focusing on themselves as a *strategy* they used when thinking about navigating housing and relationships with family. Aggravated with his family's persistent heterosexist harassment, Lee described how he felt it was time to do his own thing: "It just made me feel like I don't need them … I can just do me." Noah had a different experience with focusing on himself, choosing to leave his mother who was supportive of his gay identity but struggled with addiction, and pursuing shelter with Lee. He reflected on that hard decision, "I was like, 'I'm trying to help myself and I can't help myself. I'm definitely not gonna be able to help someone else.'" Both Lee and Noah made the *strategic* decision to disconnect from their families. The strong *connection* of their relationship had become their new home and was a source of resilience throughout their extensive experiences of homelessness and housing instability.

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Living in school facilities. Several youths reported that their school was a resource in their efforts to find and maintain stable housing. For some youth, school dorms were a physical location for them to stay. Aaron chose to attend a boarding high school for the arts to escape his mother's heterosexist and cisgenderist harassment and her larger mental health issues: "At that point in my life, I had already chosen to apply for boarding schools because I knew my mother and I had so many other conflicts with her need to control me in general." Tyler described how his school tried to help him after being kicked out of his parents' home: "So my school, at first, tried to issue me a caseworker. And it was nice to at least have somebody to talk to, who was another human being."

Some youth noted the role of school and academic achievement as an escape during their time living with abusive families. Ben remembered viewing school as his way out of his parents' house: "I shoved my ass into academics, cause I'm like, this is my way out." Aaron described how they focused on school as a way to avoid conflict with their mother, "So it was simpler for me just to focus on my studies … no one can yell at you for doing your homework." Bryan was *strategic* and used the opportunity to transfer colleges as a way of moving out of his mother's home. He had worried that his mother might kick him out of the house after coming out, even searching for housing on Craigslist prior and setting up a "designated friend" he could stay with. After he did come out he was not kicked out, but he did feel that his mother was verbally abusive, which made him feel uncomfortable in the home. He used the opportunity to transfer colleges as his way to move out of the home and pursue a fresh start: "I applied for scholarships and

everything was taken care of, I was just ready to go. When I got accepted, I didn't even tell my mom until three months before I had to leave."

Bryan's story typified two themes of resilience: *strategizing* about taking control of his life and pursuing a fresh start and maintaining *connection* to his close family members. Bryan spoke passionately about the moment he realized he could take control over his live: "She said this one comment to me in the kitchen and as soon as she said that I snapped and woke up … I'm not going to let other people have this control over me. Over my happiness so I decided I'm going to move." When I asked him in our second interview about what led up to that moment, he reflected on how his mother's verbal harassment had caused him to reflect on his role in the family:

> I was a major part of the family improving; making sure the house was clean, groceries, cooking, all that stuff … And then as soon as I kind of "came out" and received that backlash, I was like, "Huh … So this one part—one part of me, and it causes this whole issue … Okay, let me rethink."

He described how that hardened his resolve to leave home and take control of his live: "I'm going to work on to taking control of my life back and my happiness back, because my entire life has been out of my control so now I want to take that back. " He also noted that the opportunity for a fresh start appealed to him: "I have a chance to reinvent myself. I have a chance to start over, kind of flip the script and just be who I want to be." Poor treatment by his mother caused Bryan to *strategize* about how to take agency over his own life, and transferring schools gave him the opportunity to get a fresh start with his life.

After transferring schools and relocating to Denver, Bryan experienced more housing instability. He was unable to afford his tuition and kicked out the dorms, electing to live in a shelter run by his local masjid before saving up enough money to move in with friends. Throughout these stressful experiences, Bryan cited his *connection* with his sister and mother as sources of resilience and strength. Despite experiencing a lot of conflict with his mother after he came out, Bryan also reported that their relationship had improved in the two years since he had moved away: "Our relationship's a lot better. I know it's not like all the way there, but I'm happy that she's actually taking steps to not push me out of her life." In fact, Bryan was very clear that his relationships with his mother and his younger sister were some of the most important supports in his life. He described his sister as his best friend and explained how he felt sense of *connection* and responsibility to her: "I think of my sister, because even though we're super close … I don't want to be another adult figure in her life that disappoints her. So that kind of pushed me." He also explained that reflecting on his mother and the difficulties she had overcome in her own life motivated and inspired him: "So, whenever I'm going through something hard, it's like, 'What would my mom do? How would my mom handle this?' … That kind of gives me that resilience and makes me hopeful." Despite conflict around his queer identity, Bryan's strong *connections* with his mother and sister helped him stay resilient in the face of his housing instability. School was a tool for him take agency over his own live, ultimately opening up a distance that improved his relationship with his mother and strengthened his *connections* with his family.

Living with family. Several youths described living with family, either returning to the family home they had left or living with other family members, during the course

of their housing instability. Youth who had divorced parents described how they considered moving in with their non-primary custodial parent. Elena's father was more accepting than her mother but lived in a more rural community. After hearing from her stepsister that the local school did not have any out queer or trans students, Elena concluded that staying with her unaccepting mother in a more diverse community was more important. Her housing instability was an open topic with family; she recalled feeling that the message from her dad and stepmother was "well, you know, obviously we're always here, we're always an option, but you need to work it out with your mom." Blue had considered moving in with his dad, who lived with Blue's older sister, but concluded that that household would be just as unstable as his mother's house.

Riley's *connection* with their grandmother typified the kind of complicated family relationships that were common in the study sample. Riley had moved to live with their grandmother because they felt that she was the most supportive adult in their life—she had supported them through other hard times in ways that Riley's parents never had. But living with her meant that Riley was subjected to her heterosexist and cisgenderist beliefs. The conflict around Riley's identity resulted in Riley leaving home or being kicked out multiple times. Their relationship was a source of both support and stress for Riley. At the time of our first research interview, Riley explained that the relationship with their grandmother was improved by Riley staying at a shelter—the distance minimized their conflict. Riley was disappointed by their grandmother's disapproval but determined to live their own life: "You're going to spend your whole entire life trying to please other people, or just be who [you] are. And do what you gotta do … I don't know. You don't have that much time." They did note that their grandmother's disapproval of

their queer and trans identities caused them to have doubt about those identities, or at least about expressing them: "Sometimes I feel like I do agree with her because just the world is kind of shitty sometimes. You know?"

By the time of our second research interview one month later, Riley shared that their grandmother was moving to a different state and that they were thinking about going with her. When asked about the benefits of moving with their grandmother, Riley noted that her new home was near a college and that, despite the conflict, she was their most supportive family member. Riley expressed an earnest hope that their grandmother would eventually come to accept them, but they were also potentially prepared to delay their gender transition if she did not. Their relationship was very important to Riley: "I just hope that I could continue having a relationship with her until her time comes … because I'm the only person she talks to in any of the family. I just don't want her to die lonely." Despite high levels of conflict around Riley's queer and trans identities, Riley's *connection* with their grandmother was an important source of resilience for them.

Riley also maintained a sense of resilience by *strategizing* about their future goals. Riley named a number of future goals, including living in an RV to travel around the world, making films, becoming an EMT, and owning their own farm. These diverse goals represented Riley's positive sense of themselves, their capabilities, and their future. They stated, "I just feel like, the potential in myself." They also expressed a strong sense of altruism and a desire to help other people as part of their long-term goals: "I just want to be helpful and supportive … I don't think I can make big changes, but little changes in every place I go and just make a positive impact." The opportunity to accomplish their goal of pursuing a college education was a strong motivator for them to follow their

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grandmother out of state—their focus on their future goals helped them make decisions about where to stay amidst their housing instability.

Reengaging Family

Perhaps the most unanticipated finding of this study were the experiences youths shared about reengaging with their families after leaving home. Most youth in the study had some contact with their families. Many of them shared their thoughts about how to establish boundaries with family with enough distance for them to express their identities and focus on their futures but enough openness to receive other forms of support (emotional or material) that their families could offer. Tyler thoughtfully reflected: "Boundaries are not easy and I think it becomes even more complicated when your identity is being invalidated by somebody who you want to have a good relationship with or who society's telling you should be in a good relationship with." This reengagement is represented by the arrow on the bottom of the model in Figure 4, curving from right to left. The themes fell into three groups: ending contact, limiting contact, and engaging with family. The following section describes each of the groups and includes the stories of youth and the themes of resilience that emerged from their experiences.

Ending contact. Several youths reported that they had made the decision to end contact with their family. Noah described his feelings about his father: "I don't even see him as a father figure and I would definitely say if someone was around me that didn't accept it and still wanted to be around me, I would just … rather them not be around me." Sammi was also not in touch with her family and when asked if she wanted to have a relationship with them in the future, she said, "Maybe. Maybe later on." Most of the

youth in the study who described cutting ties with their families were firm in their resolve and cited their parents' abusive and toxic behavior as too great of a risk.

Aaron described struggling with the decision to cut contact with their mother. Their relationship had never been good and Aaron recalled the push-and-pull of trying to make the relationship work: "So those were the three times I moved out on a moment's notice. I did not go back, and after that last time the separations from my mother grew larger and larger and larger." Eventually, they realized that the harm their mother's behavior caused was too great: "I am currently no-contact with my mother. I at one point had to file a restraining order against her." Aaron recalled wanting to play the part of a traditional child in a traditional family: "I wanted to be a good daughter. I felt that kind of patriarchal, nuclear family obligation to fulfill a role and to satisfy my mother's image, but I … doing that was stressful. Doing that sucked." They noted that this decision caused them some guilt but was ultimately the right choice, "Even today I still have some guilt about, did I try hard enough to make things work with my mom. At the same time, my life is so much better. I would hope that some part of her would want me to have a wonderful life." Aaron was confident that the choice to focus on their own life and future was more effective and healthy than continuing to try to engage with their mother and her disapproval of their identities.

In order to *cope* with the stress of conflict with their mother, Aaron described being intentional about selecting mementos of other important relationships in their life and carrying those with them throughout their housing instability. Mementos included photos of friends, a figurine from their grandmother, and a stuffed animal from a supportive teacher. Aaron noted that these items held special importance while they were

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couch surfing "because I specifically remember choosing different items here from when I was homeless, because you have to hold on to those tiny little *connections*." They also described how these items were still significant to them and displayed in their current home: "When I look at that little shelf, and I see those things, I see my tiny human *connections* and those people who have supported me and believed in me." Aaron was deeply *connected* to the people who had supported them in the absence of their mother, and those items that helped them remember those attachments and memories helped them *cope* with the pain of their mother's rejection and the stress of their housing instability.

Limiting contact. Several of the youths in the study reported that they had begun limiting contact with their families but not eliminating it. They reported two main techniques: limiting the content of communication and limiting the frequency and duration of communication. Blue explained how he limited the topics he discussed with his mother: "I keep everything very surface, I don't like to talk to her for very long about anything that's important to me because I know that she's going to have an opinion on it." Several youths mentioned that they had not come out to some members of their immediate or extended families. Nicole recalled that she was not out to her non-custodial parent, her mother: "She thinks that I only like men. Yeah, she doesn't know." Ben was only in touch with his family about the legal conflict or about the death of his grandmother. Limiting the content of communication with their families was an effective technique for minimizing conflict and maintaining relationships.

Other youths described how they limited the time they spent in touch with their families. Alex reported, "There's a 25 percent chance we talk." Lucy described how she had decreased the number of times she and her mother spoke on the phone:

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My mom and I talk on the phone at least once a week, every single week, which is

not very healthy and it needs to stop really because it's more something I do out

of obligation or because she makes me feel guilty if I don't. So, I think sort of my

next step in this whole process is cutting back those phone conversations with her

and trying to help her understand that I'm starting my own life and she's not as

big of a part of it as she wants to be.

Elena described how moving away to college and going through a period of not speaking

to her mother had eventually improved their relationship: "And it was just a space

boundary, you know? … Even though at that point she was coming around, it was still

like I was finally out from under her roof, you know?" For several youth, being mindful

about the amount of time they spent with their families was useful for minimizing

conflict.

Hannah used both techniques—limiting content and time—to manage their

relationships with their parents. They had not yet come out to their dad as queer or

trans—they didn't think that it was relevant to their long-distance relationship with their

father. They reported being very intentional about limiting time spent with their mother:

"I think it's hard to set boundaries especially there … Not too much time … Intentional

time management and time planning." Given their mother's argumentative nature,

Hannah found it very effective to limit the time they spent together.

To deal with the tension of conflict with their mother, Hannah employed two

themes of resilience: *strategizing* and planning toward their goals and *connecting* with

friends with whom they shared interests. After moving in with their partner and then

being forced to find housing again by a sudden breakup, Hannah looked into resources

like the Denver Housing Authority but found that they didn't qualify for assistance. They moved in with roommates and are not focusing on their goal of finishing their bachelor's degree in psychology. Hannah shared that their motivation to succeed in school stemmed from rebellion against their parents: "I think my reasons for being in school are based in rebellion. Neither one of my parents is supportive in that decision." Hannah's *strategy* of focusing on their goals helped them stay resilient: "I'd say I have hope in like short-term goals." Hannah's other main source of support and resilience were their *connections* with friends: "I have a couple of great friends … One's an academic, one's got a master's degree from the University of Amsterdam … The other one ran away at 17. She's very different, and I felt like, oh, I can be different. That's fine." Limiting the influence of their parents was a strategy that allowed Hannah to focus on their own goals and opened space for new friends who shared their interests and supported their identities.

Engaging family. A number of youths in the study reported being engaged with their families. Some of these families had evolved and begun to accept and even embrace youths' queer or trans identities. Other youth had chosen to reconnect with family despite lingering disapproval. Nicole described how distance had helped her relationship with her family: "I've been trying to talk to them … Our relationship's up there, just because I don't have to see them in person. They don't really know what's going on in my life." When asked how those conversations felt, Nicole confessed, "Weird, because I'm not used to that." But she remained open to communicating with them. Elena and her mother had repaired their relationship after her mother talked to a non-rejecting religious authority and changed her disapproval about Elena's queer identity. Elena expressed appreciation for the effort her mother had made to change: "I feel like that's something

I'm able to forgive at this point, because she has made it so far, and she has put a lot of effort into it, so I can appreciate her effort." This made Elena feel accepted and interested in staying *connected* to her mother and family, despite their rocky past.

Engaging family about LGBTQ issues. For some youth in the study, reengaging with their families meant engaging directly in conversations about queer and trans identities and issues. For many youth, this resulted in them trying to educate their family members, with diverse results. Bryan's mother had become much more accepting of his gay identity but still occasionally said hurtful things or committed microaggressions. Bryan's strategy for engaging with family and friends was "if you're willing to actually ask questions, and actually learn, I'm here for you … But if you just want to argue, tell me I'm going to hell, or I'm wrong, then I'm not going to talk to you." He noted that sometimes he simply did not have the emotional capacity to discuss these issues with others: "Sometimes it's just exhausting and sometimes I don't want to do it, so I just put a pause in the conversation with her and say, 'I'm not in the mood to talk about this.'" Riley also described trying to educate their grandmother, "I don't tell her these things to get my point across. I actually want her to learn, because she says this stuff in public, and it's gonna offend someone." Riley's grandmother was not receptive to changing her opinion, but Riley appreciated that she was willing to listen.

Several youths noted that they were motivated to educate their parents for the sake of their younger siblings, who they did not want to be impacted by or absorb the heterosexist and cisgenderist opinions of their parents. Elena explained her desire to stay in touch with her younger sibling: "Yeah, and you don't want them to turn out like your parents … He goes to Catholic school. He could very much be swayed to be of a certain

mindset, but I don't want him to be." She mused about different strategies for discussing queer and trans issues with him: "I'm like, 'When is the best time to … what kind of conversation should I be having with my little brother right now that I'm not?'" Sibling *connections* were an important factor in youth in the study being motivated to stay engaged with family.

Lucy's experience of engaging with her family after coming out illustrated the complexity and challenges of these relationships. Lucy had come out to her mother on a family vacation, only to be subjected to hours of interrogation and lecture about how her sexuality was sinful. At the time of our research interviews, Lucy was locked in a long-standing religious debate with her mother about sexuality: "She was always trying to give me different resources about how God hated me, and I was trying to give her different resources about how God didn't hate me, so we were just swapping resources." When asked if she felt like her mother's views were changing over time, she replied, "I always kind of felt like she was just like, 'You're making excuses.'" Just when she would think that maybe her mother had listened to her "like a month later she would come back, because she'd come up with more."

Despite this exhausting conflict, Lucy remained interested in being engaged with her family. She wondered if she should cut them off and go no-contact but was conflicted because her father had become more accepting: "My dad is super positive … He hasn't said anything negative in like over a year." She also wanted to stay in contact with her family due to her *connections* with her siblings, one of whom had disclosed to her that they were exploring their sexuality. Lucy explained, "I know that that's a thought in his

head and so I want to be a supportive person in his life because I know that having experienced things with my family, that he might have to go through that too."

Despite these incentives to stay *connected*, Lucy worried that her mother's struggle to accept her sexuality would continue to bring negativity into her relationship, "I'm kind of like at this place where I'm just kind of like weighing it all and trying to figure out a balance of like how do I have a relationship with my dad and brothers while distancing as much as possible from my mom?" Lucy stated that her *connection* to her partner was her biggest source of resilience and hope for the future. She expressed her confidence in the relationship as one of her primary supports in the ongoing conflict with her parents: "And like I love who I'm with and she's the best person that I could possibly be with. I can't even begin to imagine my life with somebody different and so I just want to fight for that." Lucy continued to have a relationship with her family, despite being very aware and worried about the long-term stress that her mother's rejection caused.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of all three research questions of this study. Youth provided extensive data about their experiences of family rejection, noting that heterosexism and cisgenderism had been present in their family homes prior to coming out, largely driven by their families' conservative political opinions or religious beliefs. This heterosexism and cisgenderism manifested as using slurs or believing in heterosexist, cisgenderist, or sexist stereotypes. This rejection was sometimes compounded by other family stressors. Youth reported an increase in several different kinds of rejecting actions from their families after coming out: an increase in heterosexist

and cisgenderist harassment and conflict, abuse and neglect, silence and avoidance, and control and isolation, as well as revoking access to housing or material support.

Youth experienced this rejection both before and after coming out. They described how the heterosexism and cisgenderism they witnessed in their family homes created tension when they came out to themselves and caused them to anticipate more rejection from their families after coming out. After they had come out, youth reported that their parents' rejecting behavior made them feel pain, disconnected from the family, stifled in the home, resistant to their parents' control, and uncertain about their relationship with their family.

Amidst these experiences of family rejection and their subsequent housing instability, youth used three techniques of resilience to make decisions about where to live: strategizing, coping, and connecting. They used these techniques to manage living at home with their rejecting families and make both planned and unplanned exits from their family homes. Youth in the study reported using a variety of locations and resources as places to stay: shelter, sleeping in their cars or public spaces, couch surfing with friends, exchanging sex or romance for a place to stay, living with a romantic partner, staying in school facilities, and living with family. As time passed, a number of youths in the study described how they managed ongoing relationships with their families, some choosing to end all contact, others limiting contact, and others continuing to engage with their families and discuss queer and trans issues. Throughout all these circumstances, youth used strategies to take agency over their lives, coping mechanisms to manage stress, and connections with people or community agencies to access information or support.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and

toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that the world is not

enough, that indeed something is missing… Queerness is essentially about the rejection

of a here and now and insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another

world.

José Esteban Muñoz

Introduction

This study has examined the experiences of queer and trans youth and young

adults in terms of family rejection of their queer and trans identities and their housing

instability. I spoke with 15 queer and trans young adults who shared their experiences of

heterosexist and cisgenderist rejection at the hands of their families, how that rejection

impacted their access to stable, safe housing, and how they made decisions about where

to stay. Using multiple in-depth interviews to capture young people's stories as

completely as possible, this study has illuminated how young adults take agency over

their own lives and pursue their goals. Young adults shared their techniques for

maintaining resilience in the face of marginalization and stress. In this chapter, I discuss

study findings, their relevance to the literature, and implications for social work research

and practice. I also address study limitations.

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Summary of Findings in Context of Existing Literature

This study had three research questions: 1) What kinds of heterosexist and cisgenderist rejection do queer and trans youth experience from their parents or guardians? 2) How do queer and transgender youth experience and react to that rejection? and 3) Amidst these experiences of rejection, how do youth make decisions about where to live?

When it comes to kinds of heterosexist and cisgenderist rejection, youth experienced diverse forms. After coming out as queer or trans, youth reported an increase of casual heterosexism or cisgenderism in their interactions with their families. They experienced abuse and neglect that intensified after their families learned of their queer or trans identities. Their families engaged in increased amounts of conflict—arguing with youth about their identities or trying to debate with them about the validity of queer or trans identities. Families used their power as adults in charge of youths' care to control youths' lives, isolating them from supportive friends or family and confiscating their belongings. Several youths in the study were kicked out of their family homes, sometimes multiple times over months or years. Families also gave their children the silent treatment, refusing to acknowledge their queer or trans identities or their autonomy as young adults. While there is not a definitive definition of what constitutes family rejection of queer and trans people and how to measure it in the scholarly literature, these findings echo the themes illuminated in another qualitative study of family rejection among Australian queer adults (Carastathis et al., 2017). That study found that participants reported a mixture of subtle and blatant rejection from their families, similar to how youth in this dissertation study reported varying degrees of directness in their

families' disapproval. The forms of blatant rejection reported in this study include increased heterosexist and cisgenderist conflict, abuse and neglect, control and isolation, and revoking access to housing. Conversely, silence and avoidance is a more subtle form of rejection. Carastathis et al. also found that queer adults reported continued rejection long after they had come out and forms of conditional love from their families (2017). Youth in this study also noted the heteronormative and cisnormative conditions their families placed on their love and support, controlling youths' self-expression, social relationships, and access to housing.

Youth discussed perceived antecedents to, or causes of, the rejection they faced. Youth reported that their families' negative opinions of queer and trans people in general, and their queer and trans identities in particular, stemmed from their religious beliefs or conservative political opinions. Many youths reported anticipating their families' negative reactions due to witnessing previous instances of heterosexist or cisgenderist behavior in their family home before coming out. Families' negative reactions were also intensified by stressors that were unrelated to youths' queer and trans identities. Youth described unhealthy family dynamics that predated their coming out and complicated their efforts to participate in family relationships. This finding aligns with other qualitative explorations of queer and trans youth homelessness that have found that preexisting family conflicts can be inflamed by conflict about youths' queer and trans identities and exacerbate their housing instability (Castellanos, 2016). Several youths discussed the difficulty they experienced in determining how much of their family's rejection was due to heterosexism or cisgenderism and how much was due to other family dynamics, some of which they described as existing in their families for generations.

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Youth responded to their families' rejection with a mixture of emotions and reactions. They described the ways they adjusted their behaviors to avoid conflict with their families, from hiding their identities prior to coming out to limiting the topics they would discuss with family. They reported that their families' rejection caused them to feel pain and disconnection from their families. This disconnection frequently motivated them to leave home. They also described how their families' efforts to control and silence them caused them to feel stifled and unable to pursue their own goals. They resisted their families' rejection by pushing back against this control and silence. Some youth expressed ambiguity and uncertainty about how to deal with their families' rejecting behavior while still maintaining family relationships. These findings align with themes in the well-established literature about how parental rejection negatively impacts the mental well-being of queer and trans people (D'Amico & Julien, 2012; D'Amico et al., 2015; Needham & Austin, 2010; Ryan et al., 2010; Shilo & Savaya, 2011). While the mental health impacts of family rejection were not the primary focus of this study, youth in the study did report feeling distress and pain in response to their families' rejection. Several youths reported mental health hospitalizations or symptoms that impacted their ability to find and maintain stable housing. Youth also reported that their families' rejection, both before and after coming, had negative impacts on their queer or trans identities, confirming other scholarship which has found that queer people who experience family rejection report higher levels of internalized heterosexism and struggle with their identity (Bregman et al., 2013).

When it comes to making decisions about how to balance their families' rejecting actions with their need for housing, youth relied on a variety of resilience techniques.

These techniques fell under the themes of strategizing, coping, and connecting. These forms of resilience, especially the theme of connecting, align with and support Carastathis et al.'s findings about queer adults' resilience in response to family rejection (2017). Interestingly, participants in the Carastathis et al. study reported that they also strategically concealed their queer identities after coming out to minimize conflict with family. Youth in this study did occasionally describe concealing their identities prior to coming out or minimizing their identities after coming out to avoid conflict, but they also emphatically wanted to express their identities with their families and larger communities. They strategized about how to secure better housing and to pursue their goals for their futures, frequently planning their exits from their families' homes for months ahead of time. After leaving the home, they strategized to find housing solutions on very short notice. Youth in the study stayed in a variety of places and housing arrangements after leaving their families' homes: emergency shelter, moving away to attend school, couch surfing with friends, living with romantic partners, living with supportive family, or sleeping in their cars or public places. They were reflective about the strategies they used to evaluate their housing options, focusing on their immediate safety as their primary concern.

Young people in the study also described the multitude of coping techniques that they had developed to manage the stress of their families' rejection and housing instability. They discussed how they used creativity, like photography, journaling, and painting, to help them cope with feeling stifled under their parents' control. They carried mementos and self-care tools with them, among their limited belongings, to help them stay grounded amidst uncertainty and stress. They spent time in nature or listening to

music to help them stay calm. They described the importance of reflecting on all that they had learned from their experiences with their families and of maintaining a positive outlook and sense of self.

Finally, youth explained the importance of connecting with other people and community resources. Youth shared thoughtful insights on the various services and programs in their areas, describing both the support they offered and the gaps or barriers they encountered. Several youths described how their connections with other LGBTQ people or people in the recovery community provided the affirmation and social support they did not receive from their families. Finding people, either young peers or adults, who accepted them as queer and trans people and supported them was a transformational experience for many young adults in the study. This aligns with other scholarship that has found that connecting with trans-affirming people and programs is a source of resilience for trans youth experiencing housing instability (Shelton, 2016). Youth frequently relied on these supportive relationships for assistance with their housing, ranging from using their social networks to find places to stay to sharing information about services or the logistics of living independently. This aligns with scholarship noting the importance of queer and trans youth establishing a supportive social network (Carastathis et al., 2017). Given that the presence of one or more supportive adults in their lives meant that youth were less likely to report a suicide attempt in the last year, these findings affirm and illustrate the importance of supportive adults in the lives of queer and trans youth (The Trevor Project, 2019). Many youths also expressed a strong sense of connection and altruism toward other queer and trans people and others experiencing housing instability.

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For many youths in the study, connections included ongoing relationships with family, despite their past conflict and no longer living at home. Youth ranged widely in their attitudes toward their families. Some had written off their families and had no interest in continuing any relationships. Others reported that their parents had experienced huge shifts in opinion since they had come out and were now more accepting of their queer or trans identities. Most youth fell somewhere in the middle, actively working to find a balance between feeling rejected for who they are and other dimensions of their family relationships. Several youths expressed hope that their families would become more accepting. Others wondered if they should cut contact for their own emotional safety. The dynamic of balancing the desire to stay in touch with their families with the pain that that contact sometimes caused compounded youths' stress and sometimes complicated their housing situations as they moved in and out of the home. Given that youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to lack parental ties than their middle- or upper-class peers (Hartnett, Fingerman, & Birditt, 2018) and that housing instability is itself a manifestation of lack of economic resources, there may be a class element in youths' complicated relationship with families.

Overall, this study found that family rejection does not have one simple impact on queer and trans young people and their housing. Rejecting behaviors vary widely, from severe abuse and neglect to silence and awkwardness. The impact of these behaviors, however, is similar. Youth feel hurt and uncomfortable, which motivates them to leave the family home. Youth respond to family rejection by practicing resilience through strategizing, coping, and connecting. Much of their drive to become adults independent of their families was grounded in their desire to express their identities freely.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, especially when considering the implications for social work research and practices. The findings of this study, with its small sample limited to one metropolitan area, are not generalizable to all queer and trans young adults experiencing family rejection and housing instability. It is important to note that there is selection bias in the sample, because it only includes youth who volunteered and therefore may have been more prepared to discuss their difficult experiences with a stranger. The small size of the sample also limited the diversity of racial and ethnic identities of the study participants. While youth in the study did come from a variety of racial and ethnic identities, it is extremely important to acknowledge that experiences of heterosexism and cisgenderism are heavily racialized (Ferguson, 2004), and combining youth of diverse racial and ethnic identities together in one study may flatten some of the differences in experiences. Youth who were assigned female at birth were also overrepresented in this study, so the experiences of cisgender male or transfeminine youth may be underrepresented among the study findings. Nonetheless, this study offers a deep and thorough exploration of the experiences of queer and trans youth experiencing family rejection and housing instability. By including youth of many identities in one sample, I hoped to examine the similarities of marginalization from the shared impact of heterosexism and cisgenderism. Future research should examine the experiences of queer and trans youth of different racial and ethnic groups to illuminate the ways in which racism and white supremacy intersect with heterosexism and cisgenderism.

The diversity of ages in the sample also complicated the analysis. Some youth were in their mid-twenties, had established their own stable housing, and were retrospectively reflecting on their experiences of housing instability. Other youth were recruited from an emergency shelter and were still in the midst of their housing instability; they tended to be in their late teens or early twenties and had less time to reflect on their experiences. They were not able to share what had helped them establish housing stability because they were still in the midst of housing instability. Future studies should examine these differences in age and any developmental differences between youth in different stages of their young adulthood.

Another study limitation was the assessment of youths' housing journeys and trajectories. While study interview questions were designed to capture youths' experiences leaving home and finding other housing, the questions did not explicitly direct youth to walk me through their stories chronologically. Even when I did ask youth to relay events chronologically, they frequently referred to housing events or situations later in the interview that they had forgotten or neglected to mention in their chronology. Upon reflection, I feel that I underestimated the messiness of these histories and how difficult it would be for youth to recall these events in an orderly, neat fashion. These events did not occur in an orderly nor neat fashion. This messiness created complications in data analysis because it made it difficult to establish similarities and differences among the sample. In future studies, I would ask youth to create a map or timeline of their housing trajectories as part of the interview. While this will still be limited by youths' retrospective lens, the visual aid may help both the young person and the researcher walk

through their experiences in chronological order and establish as clear of a trajectory as possible.

Finally, this study is limited by the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher. As with any qualitative research, I made efforts to reflect on my own identities and experiences and limit my own biases. However, my subjectivity as a queer, trans person who had not experienced family rejection and whose economic and educational privilege has shielded me from housing instability cannot be removed from the analysis. My lens has influenced the analysis of youths' interviews and the organization of these findings. My positionality and identities may have also impacted youths' comfort and willingness to share in the research interviews. In the spirit of reciprocity, I shared my queer and trans identities with all research participants during the screening process. However, when reviewing the youth profiles and my assessments of data quality for each interview, I found that I felt I had the lowest levels of rapport and data quality with some Black participants and one transfeminine participant. My Whiteness, my economic and educational status, my masculinity, my age, or simply my status as an established, "post-transition" trans person may have prevented these youth from feeling safe in the research interview and sharing their experiences in more depth. Despite this, the youth profiles showed that I felt I had good rapport with most study participants and this rapport allowed them to share their experiences in more detail.

Implications

This study has many important implications for social work research and practice. It fills an important gap in our understanding of what family rejection looks like and how it is experienced by queer and trans youth, illuminating how this rejection either forces

them out of the home or encourages them to leave. Further, it illuminates youth's decision-making processes and techniques for fostering and practicing resilience amidst pain and stress.

Implications for Social Work Research

The findings of this study align with a small but growing scholarly literature about the resilience of queer and trans youth and young adults experiencing housing instability (Carastathis et al., 2017; Shelton, 2016; Shelton et al., 2018). Future social work research should continue to examine the explanatory power of this study's proposed model for youth resilience amidst family rejection and housing instability. First, the model should be examined among queer and trans youth experiencing family rejection and housing instability in other locations to determine if the themes of strategizing, coping, and connecting are applicable to queer and trans youth in other locations. Future research should assess for differences in youth experience across rural, suburban, and urban environments. Family rejection behaviors may differ across these diverse geographic conditions.

Future research should also examine the applicability of this model to straight and cisgender youth and young adults experiencing housing instability. While not experiencing the same kinds of heterosexist and cisgenderist rejection as their queer and trans peers, straight and cisgender youth often report other forms of family conflict as a driving forces in their housing instability (Choi et al., 2015). Researching straight and cisgender youths' relationships with family throughout their housing instability will illuminate similarities and differences in youth experiences, potentially leading to

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interventions which can help youth of all sexual orientations and gender identities think constructively about their relationships and boundaries with family.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This study holds several important and interesting implications for social work practices with queer youth and young adults experiencing family rejection and housing instability. First, the model proposed in this study is a useful heuristic device for identifying key moments of intervention for social worker practitioners. A youth who is still living at home but fears that their housing may be threatened if their family learns of their queer or trans identities has different service needs from a youth who has been kicked out and is living on the streets. Identifying where a youth falls on the model in terms of leaving home, finding alternative housing options, and managing ongoing contact or lack of contact with their family will allow social workers to tailor their support to the needs of each young person they serve.

This model also suggests innovative opportunities for adapting housing services to the needs of queer and trans youth experiencing family rejection and housing instability. Service providers might consider developing outreach efforts to reach youth who are still living at home but fear for their housing, assigning that youth a case manager who can help them create a safety plan for living at home and/or a plan for moving out to a safe and stable alterative housing option. Housing service locations may consider developing programming to help youth develop positive coping mechanisms based off the coping techniques cited by youth in this study, including devoting more resources to arts programs to give young people outlets for self-expression. Service providers should consider establishing mentoring or even host home programs for queer

and trans youth with queer and trans adults who can provide emotional and material support and the affirmation youth cannot receive from their families. The findings of this study also align with other scholarship that has documented the need for ongoing training on queer and trans identities for housing program staff (Abramovich, 2016; Shelton, 2015).

Providers may also work with youth to develop healthy boundaries with their families, perhaps even engaging some families in restorative justice practices or family counseling modalities to minimize conflict and help a young person stay at or return to the family home. Learning to develop adult boundaries and relationships with one's family is a rite of passage in young adulthood that all of us experience, regardless of our sexual orientation, gender identity, or housing status. Assisting youth in reflecting on their own goals for their relationships with their families and developing boundaries may have beneficial impacts on their housing stability.

Impact of Study on Researcher

Just as it is important to acknowledge my own subjectivity and positionality in the study design, analysis, and findings, I feel it is important to name and discuss the impact that this study had on me as a researcher and a thinker. Setting aside the tremendous growth that I experienced simply due to the dissertation process, I have also observed growth and transformation in how I think about young people, housing, and systematic heterosexism and cisgenderism. While I have a lifetime of experience with these systems of oppression and marginalization, this study has prompted me to reflect on how my privileges have shielded me from some of the most insidious and devastating effects of heterosexism and cisgenderism. Talking with these young people and spending so much

time immersed in their transcripts has also caused me to feel tremendous gratitude for both my family of origin and my chosen family of queer and trans people. I am more mindful of all of the people who helped me on my journey to independent adulthood: my parents, mentors, professors, colleagues, and supervisors. I am enormously grateful to my study participants for sharing their experiences and wisdom with me. I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to share their words and their insights with the scholarly community and society at large.

Finally, it feels important to acknowledge the reality of completing this study in the current political moment. What does it mean to pursue a doctoral degree when science and empirical evidence appear to hold little sway in political decision-making? What does it mean to study systematic heterosexism and cisgenderism when queer and trans people in the United States are simultaneously experiencing both unprecedented cultural visibility and acceptance and relentless attacks on our legal rights and an increase in violence? What does it mean to study the role of healthy and unhealthy family relationships when immigrant parents are being forcibly separated from their young children on our southern border? What does it mean to study homelessness during the same time period during which Denver residents voted to maintain an urban camping ban that empowers police to harass homeless citizens?

Despite much reflection, I don't have answers to these questions. I simply feel that it is important to name that this study took place, and therefore is the product, of a uniquely tense moment in the United States' history. It is clear that we as a society have a long way to go in addressing heterosexism, cisgenderism, and other forms of oppression, marginalization, and bigotry. I am hopeful that the young people who participated in this

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study and their peers will encourage us to think differently about power, about how to love one another across difference, and about how to persist in the face of tremendous stress and fear.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of this dissertation study in the context of the larger scholarly literature on family rejection and queer and trans youth homelessness. Notably, it aligns with previous studies on the importance of connection and social supports in maintaining resilience among queer and trans youth experiencing family rejection. The chapter also reviews the implications of study findings. In terms of social work research, there is a need for future research to continue to examine and test the relationships in the two models presented. In terms of social work practice, these findings present opportunities to develop youth housing services that are more attentive to the needs of queer and trans youth experiencing family rejection and housing instability. Programs such as enhanced outreach to youth who may still be living at home, mentoring with queer and trans adults, and family counseling may prove effective in reducing queer and trans youth homelessness. The chapter ends with reflections on how I was impacted by the research study.

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APPENDIX B: STUDY SCREENING PROTOCOL

Introduction
"Hello and thank you for your interest in participating in the LGBTQ Family Rejection and Housing study. I am a queer and trans graduate student researcher at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work. Over the last three years, I've researched LGBTQ youth homelessness and learned that family rejection of LGBTQ identities is a major cause for young people to become homeless or worry about their housing. My goal for this study is to learn more about those experiences and how we can support young people in those situations. Is it ok if I ask you a couple of questions to make sure that you qualify to participate in the study?"

Question	Screening Action
"How old are you?"	If age is between 18 and 24, screen in.
"Do you currently live in the Denver metro area?"	If yes, screen in.
"Do you identity as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer community?"	If yes, screen in.
"Did/do your parents or guardians have a negative reaction to your LGBTQ identity?"	If yes, screen in.

"Did your parent or guardian's negative reaction to your LGBTQ identity cause you to leave their home or worry about your ability to continue living with them?"	If yes, screen in.
"Have you been hospitalized for a mental health condition or attempted suicide in the last two months?" Follow up: "Are you currently connected to a therapist or mental health professional?"	If no, screen in. If yes, ask follow-up question below. If answer to follow up question is yes, screen in.
Conclusion	
If screened in to the study: "Thanks for answering these questions. You do qualify to participate in the study and I would love to talk with you and learn about your experiences, over two interviews. Can we set up a time for the first interview? It will take approximately an hour and a half and you will receive a gift card for your time."	
If screened out of the study: "Thanks for answering these questions. At this time, you do not qualify for participation in the study. I appreciate your interest in the study and would be happy to share my findings with you if you are interested."	

APPDENIX C: STUDY CONSENT FORM

University of Denver
Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: LGBTQ Youth, Family Rejection, and Housing Stability

Researcher(s):
Jonah DeChants, MSSP, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver
Kim Bender, MSW, PhD, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver

Study Site: Rainbow Ally, The GLBT Center of Colorado, Urban Peak

Purpose
You are being asked to be in a research study to understand how LGBTQ young adults navigate family rejection of their LGBTQ identities and housing instability.This form provides you with information about the study. A member of the research team will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you have important perspectives about how family rejection of LGBTQ identities impacts housing and how to improve services for LGBTQ youth and young adults.

Procedures
If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews about your experiences and insights on family rejection and housing.
- The first interview will take approximate an hour and a half and include questions about your experiences with family and housing.
- The second interview will take place a month later, take approximately a half hour, and include questions about your thoughts on emerging themes from other participant interviews and what makes you feel at home.

Voluntary Participation
Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to answer interview questions for any reason without penalty or other benefits to which you are entitled.

Risks or Discomforts
The researchers have taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when the researchers are careful to avoid them. It is possible that discussing issues about family conflict and housing could be uncomfortable or bring up distressing memories. If this occurs, the researchers will arrange for supportive care from staff at Rainbow Alley or Urban Peak.

Benefits
This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about how young people navigate family rejection of their LGBTQ identities and housing. We hope to use the data collected during this interview to help improve services for LGBTQ youth.

You may benefit from being in this study because you will have the chance to share your personal experiences and voice your perspectives on how to best serve LGBTQ youth.

Incentives to Participate
You will be given a $20 gift card for the first interview and a $10 gift card for the second interview.

Study Costs (if applicable)
You will not be expected to pay any costs related to the study.

Confidentiality
To keep your information safe, your name and contact information will not be attached to any of your interview answers. Instead a study pseudonym (fake name) will be used. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer accessible only to our research team. The researchers will retain the data for approximately 2 years until the study is complete. The data will not be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study and will not contain information that could identify you.

With your permission, we will audio record your interview to be sure we capture all of your ideas. These recordings will be temporarily stored on a password-protected computer. Only the research team will have access to this recording. The recording will be destroyed after a research assistant listens to it and types out your confidential response. The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published and your pseudonym will be used.

The researcher is a Mandated Reporter. If you share any thoughts about hurting yourself or someone else, he will work with you to you to mental health services.

Questions
The researcher carrying out this study is Jonah DeChants. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call Jonah at 720-466-1804 or Kim Bender at 303-871-6760.

If the researchers cannot be reached, or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) about; (1) questions, concerns or complaints regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects issues, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4015 or by emailing IRBChair@du.edu, or you may contact the Office for Research Compliance by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu, calling 303-871-4050 or in writing (University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121).

Agreement to be in this study

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

Signature:_____   Date:___
_____

Print Name:_____

Please [initial/check] in the appropriate boxes:

☐   I agree to be audio recorded for this study.

☐   I do NOT agree to be audio recorded for this study.

Pseudonym to be used when writing about my interview: _____

Theme	Introductory Question(s)	Possible Follow-up Question(s)
Participant demographic questions	- How old are you? - How would you describe your gender identity? - How would you describe your sexual orientation? - How would you describe your race or ethnicity? - Where are you currently living? - How long have you been living there?	- Are there any other identities that you hold that you feel have impacted your relationship with your parents or your housing stability?
Parental reactions to queer / trans identity	- How did your parents find out about your queer/trans identity? - Can you tell me about how they reacted?	- Did you come out to them voluntarily or were you outed? - How did they communicate their feelings about your queer/trans identity? - Did their reactions to your identity change over time? If so, how?
Youth reaction to parental attitudes / reactions	- How did your parents' reaction to your queer/trans identity make you feel? - How did you respond to your parents' reactions?	- How did your parents' reaction to your queer/trans identity make you feel about your relationship with your parents? - How did your parents' reaction to your queer/trans identity make you feel about your queer/trans identity? - Did you behave differently after your parents' reaction?
Youth concerns about housing	- How do/did your parents' reactions affect how you think about your housing situation?	- Did you choose to leave home? Why or why not? - Did you think about leaving home? Why or why not? - Were you forced to leave home? - If you didn't leave home, how did you feel about living at home?

Youth actions in response to housing concerns	- What did you do in response to your worries or concerns about your housing situation?	- Where did you go after leaving home? Why? - Did you research resources for people in your situation?
Youth actions in response to housing concerns	- What did you do in response to your worries or concerns about your housing situation?	- Where did you go after leaving home? Why? - Did you research resources for people in your situation? - If you didn't leave home, did you act differently at home around your parents? - Who or what supported you during this time?
Youth aspirations for housing	- What would your ideal living situation be? - Imagine you woke up tomorrow morning and your living situation was exactly the way you wanted it to be, what would you see?	- What, if anything, do you feel like you have learned from this experience? - What things are you doing right now to work toward your ideal housing situation? - What do you feel like you need to achieve your ideal housing situation?

APPENDIX E: HANDOUT FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Information about the study

Thank you for volunteering to be a part of the LGBTQ Youth Family Rejection and Housing Study! I appreciate you sharing your experiences with me.

In all of my questions, there are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your own perspective and opinions, please feel free to share as much as you feel comfortable. If you feel uncomfortable, you can skip questions or let me know.

Here is a brief outline of the topics that we will be discussing today:
- Who you are, how you identify
- Your family's reaction to your LGBTQ identity
- How your family's reaction made you feel
- How your family's reaction impacted your ability to live at home
- What you have done to maintain stable housing
- What is your ideal housing situation

For our next interview, I would love if you could <u>bring a photo of something (an object or a scene) that makes you feel at home</u>. We'll get to chat about your photo in the next interview in a month.

Thank you again! And feel free to contact me at <u>Jonah.DeChants@du.edu</u> or 720-466-1804 if you have any questions or concerns.

APPENDIX F: STUDY INTERVIEW GUIDE, SECOND INTERVIEW

Theme	Introductory Question(s)	Possible Follow-up Question(s)
Member checking for participant's new reflections	- Sometimes, after reflecting on questions, people think of new ideas. Do you have any new thoughts about the questions I asked last time?	- What made you think of this?
Update on family / housing situation	- Has anything changed with your family situation? - Has anything changed with your housing situation?	- What caused those changes? - How have you been affected by those changes? - How, if at all, have you changed your behavior in response to these changes?
Photo elicitation	- Thank you for bringing your photo of what "home" means to you. Can you tell me about the photo and why it represents home?	- What is this image? - What in this image is meaningful to you? - Why does this image represent "home" to you? - How do you feel when you look at it now?
Constant comparison, gathering participant reflections on emerging themes	- Here are some of the themes that I have heard from other interviews, do they resonate with you?	- Is this similar to your experiences? - How so? - If not, why not? - What is missing?

APPENDIX G: LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM URBAN PEAK

URBAN PEAK

Real life. Real change.

June 5th, 2018

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of Denver
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Aspen Hall North
2280 S Vine St.
Denver, CO 80208

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing, on behalf of Urban Peak, to offer our full support for Jonah DeChants' proposed research study titled 'LGBTQ Youth, Family Rejection, and Housing Stability'. Urban Peak helps young people overcome homelessness and other real life challenges by providing safety, respect, essential services and a supportive community, empowering them to become self-reliant adults. Since 1988, Urban Peak has been there for tens of thousands of youth — homeless, vulnerable, without basic needs. We offer safe shelter and meals, transitional housing, education and employment programs, medical care, mental health and substance abuse counseling, creative outlets, and recreational and youth development activities. For more information, visit www.urbanpeak.org.

As Deputy Director and Director of Research, I feel strongly that this research will be of great benefit to Urban Peak and other agencies working with homeless youth. As planned, Jonah DeChants' proposed research will respect and protect the young people at Urban Peak as research participants, as well as contribute to our knowledge and understanding of this population. I look forward to collaborating with Jonah to implement this proposed research study with Urban Peak youth.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at 303-974-2916.

Sincerely,

Kendall J. Rames, MA, LPC
Deputy Director and Director of Research
Urban Peak Denver

APPENDIX H: LETTER OF SUPPORT FROM RAINBOW ALLEY

June 5th, 2018

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of Denver
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
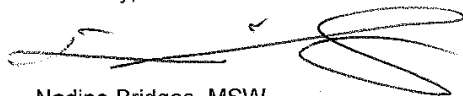Aspen Hall North
2280 S Vine St.
Denver, CO 80208

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing, on behalf of Rainbow Alley, a program of the GLBT Center of Colorado, to offer our full support for Jonah DeChants' proposed research study titled 'LGBTQ Youth, Family Rejection, and Housing Stability'. Rainbow Alley is a safe and brave space supporting LGBTQ youth and their allies ages 11 to 21. We provide a drop-in space, youth-led events and activities, counseling and support groups, health services and life skills—all in a warm, welcoming, and supportive environment. For more information, please refer to https://glbtcolorado.org/programs/rainbow-alley/.

As Director, I feel strongly that this research will be of great benefit to Rainbow Alley and other agencies working with LGBTQ youth. As planned, Jonah DeChants' proposed research will respect and protect the young people at Rainbow Alley as research participants, as well as contribute to our knowledge and understanding of this population. I look forward to collaborating with Jonah to implement this proposed research study with Rainbow Alley youth.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at 303-733-7743.

Sincerely,

Nadine Bridges, MSW
Director, Rainbow Alley
GLBT Center of Colorado