

2023-12-01

An examination of LGBTQIA+ college students and their past experiences with homelessness

Michaela Dakota Castor
University of Texas at El Paso

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Castor, Michaela Dakota, "An examination of LGBTQIA+ college students and their past experiences with homelessness" (2023). *Open Access Theses & Dissertations*. 3963.
https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/3963

This is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.

AN EXAMINATION OF LGBTQIA+ COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR PAST
EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESSNESS

MICHAELA DAKOTA CASTOR

Master's Program in Sociology

APPROVED:

Aurelia Lorena Murga, Ph.D., Chair

Cristina Morales, Ph.D.

Eva Moya, Ph.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Copyright 2023 Michaela Dakota Castor

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to those who have inspired me to grow and become a better person every day. Thank you to my family, friends, teachers, and professors who have been stepping stones and the motivation I needed to become someone who can advocate for those whose voices need amplification. To the people who shared their stories, thank you for sharing your deepest and most intimate moments with me. Through you, we continue to make the world a better place for LGBTQIA+ youth following our footsteps.

To all the LGBTQIA+ individuals reading this, there is a place for you at the table: reach for it. You do not need to change. You are perfect the way you are. Storms will come, but they will always pass.

AN EXAMINATION OF LGBTQIA+ COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR PAST
EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESSNESS

by

MICHAELA DAKOTA CASTOR, B.A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2023

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Aurelia Lorena Murga for her support throughout my master's and undergraduate degrees. Thank you for being a gentle and kind professor and giving me a plethora of opportunities. To my thesis committee, Dr. Cristina Morales and Dr. Eva Moya, thank you for your mentorship and dedication to my work. Thank you, Nora Hernandez, for being an amazing mentor and always pushing me to do better. Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Juarez, thank you for being amazing educators and helping me grow to be a better educator myself. It is inspiring to have such talented and knowledgeable women guide me in this stage of my life.

To my parents and siblings, thank you for accepting me for who I was. You were never ashamed of me and always had my back. I never had to hide my sexuality or lifestyle and that is the biggest blessing any queer kid could ask for. Mom, thank you for always leading by example when I was younger. You may not have noticed, but I learned how to be selfless, hardworking, and an avid reader because of you. Sister, thank you for being a mini-me and proving that I was a good big sister to you. Brother, I appreciate all your help throughout the years and being the coolest guy I know. I hope both of you have the brightest futures ahead of you and can lean on me for support. To my partner, thank you for being patient with me, cheering me on, and keeping me company during these late study hours. I hope I can be just as amazing during your academic journey. Penelope, I know you can't read this because you are a dog, but you are the best study buddy dog I could ever ask for.

To my dearest friend group, Victoria, Alyssa, and Tony. I appreciate all our late-night study sessions and endless cups of Village Inn coffee at the back of the restaurant. Anthony and Noe, thanks for being great friends to me. You are only as good as the friends around

you, thankfully it is you guys. I hope we are friends until the end of time. Thank you to my Bowie and Eastlake family. You guys have given me so much feedback and advice, I appreciate you all very much.

Lastly, thank you to the participants who shared their stories with me. You have helped our community in many ways. I hope you heal from your past wounds and receive all the love, care, and respect that you deserve. I will always root for you.

Abstract

In the United States, there are more than 20 million people who identify as LGBTQIA+ which equates to roughly 8% of the population (Powell 2021). Although LGBT youth only make up 5% to 10% of the youth population, 28% will experience housing insecurity (The Trevor Project 2022). For many members of the LGBTQIA+ community, “coming out” is a sentimental and often scary experience. LGBTQIA+ youth, in particular, are afraid of being rejected and kicked out of their homes because of their sexuality and gender expression. 1 in 4 LGBTQIA+ individuals will be homeless and 68% will face some sort of familial abuse due to their sexuality (Lesly University). Therefore, the LGBTQIA+ community faces higher rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harming compared to their heterosexual cis-gendered counterparts (Conron et al. 2022). City and educational resources can play vital roles in the comfort and safety of their LGBTQIA+ community members. Through interviews, seven of the ten participants faced homelessness due to their families rejecting their sexuality. Participants also shared stories of mental and physical distress and abuse from family members. Most participants needed food, housing and personal care items when experiencing homelessness. This thesis seeks to understand the lived experiences and resources utilized or needed during the time LGBTQIA+ persons spent homeless. Using semi-structured interviews, my research hopes to shed light on the ways institutional and educational sectors can help LGBT individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

Table of Contents

Dedication	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Abstract	vii
Table of Contents	viii
Introduction	1
Definitions	2
Literature Review	5
Homelessness in the LGBTQIA+ population	7
College LGBTQIA+ students	9
Resources	10
Summary of literature review	11
Theoretical Model	13
Methods	14
Positionality	17
Findings	18
The Significance of Sexuality: Christian and Karina	18
Christian	19
Karina	22
Mental and Physical health and Abuse: Melissa, Stephanie, Ashley and Ruby	25
Melissa	25
Stephanie	28
Ashley	30

Ruby	32
The Shame of Needing Help: Angie, Isabella and Olivia	35
Angie	35
Isabella	38
Olivia	40
Resources	42
<i>“I couldn’t afford anything!”</i>	42
<i>“Thankfully I had resources”</i>	44
Policy Implementations	48
Study Limitations	51
Discussion	53
Call to Action	54
Conclusion: We are Here; We are Queer!.....	58
Appendix	60
Table One: Participant Demographics	60
Table Two: Participant Resources	61
Recruitment Flyer	63
Interview Guide	64
References	66
Vita	73

Introduction

Sexual and gender minorities make up a small percentage of the United States (U.S.) population and are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Homelessness affects the LGBTQ community at double the rate than the heterosexual community (Morton et al. 2018) with approximately 1.6 million youth experiencing homelessness and LGBTQ youth making up 40% of this due to the unacceptance of their sexuality by family members (Page 2017). In fact, the LGBTQ population faces increased rates of discrimination in multiple realms: education, workplace, and housing. 1 in every 4 LGB persons have faced job loss due to their sexuality and this is even higher for transgender individuals at 36%. This number jumps to 50% if the individual was a person of color (POC) or had a disability (Medina and Mahowald 2023). The experiences of LGBTQ+ peoples, while diverse, are filled with constant experiences of discrimination that lead to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide. As a result, being a part of this community puts a person at risk for loss of safety, housing, and health.

Importantly, we can see how negative factors that are added to one's identity can inhibit someone's quality of life. Particularly, in the United States, we can see how straying away from the societal norm of cis-gendered heterosexuality can cause a plethora of obstacles to overcome. As previously mentioned, members of the LGBTQ community have higher rates of homelessness due to family members being unable to accept their sexuality. This mistreatment usually leads to higher rates of mental health disorders, self-harm, and suicidal ideations. In 2022, a study conducted on Texas LGBT youth between the ages of 13-24 showed that 72% reported symptoms of anxiety, 59% reported symptoms of depression and 47% stated they thought about suicide the previous year (The Trevor Project 2022).

These numbers rose when adding the additional stress of facing homelessness. A study conducted by Strauss et al. (2017:10) on homeless LGBT persons showed that “almost three-quarters of participants had at some point been diagnosed with depression; 72 percent with anxiety disorder; 80 percent had self-harmed; and 48 percent had attempted suicide.” These numbers show the mental and physical health of LGBTQIA+ individuals and the barriers they face when seeking care.

For these reasons, my research looks at understanding the lived experiences and resources that LGBTQ+ individuals had during the time they spent facing housing insecurity, in particular, homelessness. I would like to understand what resources, relationships, and experiences they had during this difficult time in their lives. My substantive research questions revolve around whether homeless LGBTQ students faced educational/institutional barriers to receiving help and what kind of family support they had during this time. I want to shed light on 1) the lived experiences that LGBTQ individuals faced when homeless, 2) what resources did they use and, 3) what resources they wished they had at their education institutions or near campus. This study will contribute to the LGBTQIA+ community within the US/Mexico border. To my knowledge, there have been no qualitative studies investigating the experiences of homeless LGBTQIA+ college students, especially when also recalling their homeless high school situations.

Definitions

In this section, I share definitions that can assist in understanding my research: homosexuality, gender expression, and homelessness. Homosexuality is a sexual orientation in which a person has a sexual or romantic attraction to others of one's same-sex (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The acronym LGBT is commonly known as a way for someone to

express their sexuality. The “L” represents those who identify as lesbian, “G” for gay, “B” for bisexual, and “T” for transgender. However, we are seeing this acronym shift to LGBTQIA+ to include new gender and sexual expressions. The additional letters stand for Queer/Questioning, Intersex and Asexual and the plus sign to validate the sexual and gender minorities that are not represented by the acronym.

Gender expression is the way in which someone chooses to express their outward gender identity. The most common gender expressions are transgender, non-binary and gender nonconforming. Pronouns are vital for gender minorities as they give them control over how people address them and how they wish to be seen. Transgender is “a general term that describes people whose gender identity, or their internal sense of being male, female, or something else, does not match the sex they were assigned at birth,” whereas gender non-conforming individuals do not follow the societal customs of their assigned gender (Lowell 2021). An example of gender non-conformity is a woman who has short boyish hair, dresses masculine, and changed her feminine name to a unisex name, therefore going against societal norms of a woman. Nonbinary individuals feel as if they do not fit into the binary genders of a man or a woman (Wamsley 2021). These individuals most often go by they/them pronouns to avoid being labeled with a certain gender pronoun marker. As society continues to become more secular, educated, and individualistic, more people are “coming out” to their families, friends, and community. “Coming Out” refers to an individual who has told others their gender expression or sexuality. There is no right time for someone to come out as it largely depends on their comfort and safety within their network. However, most teenagers come out at the age of 17. Possibly due to their new understanding of their sexuality and wish to express it freely.

Homelessness refers to a person's inability to maintain a permanent residence and usually dwells in a shelter, outside structure, or in a car. In 2022, there are more than half a million homeless individuals and Texas has the fourth largest homeless population with 27,229 individuals (World Population). For many LGBTQIA+ individuals, coming out means risking their safety and shelter within their family unit. According to Lesley University, 68% of LGBT teens who have come out received negative backlash and more than 1 in 4 will be forced to move out of their homes. This is alarming as LGBT youth make up only 9% of the youth population but 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBT (Couch 2021). Those LGBT youth are then subject to 7.4 more acts of violence on the streets compared to their heterosexual counterparts and are more likely to be approached for sex in exchange for money, clothes or food (Lambda Legal 2009). Knowing this, many LGBTQIA+ youth decide to hide their gender expression and sexual status until financially able to provide for themselves.

Literature Review

There has been a shift in sexual expression and acceptance based on the generation people are born into. For example, 20.8% of Gen Z (2000-present) identify as LGBT compared to only 0.8% of traditionalists (born before 1946). This is largely due to society becoming more aware and accepting of those who identify as LGBTQIA+. Social movements such as Stonewall in 1969, Pride Parades, and media representation have introduced Americans to LGBTQIA+ culture. A study conducted by Gallup explored the opinions of Americans and how they view gays and lesbians. In 2001, 53% of those surveyed believed that homosexuality is a moral sin compared to 33% in 2023 (Gallup 2023). Although this is a change for the better, not everyone is accepted by their parents or guardians. Many LGBTQIA+ people have experienced discrimination, abuse, and/or have been kicked out of their residences due to their sexuality. For many LGBTQIA+ people, the risk of coming out comes with great consequences. Those who are “out” to their families and friends often experience higher rates of stigma inside their families (64%), outside of family (60%), and are more likely to face physical harm (62%) than those who are not out to their families (Morton et al. 2018). A study done by Galop (2022) on LGBTQIA+ youth showed that “30% first experienced abuse within a family environment when they were below the age of 11, 33% first experienced familial abuse between 12 and 18 years old and 31% were over 18 when they first experienced abuse from their family.” Besides causing anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations, young LGBTQIA+ are forced to run away from home or are kicked out.

The LGBTQIA+ community is growing as there are over 100 sexualities and every year there are more ways one can describe themselves (Igoe 2022). Some of the newer

sexualities included are autosexual (being attracted to oneself), pomosexual (rejecting labels regarding sexuality), and multisexual (having multiple labels for sexuality), (Igoe 2022). An individual can discover their sexuality at any time. According to Pew Research Center (2013), 5% of LGBTQ individuals knew of their sexual orientation and gender expression before age 10 and 56% knew around 10-19 years of age.

Gender expression, or how people choose to present themselves, should not be confused with sex, which are biological characteristics such as hormones and sexual organs (American Psychiatric Association 2022). A cis-gendered person is someone whose gender expression and biological organs are the same. Other gender expressions are “non-binary (no female or male expressions), butch (a woman who dresses masculine), and pangender (having all genders). A transgender person can be heterosexual. (Abrams, LCSW, and Ferguson 2022). There has been a shift in the way the LGBT community views transgender individuals with emotional online debates regarding dismissing the (T) in LGBT since transgender individuals are thought of as bringing down the acceptance rate of the queer community. This is a critical flaw that the LGBT community needs to address as transgender people run the risk of having no support system from family, friends, and their community. Data shows that “82% of transgender individuals have considered killing themselves and 40% have attempted suicide,” with neglect, bullying, and microaggressions being the leading causes of ideation (Austin et al. 2022). The transgender community also faces higher rates of housing discrimination and homelessness. A PIT (Point-In-Time) survey in 2019 showed that 63% of transgender and 80% of non-binary people who have experienced homelessness were unsheltered (Kaiser 2022). This is largely due to renters being fearful, suspicious, or discriminatory to the transgender community.

For decades, LGBT people have been abused and discriminated against due to their sexual orientation. This includes parents who decide to disown and kick their children out of their home purely based on their sexuality. In fact, children state that the main reason for their homelessness is due to relationship tension with their parents (McCarthy and Perri 2022). The rates of homelessness disproportionately affect LGBTQIA+ persons at a higher rate than their heterosexual counterparts. For instance, according to (Page 2017) “It is estimated that 5%-10% of all youth in this country identify as LGBT; by contrast 20%-40% of homeless youth identified as LGBT”. Being LGBTQIA+ means constantly hiding or knowing that you can be discriminated against, assaulted, and killed due to your sexual orientation. This takes a toll on the mental and physical health of the population. A study done by (Ryan et al. 2009) showed that LGBT individuals who are not accepted by their families are “8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to report illegal drug use, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse” than those who are accepted by their families.

Homelessness in the LGBTQIA+ population

According to Red Nose Day (2021) there are four types of homelessness: transitional, episodic, chronic, and hidden. Transitional homelessness happens after a sudden major life event occurs, such as job loss, family crisis, or domestic violence. Some of those within this category have jobs but are unable to pay rent and bills by themselves. Usually, LGBTQIA+ individuals are in this category due to unacceptance from their families which leaves them homeless. Secondly, episodic homelessness occurs when individuals are in between housing and sleeping on the street. This type of homelessness is usually caused by drug and alcohol

abuse. Individuals bounce from being housed to being homeless based on their substance abuse. Chronic homelessness is categorized as someone who has been homeless for more than one year and has barriers stopping them from seeking permanent housing. Those who are veterans or have severe mental illnesses are usually within this category. Lastly, the hidden homelessness category includes people who couch surf or live with a friend but cannot claim this as permanent housing. LGBTQIA+ homeless youth cite their family members' inability to accept them, being kicked out of their homes, or running away as reasons for being homeless. Thus, results in transitional and hidden homelessness as it occurs suddenly, and many couch surf with friends. Within the community, transgender youth report bullying, physical violence, and sexual abuse as reasons for homelessness (Choi et al. 2015).

Those who had families who accepted their sexual orientation were less likely to have symptoms of mental illness. According to Ryan (et al. 2009), LGB youth who were rejected by their family were “8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to report illegal drug use, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse, compared with peers from families with no or low levels of family rejection.” Heterosexual homeless youth have different factors that play into their homelessness. Those who fall into this group are usually kicked out by their family due to their drug or alcohol use (Rew et al. 2005). Within the same study, Rew et al. (2005) found that gay/lesbians were less likely to receive their full series of the hepatitis B vaccine. The authors suggest that there could be a health disparity amongst sexual minorities who are experiencing homelessness, “a relatively higher incidence of HIV diagnosis and treatment in the gay/lesbian and bisexual groups than the heterosexual group combined with the finding that more heterosexual than gay/lesbian or

bisexual participants had obtained the full series of immunizations for hepatitis B, suggests that there are health disparities related to sexual orientation among youth who are homeless.” In some cases, young homeless individuals turn towards survival sex that allows them to make small amounts of money, crash on someone’s couch, or escape abuse. These factors greatly affect the mental health of LGBTQIA+ persons.

College LGBTQIA+ students

College dorms are a safe haven for the 45.7% of LGBTQIA+ college students who are not accepted or out to their families (Gonzales et al. 2020). According to Charlton et al. (2018) “41.4% of those who sought shelter were denied it, 29.8% were openly denied because of their gender expression, and 44% reported experiencing mistreatment at a shelter within the past year”. During the COVID-19 pandemic, college students who were suddenly kicked out of university dorms were faced with finding housing within hours of the announcement. Many LGBTQIA+ students who used dorms as a place for housing and were unable to return to their parents faced sudden homelessness. However, all college students are facing higher rates of housing insecurity, as a study conducted in 2020 showed that of 195,000 students, “of those surveyed, 58% reported experiencing basic needs insecurity, defined as experiencing some form of food insecurity, homelessness, or housing insecurity—which encompasses a range of challenges to accessing stable housing” (Butler and Torres 2023). College homeless students do have some resources that non-college homeless individuals may not have as college settings allow for greater interactions and college resources such as emergency funding, food pantries, and medical and technology use (Schmitz and Tyler 2018). However, discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and stigma affects the LGBTQIA+ homeless college student population. Depending

on location, LGBTQIA+ students face higher discrimination rates than their heterosexual counterparts. A study done by The Williams Institute shows that 63% of the LGBTQIA+ community lives in the Midwest, Mountains, and Southern states and faces higher discrimination rates in health, education, and economics compared to their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts. Depending on where you live, daily LGBTQIA+ experiences will differ drastically. In largely religious areas, LGBTQIA+ students may be afraid to come out or seek medical health care that reveals their sexual activities. For LGBTQIA+ homeless students, resources might be from religious organizations which are unfavorable due to their sexuality.

Resources

The college in which these participants were interviewed was located on the US/Mexico border and is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). A study conducted by Moya et al. (2023) showed that three factors (low income, no reliable transportation to campus, and not living with family) played a role in housing insecurity. Moya (2023) argues that living with family off-campus is one of the best ways to avoid housing insecurity. However, this is not an option for LGBTQIA+ students who have been disowned and kicked out of their homes. In addition to housing insecurity, they also face food insecurity. Like housing insecurity, four factors emerge for food insecurity (being head of a household, having lower income, being unemployed, and not having reliable transportation to campus) (Moya et al. 2023).

LGBTQIA+ students who faced homeless due to their sexuality cannot change their familial living situations, but they can choose where they wish to move to. A study done by Conran et al. (2022), showed that 32.6% of LGBTQIA+ individuals picked a college that had a welcoming environment and was far away from their hometown. Resources can become a

life-saving technique for LGBTQIA+ who reported three times higher rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harming than their heterosexual counterparts. Out of that study, only 38.5% had LGBTQIA+ mental health services and 29.5% had LGBTQIA+ health services (Conron et al. 2022). Resources on college campuses can vary largely depending on six factors: political state party, public vs. private colleges, secular vs religious colleges, student population, female student percentage, and Democratic student organizations (Coley and Das 2020). Across 1,953 universities in the U.S., those universities who voted Democratic in their elections, were public and secular universities and had a higher student body population that were female, were more likely to have LGBTQIA+ resources compared to their counterparts. Meaning those who are LGBTQIA+ and fall into the latter category, are less likely to have the same access to resources and experiences than LGBTQIA+-friendly schools. Pitcher et al. (2018:123) found that “LGBTQ+ resource centers are important for three reasons: providing physical spaces, providing community and professional support, and serving as symbols of LGBTQ+ support and inclusion”. LGBTQIA+ students who need support can turn to their centers for mentorship and guidance.

Summary of Literature Review

LGBTQIA+ individuals face unnecessary barriers due to their sexuality and gender expression. From educational and employment to housing and health barriers, being LGBTQIA+ comes with risks. Coming out means running the risk of becoming homeless and without financial and emotional support. Homeless shelters are often underequipped or do not have specific guidelines for helping LGBTQIA+ youth experiencing homelessness. Due to these issues, there is an increased risk of developing anxiety, depression, and sexual transmitted diseases in order to survive on the street. It is important to acknowledge that

finding LGBTQIA+ homeless students currently attending college is hard due to half of LGBTQIA+ homeless individuals having less than a high school diploma (Schmitz and Tyler 2018). Educational institutions should be aware of their homeless student population and ensure that their educational, mental, and physical health are cared for while attending their institution. By providing the correct resources, LGBTQIA+ individuals can find safety and comfort in their universities.

Theoretical Model

In this thesis I use Erving Goffman's theory of stigma in order to analyze the experiences faced by the LGBTQIA+ members facing homelessness. Stigma is the label that we give others and is closely related to stereotypes. To put it in simpler words, stigma is when we "reduce in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Goffman 1978:3). Out of the three different types of stigma, the participants of this study fit into the third category of stigma: blemishes of character. These characteristics are "perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty" (Goffman 1978:5). While stigmatization is usually rooted in bad intentions, Goffman believed that stigmatized group members can come together due to their likeness.

The first stigma of character LGBTQIA+ people face is the "flaw" in their sexuality, often criticized by their family. Once someone reveals their sexual orientation, based on the audience's views, a stigma or label is automatically assigned to them according to what the audience member thinks of that group's stigma. This label can be seen in a positive or negative light. Disclosing oneself as an LGBTQIA+ member is often treated as something morally wrong and unrighteous.

The second blemish of character is being labeled as someone experiencing homelessness. Society generally views homeless people as "scary, dangerous and delinquent" (Gaetz 2009). Consequently, we can think about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people, in particular youth, who are experiencing homelessness as facing a double stigma. Stigma may lead to the embarrassment of receiving services, telling teachers of their status, and, because of this, people may often refuse help.

Methodology

After receiving IRB approval from The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), the second step was finding participants that fit into a narrow eligibility requirement. Anyone who identified as an LGBTQIA+ member, above the age of 18, and has faced homelessness anytime in their life was eligible to be interviewed. Recruitment flyers (see page 63) were placed on bulletin boards throughout campus, specifically in the Education, Psychology and Old Main buildings. Flyers were also shared with two organizations: Student Impact Association and the Texas Rainbow Center. I chose these two organizations as they have a large LGBTQIA+ presence in the community. Since both organizations have in-person events, flyers have been printed and are available to those who are not following them on social media accounts. A QR code is on the flyer that is linked to a simple survey that screens for eligibility. I also included my email address and phone number on flyers in case that was a better way for participants to contact me.

My research consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews using three ways to interview participants; in-person, by phone, or via Zoom. Discussing issues regarding homelessness and speaking about possible mental illness can be embarrassing subjects to converse with a stranger about, so to ensure that participants feel comfortable about sharing their stories, the confidentiality of facial recognition can be done. Therefore, participants were asked if they feel comfortable meeting in person to conduct their interview. If not, interviews via Zoom or phone were possible. Online or phone interviews are also an option for participants who have barriers to transportation. Zoom is an online platform system where people can schedule meetings, but this requires Wi-Fi and a stable connection, such as a laptop, tablet, or advanced phone. As the literature review has shown, homeless students can

face internet issues if not at a place that offers free Wi-Fi. Because of this, interviews can also be conducted by phone. The eligibility questions were as follows:

1. Do you identify as a part of the LGBTQIA+ community?
2. Have you experienced homelessness or housing insecurity?

After the survey was completed, contact information was asked for where and when they preferred meeting. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to one hour and a half. The interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding sexuality, homelessness, and resources that were used or would have been helpful during the time the participants were experiencing homelessness. There are participants whom I may have missed due to them dropping out, or those who speak only Spanish. This flyer was also distributed at certain parts of campus and could have more of an impact if posted in other buildings and campuses, such as Rio Vista Community College.

My thesis investigates the experiences of LGBTQIA+ college students who have faced homelessness or housing insecurity at any point in their life. Because of this, any person who identifies as anything other than cis-gendered or heterosexual will be considered part of the LGBTQIA+ community. This includes people who are asexual, gender fluid, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary. College students consist of anyone who was enrolled part-time, full-time, or receiving a certificate through a university or community college. There are many types of homelessness that someone can encounter and can be broken down into seven categories. 1) Sleeping on the street, 2) sleeping in a car, 3) sleeping in abandoned buildings, 4) sleeping in tents, 5) sleeping in shelters, 6) sleeping in uninhabitable housing, and 7) sleeping on couches (Griffith, 2019).

I asked my participants to refer others as possible respondents for my study, thereby using a snowball sampling method breakdown by Simkus (2022). In a snowball sample, homeless individuals were able to refer me to others who also experienced the same thing. Since the population I interviewed is extremely small and hidden, I believe I will largely rely on my participants recommending others to me. I interviewed 10 participants through various forms of recruitment. One participant I met at a local LGBTQIA+ resource center, two through my personal social media pages, and the rest were recruited by the flyers posted.

Interviews were recorded and saved to a secure platform such as OneDrive through my university's resources. From there, interviews were transcribed and coded for general themes found in the literature review, such as abuse, sexuality, and mental and physical health. I used Nvivo to code and look for the repetitiveness of themes. I have experience coding and creating a codebook on Word but using Nvivo was new to me. Although challenging at first, using Nvivo helped with coding themes and organizing interview data. While interviewing, I took field notes on key themes and noted possible follow-up questions along with details regarding participant behavior and emotion. Participant names were changed to pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Each participant was compensated \$20 upon the completion of the interview. Participants who conducted their interviews via phone call or Zoom were compensated with an e-gift card. I received a grant from UTEP's Dodson Grant to fund this thesis.

Positionality

As with any qualitative research, it is important to understand the role I play within this thesis. Positionality refers to the "demographic characteristics or potential relationships to participants" within a study (Savin-Baden and Howell 2023:1974). As an openly queer

person, I was able to think of questions, personal experiences, and how I would approach my participants regarding these sensitive subjects. Bonding with participants and understanding their sexual experiences was an easier task as an in-group member. For those out-group members, understanding stigma regarding sexuality, and the coming-out experience may not be something seen as important or necessary. However, both are crucial turning points for many queer individuals.

I knew that this thesis would shed light on some of the abuse that I had heard from peers throughout my life. I always felt and considered myself lucky since I have a supportive family. I never felt the danger of being kicked out of my home or abused, either mentally or physically, because of my sexual orientation. Still, I knew that this was not the case for other members of the LGBTQIA+ community I grew up around. As a teenager in high school, I saw first-hand the abuse that follows an individual when their sexuality is discovered by parents. Even now, as someone in their late 20's, I have friends who are still hiding their relationships from their family. Their experiences influenced my decision to conduct this research and, when considering issues related to how we, as sociologists, can make changes happen and shed light on the resources needed by LGBTQIA+ homeless youth.

Findings

This section discusses the findings of the ten participants I interviewed for my thesis from April 2023 through July 2023. I found that while all participants experienced different familial upbringings, seven out of the ten participants experienced homelessness (e.g., were kicked out of their homes) because of their sexual orientation. All participants experienced homelessness as teenagers or young adults and one of them was currently homeless. I present my results using Gleeson's (2016) approach to sharing findings in *Precarious Claims: The Promise and Failure of Workplace Protections in the United States* (2016). In her book, she organizes her chapters into themes by presenting the data as a collection of individual narratives or stories that are grounded in the context of issues experienced by a population. I present participants' stories or narratives by contextualizing their experiences and addressing how their experiences reflect that of the study population. In the following sections, I provide the background of the participants and address some of the key issues they lived through while being homeless along with the resources they needed during this time.

The Significance of Sexuality: Christian and Karina

I asked my participants a series of questions related to their sexuality and their gender expression. It is important to know how to address them as many have taken many risks to let others know of their sexuality and gender status. Therefore, it is crucial that we address them in the ways in which they want to be known. It is vital to understand that LGBTQ people often have to mask their sexuality in order to be respected and feel safe in their households. Masking often happens on a daily basis, while they are in different spaces and around different people. I also found that this often happened when participants were younger. In this

section, I share the experiences of Christian and Karina who both have strong feelings about their LGBTQ identity and how it plays into their everyday life.

Christian

Christian was one of the last participants I interviewed but had the most to say about his experiences with coming out. Christian first came out to his family at the age of 12. During this time, he came out as a bisexual girl to his mother and father. Today, Christian is a transgender male. Christian knew that his family would not accept him, since his mother is a religious Mexican Catholic. On the other hand, his father played a backseat role regarding his sexuality. Meaning his dad did not necessarily approve of Christian's bisexuality or transgenderism. In both cases, his father told him that his mother would "not be very happy". At the age of 15, Christian realized that maybe he was a lesbian and not just bisexual, but he did not tell his family due to the tension and fights already caused by his bisexuality. However, everything changed when he left his hometown and his conservative family to study at a Liberal Arts university in Minnesota. According to Conron et. al (2022), 33% of LGBTQIA+ individuals moved to a friendlier and more welcoming university where they can be themselves without the worry of family or peers judging them. There are websites specifically designed to help LGBTQIA+ students do just that, such as Campus Pride. Once there, Christian saw a plethora of queer people and decided to join the rugby team. He not only felt accepted within the larger college community but also found an organized group that welcomed him. Christian realized that there was more to his sexuality than just staying in the closet and hiding his transgender status. He now identifies as a "trans faggot" or as a "gay trans man" (something that he uses when wanting to be polite). In the following quote, Christian shared why sexuality is so important to him:

I feel like my queerness and my transness is behind all of that. The way I live my world every single day, academically, it's just the motivation there and career-wise. I want to be in regenerative farming and regenerative agriculture. That is connected to my queerness because it literally influences every aspect of how I relate to others and the world around me. I think queerness is the perspective that guides everything that I do and when I talk to people who are not queer and they have a different perspective of things, I think “this is really a different experience”.

It is clear that Christian embraces his sexuality and gender expression and wants to inspire others through his community. He has faced coming out twice and risked his family and social life, all for the chance to be himself. Now that he can express himself and “breathe freely”, he shows everyone how proud he is to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Christian is a transgender man and is not afraid to show that to those around him, strangers or not. At first, he delayed telling his family of his transgender status because he feared that they might not accept him again. The first time he came out to his family as bisexual proved to be a challenging time. As a transgender male, Christian’s voice got deeper and he started to bind his chest and dress in a more masculine way, so he decided to come out to his family again. Luckily, during this time, he did not live with his family, so mental and physical abuse and homelessness were not something he was worried about. However, to his surprise, Christian’s family did not judge him, and he felt like his mother finally came to peace with his gender and sexual expression. We do not know why Christian’s mother came to terms with his gender expression, however time and destigmatization of the LGBTQIA+ community could have a role. Out of the seven participants who were kicked out due to their sexuality, four parents changed their beliefs towards their queer child and accepted them later in life. When an LGBTQIA+ person comes out to their family, many parents do not know what to do or think and stigmatize their child based on the information they believe. Stigmatizing phrases such as “transgenders are perverts”, gay men “catch diseases faster”

and same sex couples raise gay children are some of the many quotes that stigmatize the LGBTQIA+ community. However, once these parents take time to do research and realize that their queer child is the same person, acceptance becomes much easier.

Transgender individuals are more likely to be bullied and have a hard time with employment and educational institutions recognizing their new identity. For instance, a study by Goldberg, Beemyn, and Smith (2019) showed that although universities attempt to change policies to accommodate transgender individuals, these are often ineffective. This was the case for Christian. He had a hard time getting his university to switch his dead name to his new name. “Dead names” are the names given to transgender people at birth. When contacting me via our school emails, Christian’s dead name was still something I could see. Names are usually gender-coded, so going by and being identified by a new name gives transgender people control over the way the world addresses and sees them. Although having to correct his name and pronouns often is a hassle for him, he would rather have control of his life than let the institutions around him dictate how he is presented. Christian administers hormone shots to himself on a weekly basis and is in the first part of transitioning. He has not had top or bottom surgeries, yet. Christian sees this as a bittersweet problem since it allows him to adapt to the environment he is in. For example, depending on how he looks (binded chest or not binded) he will use the bathroom that is most comfortable for him. If he is in a college-aged bar that is LGBTQIA+ inclusive, he is less likely to be stigmatized and can be himself. Gender-neutral restrooms are often not available to Christian or other folks that want to use them, and Christian experienced an event where a lady screamed at him for using the women's bathroom.

Christian's story provides some background to the problems that he faces as a transgender person and sheds some light on the issues that other transgender folks also experience. His past challenges with his gender expression do not stop him as he is working on a senior project regarding queers and the homebuying process. He states, "I become really motivated by connecting with my community and how I can create stronger networks and how I can give back." For Christian, not only is sexuality important, but it is his very reason for living.

Karina

Unlike the rest of my participants, Karina was the only one who was open with her family about her sexuality and was accepted by them. Still, that does not take away from the struggle that she had with coming to terms with her sexuality and how she wished to be viewed. Karina was sexually abused by her stepfather at a young age. This trauma left her afraid and severely damaged. During our interview, Karina explained how she discovered her sexuality and the mixed feelings she had regarding this identity. She questioned whether she liked women because of the abuse she faced or if she was born this way and whether she would be a lesbian regardless of her past trauma. Instead of hiding her sexuality and being ashamed of it, she embraced her new feelings. I wanted to know why her sexuality was so important to her, especially since she had a difficult time trying to figure out the reason for her sexuality.

You know I did a lot of research, and I did a lot of talking to people who are like me and some who weren't like me and I just kind of was trying to figure it all out you know? Trying to figure out where does this all come from, you know why am I like this? Why am I the way I am you know? Just trying to figure myself out and so I did get a lot of that but you know, I didn't make myself feel ashamed or anything and they [family] didn't make me feel ashamed, they just were trying to figure me out too. I think everyone was trying to figure out who I was.

Karina was questioned by their family who wanted to know if her “new” sexuality was a phase or an issue that needed to be resolved because of their past trauma. She felt the stigma that is widely felt among the LGBT community. She carried the idea with her that cheerleaders were not supposed to be lesbian or bisexual. The media often portrays lesbians as masculine and not pretty, meaning a cheerleader should be popular, pretty, and dating the quarterback (McInroy and Shelley 2017) and not identify as a lesbian. To her, coming out was a breath of fresh air as she did not need to hide her feelings from people and always be on edge. As a result, with this mental baggage gone, Karina found that coming out “absolutely saved her life.” Instead of having to hide her sexuality and add more pressure to her already stressful life, she was able to express her feelings and sexuality freely.

Karina’s story of homelessness did not stem from her family rejecting her sexuality but was due to severe drug and alcohol abuse that stemmed from the sexual abuse she endured as a teenager. Her story goes against the norm since homosexual homeless youth are more likely to be kicked out due to their sexuality. Karina became homeless because she was unable to pay rent as she spiraled out of control with her drug and alcohol abuse. After losing her apartment, she decided to live out of her car for eight months while working at a strip club. This environment proved to be a bad influence on her since she continued to abuse drugs and alcohol at work to cope with working at the strip club. She then couch-surfed with a friend for four months and later lived in a hotel for a year.

Karina’s story provides the gaps that are overlooked when examining LGBTQIA+ homelessness. Her story does not follow the reason why most LGBTQIA+ individuals are kicked out (rejection of sexuality), however, it is important to share her story. As stated

earlier, LGBTQIA+ homelessness is usually due to family rejection, whereas Karina's homelessness was due to drug and alcohol abuse that left her unable to afford rent.

Regardless of the way an LGBTQIA+ individual became homeless, there must be accessible resources for them to get back on their feet.

Sexuality is a fluid and ever-changing feeling and identity that many LGBTQIA+ experience through the life course. For instance, Diamond (2008: 9) showed that "Two-thirds of her subjects changed their sexual orientation labels over a 10-year period, with many shifting toward bisexual or unlabeled categories and some even adopting a heterosexual label." When Karina came out at the age of 19, she identified and labeled herself as bisexual. Currently, she identifies as pansexual and is happily married to her transgender husband. Christian, who today identifies as transgender, first came out as bisexual, then identified as a lesbian, and is now a transgender man. As a cisgender woman, Christian was attracted to women. However, they now date transgender men as it is easier to explain and there is no need for awkward conversations around genitalia, hormones, and sex.

In this section, I briefly covered two different stories of LGBTQIA+ individuals; a bisexual female (now a transgender male) who was not accepted by his family and a cisgendered bisexual (now pansexual) who was accepted by their family. Although the circumstances that left them both homeless are different, both faced issues regarding their sexuality. Christian, like my other participants, were not accepted by their family. Over time, this changed, but not without them finding themselves homeless in the process. Karina's story is quite different, as she became homeless due to alcohol and drug abuse that stemmed from a childhood trauma. For Christian and Karina, their sexuality was a very important part of who they are.

Mental and physical health and abuse: Melissa, Stephanie, Ashley, and Ruby

For many LGBTQIA+ individuals, the act of coming out is considered one of the most stressful decisions that they will make because they are juggling their sexuality and the way it fits into their family's ideals and customs. Some people may consider themselves to be blessed when their family is open and supportive of their sexuality, so coming out is not terrifying for them. Still, others who live in religious or conservative homes often try to delay coming out until they are financially independent and able to live away from their parents. In fact, “78% of youth are not out to their parents as LGBTQ [since they] hear their families make negative comments about LGBTQ people” (Human Rights Campaign 2018). By delaying coming out and hiding their sexuality, young LGBTQIA+ individuals are missing out on opportunities to build strong friendships, relationships, and experiences with those around them. Unfortunately, parents can force their children to come out by finding items in their rooms or by hearing or seeing their child participate in homosexual acts, such as kissing or hugging. This was the case for three out of the four participants in this section. Though I work to unpack my participants’ coming-out experiences, I refrain from discussing sensitive topics of abuse, suicide, and self-harm that were shared during interviews. In this next session, I will unpack the mental and physical health, and abuse the participants faced when coming out to their families. I begin by sharing Melissa’s story and how she is currently juggling homelessness and her college education.

Melissa

Melissa was one of the first participants I interviewed, and she is also the only one who is currently facing housing insecurity. She became homeless after she told her parents that she was pansexual, something that her mother, who is religious, did not agree with. At

one point, Melissa was sent to her grandmother's home so that her grandmother could "pray the gay away". When that did not work, her mother kicked her out of the house because she feared that Melissa would bring girls over to the house. Similar to Christian's story, Melissa's father took a backseat role on issues regarding her sexuality but tried to help her behind his wife's back. Her father's support was not much help since in the end she was kicked out of her house for being queer. With nowhere to go, Melissa stayed with a friend for a couple of weeks until her university was able to assist with emergency housing. During the interview, Melissa was very timid and constantly looked down at her hands and brought a friend for comfort while she was being interviewed. At the time of her interview, she was living in emergency housing at her university. I wanted to know how her mental and physical health was during this time. Unfortunately, she informed me that she was still struggling with another possible homeless situation at the end of the semester. Her anxiety and depression were noticeable throughout the interview.

I was hospitalized for eight days at a mental health facility and now my anxiety has gotten a lot worse as well as my bipolar disorder, and I now have major depression just because I have that lack of support from someone who should be supporting me. Regardless of who I identify as, who I love basically.

Before getting admitted to the mental health facility, Melissa attempted to commit suicide. She was deeply affected by her mother's disapproval of her sexuality and believed her family would be happier without her alive. Melissa is not alone in her struggle with mental illness. According to Wexelbaum (2018:36) LGBTQ students are more likely "to receive a diagnosis of depression, anxiety, ADD or ADHD, which increases their risk of suicidal behaviors". Families rejecting their LGBTQ child make this risk higher as the child has no support system.

Melissa was similar to the other six participants who willingly came out to their families in hopes that they would be supported. She labeled herself the “black sheep” of her family since she was a middle child and had previously been called the “academic one”. When telling her mother about her homosexual feelings, her mother told Melissa that her coming out was a way to “draw attention” to herself in order to distract herself from academics. I wanted to know how Melissa kept going through these rough patches and still attended university. Melissa shared the following:

I usually struggle to get out of bed a lot and have really bad motivation cause I always have to go based off of a plan and a schedule. But since everything's just out of whack, school it's really hard for me to focus because I'm overthinking about all the bad scenarios or bad cases that can happen to me. Or what is going to happen to me once my contract ends with the dorms. I am doing good in my classes. It's just it's hard to do most of the work just because of the lack of motivation. It's been really hard mentally to really go on with a normal day just because I really am scared about when my contract ends because I don't know what my living situation is gonna look like.

It is clear that coming out can be life-changing and destroy the path that students once had planned out for themselves if a family is not accepting of them. Melissa’s story shows great resilience and tenacity as she continues to struggle with her mental health, the precarity of university housing, and at the same time, completing college coursework.

I conducted a follow-up interview with Melissa in October to find out what happened with her housing status. During her first interview in April, she informed me that she did not know where she would go after the semester ended. Melissa was glad to speak with me again and during our second conversation with me, she let me know that she was no longer attending university. We spoke by phone, and she shared how she, once again, faced homelessness when the semester ended. Below is part of what she shared with me:

I did not have enough money to register for the next semester. So, my contract with the dorms did end and I did end up on the streets for a little bit. I lived on the streets for a week or two. I stayed behind the place I used to work [fast food restaurant], they had a little shelter to hide from the rain. I would move inside to work and stay in the bathroom.

Melissa continued to tell me how she moved from living behind her place of employment to moving in with her boyfriend for a couple of days. She stayed with him until she had enough money to fly across the state in order to live with her best friend. Melissa told me that it was hard to get out of bed, ask for help at her university, and pass finals knowing that she would be homeless the following week. Still, she pushed through and passed all her classes.

Through all of this, Melissa remains hopeful and plans to continue her education once she saves up enough money from her part-time job. It was heartwarming to hear that Melissa had not given up on her dreams of becoming a nurse, regardless of her past struggles. Though she's living through a challenging situation, she continues to seek help when she needs it and will continue living with her best friend for the time being.

Stephanie

Stephanie is a 20-year-old lesbian who happened to stumble across my flyer during her university orientation. She was the last participant I interviewed and was quiet and timid throughout the entire interview. Stephanie did not voluntarily come out to her religious mother, who believed that homosexuality was “gross”. Instead, she was forced to come out after her mother found letters from her then-girlfriend. The conversation became violent, and her mother physically abused her for dating a woman. Stephanie continued to date her girlfriend for three more years before her mother found another letter from her girlfriend. After her mother found that letter, Stephanie broke up with her girlfriend. Later that night, she overdosed on some pills and was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) where she

remained for a few weeks. Stephanie then told me that she realized that she did not overdose from the breakup, but from the conversation she had with her mom. After she was released from the hospital her mom did not let her back in the house, so she was forced to stay with her uncle and cousins. She stayed in the small attic during the hot summer months. Stephanie also had to endure being the butt of jokes and was constantly bullied by her cousins for being “poor” and gay. With no one fully accepting her, Stephanie's mental and physical health deteriorated during this stressful time. She explains:

When I was living with my uncle and my cousins I was diagnosed [with a bipolar disorder and an eating disorder] at the time. I wasn't properly medicated and the entire deal was insane. I felt like I was rejected and then I was off to the side and I didn't have a family or proper community. I was very thin at the time and then I like, I kinda just ballooned and then my eating disorder went from anorexia nervosa to just bingeing all the time so I just physically changed a lot. Yeah, a lot of suicidal ideation and then at that same time that's when I started cutting.

Stephanie went through a lot during this time due to her mother rejecting her sexuality. This was a mentally hard time for Stephanie as her mother was fighting an illness on her deathbed and still would not accept her daughter for who she was. After everything that happened to her, mentally and physically, I wanted to know if Stephanie thought that coming out was important.

I didn't come out. It would have been important had I been in a stable house and everything was nice and calm. But that would have been a good thing but it didn't, so I was constantly on edge, and I even thought to myself, until my mom died, I was like she will never have this conversation, and then after she's dead I can live more openly about it. I'm open about it and this is a very different environment, so peaceful and its normal so now I'm just more open with it now that the kind of the bad stuff is going away.

Coming out on her terms was not a choice for Stephanie and she would have rather waited for her mother to die instead of coming out to her as a lesbian. After some time of living with her uncle and cousins, Stephanie's older sister decided to take her in. Moving to a different

city seemed like the best option after another screaming match ensued with their mother. During this time, Stephanie's sister yelled to their mother, "Would you rather have a gay daughter or a dead one?!" Her mother stayed quiet and that is when Stephanie decided to move in with her sister. Stephanie's story shows the mental, physical, and emotional abuse countless LGBTQIA+ individuals face when forced out. Now that Stephanie is in a positive and loving home, she is doing much better and looks forward to completing her first year of college.

Ashley

Similarly to Stephanie's situation, Ashley's mom found out she was lesbian by going through her room and finding love letters from her girlfriend. Ashley is a 29-year-old lesbian who found my flyer on Instagram, and we have been acquaintances for years. She told me her story in a local café while holding hands with her wife, Emily. To Ashley, being homeless at the age of 16 was the hardest thing she had ever experienced. She recounts the day her mom found out about her sexuality.

She absolutely hated it, she actually beat me up, she actually beat me up. And when I became conscious after she choked me out, I woke up and looked at myself in the mirror and I had a bloody eye and bloody nose. I had a black eye, my cut was all fucked up and I was like "damn this is for real right now".

Ashley is not alone. 60% of LGBTQ individuals who are abused by their families believe it is due to their sexuality. According to Galop (2022), 29% of LGBTQIA+ individuals have been abused by their family, with 45% of the abuse coming from mothers and 41% from fathers. Ashley continued to share how being forced out of the closet by her mother and becoming homeless ruined her mental and physical health. At the time, she was a junior in high school and her living options were limited. Eventually, Ashley started couch surfing at a

friend's house for a couple of weeks but felt like a burden and left. She then stayed at a pastor's house for a couple of days before her best friend's mother called her and said, "I don't care if you're here I'm not asking you for a dime, you can stay here for as long as you want". Ashley finally felt safe again because she found comfort and warmth at her best friend's house. This soon changed after Ashley's mom phoned and told her to come back home because her grandmother questioned where she was, however neither her mom nor Ashley told her grandmother why she was kicked out. Once Ashley returned home, her mother never apologized for beating her and continually abused her until the age of 19 when Ashley finally left home and moved in with her wife (girlfriend at the time). Ashley's mental and physical health was not great during her last years of high school. For instance, instead of worrying about prom and homework, like most of her classmates, Ashley was wondering about food and shelter. She explained:

That was the hardest thing I ever had to experience. At 16 being kicked out of your house because you're gay was the hardest thing ever because I was jumping from couch to couch and it kinda sucked not knowing where your next meal was gonna come from, or what shelter you would be able to find. And it sucks because no one I knew was gay, so I didn't know that there were rainbow places and resources to help and my high school did not have a gay-straight alliance at the time.

Ashley's experience with homelessness in high school was unfortunate since she did not know of any resources. Ashley's high school did not have any resources, LGBTQIA+ knowledgeable counselors, or information available to students. She was alone with only a few trusted adults who knew of her sexuality. Unsurprisingly, Ashley attempted suicide three times and self-harmed due to the rejection and abuse she experienced from her mother. Ashley's mother not only abused her physically, but she also used scare tactics against Ashley in order to avoid her coming out to her father. Ashley's mother would say, "Don't tell

your father 'cause he will kill you". This ended up being false since Ashley's father embraced her and her sexuality once she came out to him at a later age. Unfortunately, she would never know if her life would have been different if she had come out to her father when she was in high school.

Ashley's story provides us with some insight into the mental and physical abuse that millions of young LGBTQIA+ individuals face when acting on their sexuality. They sometimes hide their sexuality and delay coming out, but parents find out about their children's sexuality through alternative ways. A study done by the Pew Research Center (2013) regarding a delay in coming out showed that 22% of LGBTQIA+ people have not come out due to their families' unacceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community. For some, delaying their coming out experience will shelter them from both physical and mental abuse. As a result, LGBTQIA+ youth decide to protect themselves as long as possible from these kinds of situations by refraining from coming out to family members, until they can pay for necessities. However, as we have seen from this section, delaying their coming out experience does not always work. Having experienced counselors with resources on hand should be in every high school. Regardless of geographic location, there will always be queer students who are struggling and need help.

Ruby

Ruby's story is unique because she was the only participant who was homeless in another country, Mexico. As a transgender male-to-female (MTF), Ruby was kicked out of her house in Juarez, Mexico by her dad who accidentally found out she was dating men. At the time, Ruby was not transgender and identified as a cis-gendered homosexual male dating men. Ruby's father found out that she was dating another man after he got off work early one

day and saw the two together. Her father became violent and started shouting slurs at Ruby and then began shoving and hitting her. A friend came over and watched the ordeal unfold and suggested Ruby leave for the store to put some space between Ruby and her dad. However, Ruby's dad was persistent and followed her calling her names in the stores, embarrassing her. Upon returning home from the store, Ruby's dad kicked her out of the house. Ruby's mental and physical health soon plummeted as she was forced to sleep on park benches for a couple of days until a friend took her in. She remembered:

For my mental health, I wasn't prepared that's why I was in the closet, I didn't choose to come out, he just found out. So I was afraid and scared because I didn't know if my dad would do something else. And I was afraid of how people would react. I was thinking "I hope everything will be fine". When I was at the park, I had a meltdown, and I was thinking of all these possibilities and situations in my head and it was really stressful so it affected me really bad.

During this stressful time, Ruby experienced self-stigma regarding how others perceived her. She told me that she stayed at the park instead of going to a friend's house because she was worried about how they would stigmatize her due to her sexuality and homeless status. Ruby "felt like a burden and even though they were welcoming, it wasn't home". This is the motivation she needed to reconnect with her mom and feel better about herself. Ruby's situation differs from other participants I interviewed for a couple of reasons. First, she was homeless in a country that is largely homophobic and lacks resources for the LGBTQIA+ community, and when she was kicked out of her home, she was able to reconnect with her mother in Texas. As a result, she was able to find shelter and acceptance there.

Ruby identified as a cis-gendered homosexual male when she reconnected with her mother who lived in Texas. She never told her mother the reason why she was kicked out of the house by her dad. After a few years, her mother wanted to know why she was kicked out

of her father's house. Ruby bravely came out again to her estranged mother as a homosexual man and was accepted on the condition that she did not “dress like a woman”. This was conflicting to Ruby since she knew she was transgender. However, she continued to dress like a man until she was tired of hiding her true identity. Ruby had already hidden who she truly was from her father, and she had continued to hide who she was from her mother, so she was ready to come out as transgender. Fortunately, her mother was accepting, and their relationship was not strained due to Ruby’s transgender status.

Ruby and Christian were the only two individuals I interviewed that are transgender. Luckily, both were accepted by their families later in life after coming out. Many transgender individuals are not as fortunate to have this kind of support system. It is important to note that Christian and Ruby gave their families some time to accept their sexuality. They first came out as members of the LGBTQ+ community and after some years, when they were ready, they came out (again) to their families as transgender.

In this section, I addressed some of the mental and physical toll and abuse that happens as LGBTQIA+ individuals come out to their families. In this study, four of the ten participants were physically abused and seven out of ten were emotionally and mentally abused. Unfortunately, some participants were forced to come out to their parents, oftentimes way before they were ready to do so. Many feared their families discovering their sexual orientation, and these ended up being valid fears since their parents abused them physically and mentally and kicked them out of their houses. Being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community in a religious household is never easy. For instance, Diamond et. al (2011:144) found that “anti-gay religious beliefs [are] one of the most intransigent obstacles to family acceptance”. As mentioned in this section, individuals sometimes cannot control when their

families discover their sexuality and, because of this, they experience homelessness. Sadly, along with this comes a lack of resources, which was something that Ruby experienced. When she was kicked out of her home, she had no idea what kind of resources might be available to her as a high school student. Knowing about available resources ends up being vital to keeping people on their feet and moving forward. In the next section, I address some of the obstacles that queer students went through when experiencing homelessness. Some of them experienced self-stigmatization which became a barrier to receiving resources, while others faced educational institutional barriers.

The shame of needing resources: Angie, Isabella, and Olivia

In this section, I discuss some of the perceptions and emotions that participants had about themselves when they faced homelessness. The participants that I highlighted in this section all stated that they felt embarrassed due to their homeless status. Interestingly, all of the participants that I highlighted in this section were interviewed by phone, whereas the other participants chose to do in-person interviews. Throughout their interviews, the participants spoke about embarrassment, lack of empathy from strangers, and not wanting to let others know of their status. Using Goffman's theory of self-devaluation, we must understand what emotions and feelings people experiencing homelessness face to work on dismantling some of the barriers toward receiving resources and aid that are needed.

Angie

Angie is a 23-year-old woman who identifies as bisexual. She became homeless twice due to her parent's inability to pay rent. Her case is unique in two ways; she is the only participant who became homeless due to another person's inability to afford rent. She is also the only participant who is currently not out to her family, even though she believes her

parents would support her as they are accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community. Still, she has not come out to them because she doesn't find it necessary and will come out when the time is right.

Being homeless has truly affected Angie's life and her mental health. Since 2009, Angie's family has constantly moved around, and she attributes this to the Great Recession. In 2021, her family was kicked out because her father was not paying rent on the mobile home they were living in, which dislocated her family of four into a hotel for the time being. Angie became homeless again in 2022 when a different landlord kicked her family and her out of their home for not agreeing to pay \$1,900 a month for a run-down mobile home. When asked how being unsheltered during these times affected her mental health, Angie stated:

When I was unsheltered I got really depressed to the point where I thought about taking my own life. But it felt very inhumane like people didn't care what would happen to me because I was unsheltered for a while. So I felt like I really wasn't a person to begin with, to be worthy of empathy or anything like that because I didn't have money or because they kicked us out as if it was our fault for some reason.

Feelings of suicide are prevalent in the homeless community. These feelings of heartache and embarrassment were not only felt by Angie but also by her parents who refused to utilize resources around them because they were ashamed of their homeless status. When I asked Angie how she thought that people perceived her when they found out that she was homeless she replied, "it's a frustrating experience that they view us as worthless although it's not my parents' fault I still blame them for what's happening to me, and that they can't get it together". Angie's self-devaluation of being viewed as worthless led to her attempting suicide and destroyed her mental health. Being homeless has truly affected Angie's life. She told me that the mental illness problems she faces is due to her experiences with homelessness and the stigma that follows it.

Angie experienced homelessness during 2021-2022 when COVID-19 was still a large factor playing a role in everyday life. During this time, having a clean and safe environment was vital to staying healthy and following CDC recommendations. COVID-19 only made Angie's life more difficult as she faced housing insecurity which made finances harder and caused additional setbacks for her family. Angie stated that:

Before COVID I was struggling with my mental health but when COVID happened it really set back a lot of progress I did with my mental health. So it was pretty bad if I could say. Before COVID I was barely getting over the suicidal thoughts but when COVID happened it set back everything that I did. Being unsheltered made my mental health worse.

Angie was not alone in her struggle with mental health, COVID-19, and homelessness. In addition to these barriers, Angie's family never took advantage of the resources around them due to the stigma of being labeled homeless. Angie knew of the food pantry but did not know of other resources available through her university. According to Zein (2018), only 14% of college students report using their university's food pantry. Angie and her family had a challenging time and were unable to afford basic hygiene products or food, both of which were available at community food pantries and at her university.

Angie was embarrassed to tell people she was homeless, which limited her ability to access the resources she and her family desperately needed. She stated that the community around her does not respect the homeless community and "do not see them as humans and see them as failures". I asked Angie if she had any ideas about how universities can make accessing resources more discreet and thereby more welcoming to those who need them. She stated that as a society, we need to get rid of the idea that this is an individualistic problem and instead realize that the system is broken and that this is the cause of homelessness. As a society, we must remember that everyone has a different path and sometimes we get lost.

Becoming homeless, needing resources, and asking for help are seen as things that weak and pitiful people do. Instead, we need to destigmatize homelessness and the belief that using free resources is something to be ashamed of. By doing so, we open the doors for vulnerable communities, like homeless LGBTQ+ youth, to access the resources that they deserve. As we have seen in Angie's story, there is a stigma associated with using resources. By eliminating this narrative, we open the doors for more people to receive help and take advantage of the resources they need.

Isabella

Isabella became homeless when her mother, who is a devoted Catholic, was unaccepting of her being a lesbian. Isabella decided to come out as she was in a serious and committed relationship with her girlfriend and was tired of hiding it. She invited her girlfriend to a family party where Isabella's mom tried to physically hit her in front of everyone. After her mother stormed off, she said that she was going to "kill herself" because of Isabella's sexuality. At home, Isabella and her mother continued to fight all night, so Isabella decided to pack her bags and leave that toxic environment. She couch-surfed with her brother and his son for a few months until her brother decided it was best if she just lived with him permanently.

Unlike Angie, Isabella was not afraid of using her university's resources to her advantage. As part-time retail employees, Isabella and her brother were not making enough money to pay for all the essentials they needed, so she decided to reach out to her university. Though going to the Dean's office, explaining her story, and bringing documents showing her low income was not ideal, they were able to help her. Isabella shared:

So I went to the Dean of Students offices and they helped me with money and the food pantry and then the university's free counseling program too since they offered therapy. So overall they built the case then you have to show proof of how much money you need and then explain to them your situation. You do get personal and have to get to know them. You show them proof of the bills the stuff you need to pay and then the case manager will tell you [how much you're eligible for]. I wouldn't say it was too hard, but it wasn't the easiest. I would say I was embarrassed to have to explain everything.

Isabella is not alone when it comes to the embarrassment of asking for help. Her grandmother also asked if she needed things. While they were generous in offering assistance she felt as if they perceived her differently due to her unfortunate situation of being kicked out. After a while, she got used to her family looking down on her for sharing a room with her nephew. Comments of "being a teenager without a bed" and "that sucks for her" were things she constantly heard from relatives. However, Isabella said she prefers her new living arrangement rather than hiding her sexuality from her mother.

While discussing the resources that she currently uses, Isabella told me she uses church pantries to feed the household. During the interview, we joked around, and I expressed how I feel judged when walking into churches. This is due to my outward physical appearance of looking lesbian with my short hair, tattoos, and masculine way of dressing. Isabella told me how she also looks "very gay" and gave me her experience with church pantries:

So I haven't been going to church as much as I used to just because all my family is Catholic and my mom's side of the family took it the same way [their dislike for her sexual orientation]. They were very against my sexuality so it just changed my perception of how hypocritical the people at the church are. When I was younger my mom would see gay people at church and would always make comments about it so it always leaves me wondering if people are going to be here talking bad about me. It didn't make it a place that I wanted to put myself in. I do look gay but they have never been like "oh I'm not gonna give you food" but it does feel like they're talking about me.

Not only does Isabella carry the stigma of needing food, but also the stigma of being a homosexual in a religious environment, like a church pantry. She understood the environment and the way certain church members view LGBTQIA+ individuals based on her own family's discrimination towards them. She put away her insecurities and did what was needed so the household would have food. Isabella's experience regarding feeling judged in churches is a feeling many queer people understand. The Pew Research Center (2013) showed that 1 in 3 LGBTQ individuals felt judged when in a place of worship and that 19% avoid using church pantries due to the fear of being stigmatized. This self-stigma and feelings of being unwelcome may hinder an individual from receiving food and clothing. Isabella's story truly highlights the bravery needed to overcome the perceptions of homelessness in order to ask for help and to take advantage of resources that are available to those in need of them.

Olivia

Olivia is a 21-year-old bisexual who faced homelessness after she told her mother about her sexuality. When she lived at home, she would often try to avoid her mother to keep the peace, but her mother would randomly start yelling at her and bicker with Olivia about her sexuality. Eventually, Olivia said the toxic home environment wore her down, so grabbed some items and began sleeping in her car. As a senior in high school, she did not know of any resources or places she could turn to for help. She ended up sleeping in her car for a couple of days until she reluctantly told a friend what had happened. Like Angie, Olivia was in high school and embarrassed to reach out to anyone. However, after some time she did tell a trusted friend about her situation, she explained:

I want to say it was only for a few days and I went from being in my car because I didn't know where to go but then I ended up going to a friend's but it did start in my car because I didn't know how to reach out but I was embarrassed by the fact that I

needed to stay with someone. It was rough living in my car and I didn't even know where to park my car because it was a risk and then just having my things and not being able to shower for that one night or have the resources that I needed. It was just very challenging.

Olivia was a 17-year-old high school senior when she was forced to live in her car due to her sexuality. She did not know where to park her car to sleep at night and was constantly scared something bad would happen to her. Being in high school and homeless is not ideal for anyone. Still, Olivia kept going to school despite what her peers were thinking about her. She shared this:

Having to open up to that one friend that it was more of a pride thing you never want to be like reaching out to people I know it's nothing bad but it was more of I can't believe I'm doing this right now. I think it was the hardest thing to tell, open up, and tell people about the situation. I learned that not everyone is going to understand.

Olivia continued by telling me that her school had no resources for her. Though some schools may have a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) her school did not have one and neither did the school attended by Ashley, Stephanie, and Ruby. Resources are vital to keeping students safe, especially when a minority group, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community, faces an increased risk of abuse, mental illness, and homelessness. Olivia was fortunate to be able to stay with her friend for a week and after that, she returned to her mother's house.

In this section, I covered the perceptions and feelings that LGBTQ+ homeless individuals must conquer to take advantage of resources available to them in the wider community. They often experience what can be thought of as a double stigma that compounds their feelings against reaching out for resources that may be available to them. One of the issues to recognize as a larger society is that there is a stigma regarding homeless youth. Society believes that a homeless teenager ran away because of a strict household or

other minute things. However, many fail to realize that there are youth who are abused and kicked out due to things they cannot control, such as their sexuality. Destigmatizing homelessness and being LGBTQ+ are both necessary for people to not only live without worry of being attacked for who they are but to also help them access the resources that they desperately need if they become homeless. In the next section, I will discuss the resources that my participants used and the resources they found lacking when they were homeless.

Resources

In this final section, I address issues related to the resources that my participants needed and had available to them while they were homeless. My participants were often unable to afford items, so they often found some resources available to them at school or within the community. Still, they also shared with me some of the resources they wish would have been available to them while they were homeless. Resources are vital and lifesaving for vulnerable populations. In this case, resources can range from tangible items such as food, clothing, and housing to intangible items such as information, organizations/clubs, and therapy. An excellent intangible resource high school counselors can give LGBTQIA+ students is Campus Pride, which is a nonprofit online organization that compiles LGBTQIA+-friendly universities (Wexelbaum 2018). As we dive into this section, it is important to note that four of the ten participants became homeless when they were in high school. Making them unable to work, sign up for certain benefits and programs, and unable to afford housing or buy a car. These individuals truly relied on what is around them and what was given to them by friends and offered through community resources.

“I couldn’t afford anything!”

Eight of the ten participants that I interviewed became homeless after either they voluntarily came out or when it was found out by a family member. Becoming homeless was an unplanned event that left them vulnerable and without money and even ideas of what to do or where to go. When I asked participants to share what kinds of items they could not afford, seven of the ten said that food was hard to come by. Those individuals who lived with friends were able to receive hot meals from them. Melissa was one of my participants who was not fortunate enough to have someone to turn to when she became homeless. I asked Melissa what kinds of food insecurities she faced during this period. She shared the following:

I struggled a lot with eating most of the time because I didn't know I couldn't afford food. I did not eat anything just because I couldn't afford it or if I did have food I would portion a lot just to not overeat because I was really stressed out.

Even though she worked at a fast food restaurant, she was unable to afford the food from there and did not dare risk losing her job by eating “free food”. Fortunately, Melissa discovered the university food pantry and was able to get food she desperately needed. She was not the only one who couldn't afford food during this time. Christian also shared some of the struggles they had with food scarcity. He stated that “I didn't have jack shit, just so much fast food, and box shit. It was so bad like yeah, not healthy, definitely not a nutritious diet for sure”. Unfortunately, this made his physical health poor as he was forced to either eat processed junk food or starve. Although both Melissa and Christian knew of resources and used them, they did not have enough nutritious foods or meals. This is particularly important since both were students and food became something that impacted their attention and learning in the classroom. Another issue experienced by my participants is the inability to pay for hygiene and clothing products. This is especially important as students will avoid going to school or social functions if they do not have clean clothes or if they have not

showered. Stephanie, who was a senior in high school when she became homeless, told me she did not have any feminine hygiene products and Angie was also not able to buy hygiene products.

Some participants were unable to afford rent while others could not afford to live in general. Meaning they were unable to shower, eat, or have a safe place to lay their heads. Most of them suffered their worst mental health episodes during this time and were hopeless. Not only did they lose their family by coming out, but they also lost their safety, privacy, and ability to live a normal life. Ruby, who was kicked out by her father, did not have anything or anyone when she left her house. I asked her what she could not afford when she was homeless and sleeping in the park.

No, I didn't even have clean clothes to begin with. I didn't have enough money to pay for a cell phone call, I didn't have a plan for a cell phone so I had no minutes. I didn't have any money for food so that's why I was kinda like hideous and I didn't have money for soap. I didn't have any money at all. For the first two days at the park, I honestly didn't eat and I didn't do anything. I just waited until school was over so I could go to my friend's house. The thing was that I was really ashamed because I didn't want them to find out what happened. For two days I was just at the park without eating, that sucks, now I know.

Thankfully, Ruby was able to catch a break when she moved in with her mother. If she didn't have her, what would have happened to Ruby? There were no resources available to youth in Mexico, she had no money or personal items and was queer in a largely homophobic country. Resources are life-saving and can be the difference between life and death.

“Thankfully I had resources”

In this section, I address some of the resources that were the most available and used when the participants faced homelessness. Five out of the ten participants reported not using any resources while they were homeless. Four did not know of any resources available to them, therefore they did not attempt or try to use any, and one did not take advantage of the

resources around her. Ruby, who was homeless in Mexico, stated that there were resources around her but that she was unable to use them because she would need her father's permission. Ruby said:

In Mexico there isn't enough resources or what we do have its difficult to access. What I found out is that most of the time when I was trying to find help, they would ask for a guardian since I was underage but I didn't want my dad to find out and lock me up in the house. So that's why I didn't use anything like that, the good thing is that I wasn't working but I would help in the (friend's) house by cooking or cleaning.

Ruby attempted to use resources but was unable to do this because of her age and required permission from her father if she wanted to access any kind of assistance. Since she was scared that her dad would lock her up in her house, she decided to go without assistance. Ruby's experience raised my curiosity. I was not sure what kind of assistance was available to minors in Texas, particularly when it came to shelters. For this reason, I called more than ten shelters and found that only one of them conditionally accepted minors. Any child that is 11-17 years of age is allowed to stay at the shelter and is provided with clothing, food, and necessary basics. However, they must obtain parental consent and the organization is a mandated reporter. This means the organization contacts Child Protective Services (CPS) and reports the parents for possible neglect or abuse. This is because it is illegal for children to run away from home in Texas. Those who couch surf may also get their friend's parents in trouble because "harboring a minor without the consent of a legal guardian is considered a Class A misdemeanor in Texas and is punishable by a fine not to exceed \$4,000, and/or confinement in jail for a term not to exceed one year" (Texas Youth Hotline). Although it may seem like there are many housing resources available to people experiencing homelessness, housing resources are really only beneficial to adults over 18 years of age. It is a cynical circle of traps. Should a queer child stay in the closet and pray they make it to the

age where they can take care of themselves or run away from home and have their parents investigated for child neglect and abuse? Do they couch surf or sleep on the streets until something better comes along? Ruby, Olivia, and Ashley were fortunate enough to find a house where they could sleep until they figured out what their next steps would be. However, not all queer kids have the same luck. That's where shelters and resources need to step in to ensure that no child is homeless.

The most used resource reported by participants was food pantries. Meaning that every participant who knew of food pantries used them while they were homeless and/or continues to use them now. These food pantries ranged from local food pantries to university pantries. Ruby's story earlier inspired me to investigate local food pantries and the requirements needed to receive food. Does an individual need to be older than 18 years old to receive food? Texas Rainbow Center, a local LGBTQIA+ resource center, offers free food to anyone, regardless of age and they do not require ID. When calling the Food Pantry Director, she said, "if there is a homeless kid, you best bet I am going to give them food". It was refreshing to hear such good news after a morning of unsuccessful phone calls regarding homeless youth housing.

It is abundantly clear that resources for LGBTQIA+ youth are extremely limited and often contain requirements that they are unable to fulfill. For LGBTQIA+ college students there are more resources available simply due to age and educational institutions. For example, to receive food from the university, all you need is a student ID card. There is no need for proof of income or age requirements. This continues to validate the struggles the participants had when in high school as there are no food pantries available to them. There were either no resources available to them or they had no idea resources existed.

Policy Implementations

I mentioned in the previous section that there are gaps in resources provided to LGBTQIA+ individuals. This largely depends on the age and geography of where the individual lives. While food and shelter may be available, there are still other resources that participants needed during the time they spent facing homelessness. In this section, I briefly discuss the resources that participants would have benefited from or areas that need improvement.

As discussed in the previous section, food pantries were utilized but need to be revamped with healthier, and fresher food. Two participants, Isabella and Christian, agreed that although food pantries have food, these are often processed and non-nutritious. Isabella stated that “the food pantry needs to put better stuff because I remember we got a box, but we didn't use half of it just because the stuff was unappetizing. There were a lot of instant meals, it's all pretty much canned”. Christian agreed on the need for fresher and healthier food for food-insecure students. He shared, “I really wish there was just more access to fresh food and have that available or just like other options on campus that are fresh and like healthy”. He continued by telling me about his experience with healthy dining halls at his previous university:

One thing I'll say about [Midwest University] is that when I was on campus there, it was probably the only time in my life that I ate consistently and was like never hungry because we had a dining hall and I had a meal plan. So I would just go and like get food like all the time so it's literally probably the only time because even now I mean like yeah I have like stable income but like we're broke as shit like I'm very often like skipping meals you know um so I wish we had like a dining hall like here that you could go in and it was like “all you can eat” and things like that, or like I don't even know like a community garden, even just more easily accessible like healthy options.

At his previous university, they had a bigger cafeteria and had more options to grab larger quantities of food. Although his current university has a meal plan, it is limited and

only open during certain times and closed during holiday breaks. This left Christian unable to access fresh, hot food for weeks at a time. Angie agrees that these pantries are important and should be readily available to every individual, regardless of status, she said, she would like to see more food banks “because I think it's important to eat, it's really important to eat”. I researched some information about local pantries available to residents and found that most local school districts do not provide a community pantry unless voluntarily done by staff at the school. Forty-one schools from a local school district have after-school supper programs that students can take advantage of. However, this program is for select high schools and does not cover the entire district. Making those students who do not attend those specific schools unable to receive this extra meal. Schools must acknowledge these vulnerable populations and have healthy and fresh food options that their students can take advantage of. Food pantries were available at the local 2-year college and at the university, and items are provided to students who hold a current school ID. I contacted the local 2-year community college and a pantry worker stated that they “rarely accept perishable items”. This was something that my participants wished was available to them. According to Feeding America, perishable items may not be available because pantries do not have space, nor the refrigeration needed to keep items from spoiling. The local university where these students were interviewed also did not have a refrigerator in their building, so perishable items were not provided to students.

The second resource that participants said they needed was housing, whether that be in dorms or with housing vouchers. As discussed in the previous section, some shelters accept young adults who are LGBTQ and have been kicked out of their homes. However, these shelters are often far away from the schools they attend and none but two of the

participants had a car. There are shelters, but they are not accessible due to the lack of transportation, age, or required documents. Instead of going to shelters that could possibly deny them entrance, all participants turned to other methods of temporary housing (couch surfing, sleeping in cars, hotels) until they found a more permanent solution. It is important to note that homelessness is also fluid and people can experience waves of homelessness. Whether it be going from sleeping in a car or couch surfing at a friend's place, there are periods of more stable shelter than other times. Nine of the participants couch-surfed at one point in their lives. Two stayed in hotels and two stayed in their cars. However, half of the participants stayed in multiple places as they jumped around finding better options.

The lack of affordable housing is a large contributor impacting people who experience housing insecurity. According to Cassady (2023), housing is unaffordable if the costs of it are more than 30% of an individual's earned income. For those who are homeless and making minimum wage, affordable and stable housing does not seem like a reality. Christian expressed his outrage toward the housing market by sharing his thoughts on possible housing for students. He stated:

I think most problems would be fixed if everyone was just guaranteed a one-bedroom apartment you know. I mean that's not an issue that the university can fix, but I just think that the housing crisis and how predatory renting is. And how difficult it is to buy a house and all of the things you have to qualify for. If everyone was guaranteed housing, it would fix so many things. It would have made my life completely different, so many people that I know have lost opportunities because they have to work and worry about finding a place to rent, and just yeah. If capitalism could just stop and if we could just have a one bedroom.

Christian continued to explain how the housing market is “trash” and thinks it is ridiculous that people are forced to stay in abusive relationships because they have nowhere else to go. Another participant, Alex, a 35-year-old gay man also expressed how he became homeless

due to his inability to pay for rent, which left him couch surfing for 1 ½ months until he was able to get back on his feet. Angie and her family also became homeless after the housing crisis of 2009, which left them jumping from stable housing to hotels, to apartments to hotels. For Angie, her life has been a cycle of living in stable housing to temporary living situations.

Navigating resources can be a tricky thing and a luck of the draw for many homeless individuals. There seems to be an abundance of resources, however not all of these resources are accessible to all students. For example, students who take classes and then work a full-time job are unable to access the university's food pantry. They are also unable to schedule meetings with school representatives since the campus is closed by the time they get off work. This leaves students questioning if they should miss work and receive free items that they need or if they should spend their own money to buy food. Participants suggested that they wanted to see more information regarding resources available through schools posted on social media. Ashley stated that during pep rallies, school administration should inform students of where to go when they need help. She suggested that schools should employ at least one LGBTQIA+ knowledgeable counselor, hang posters and pass out pamphlets with resources listed.

Discussion

In the analysis of interviews, participants expressed their sexuality and why coming out was important to them. All participants believed that their sexual identity was an important part of who they are and who they have grown up to become. Yet not all participants had a good "coming out" experience. Some of them were forced to come out as their parents went through their rooms and found letters from their same-sex significant others. Some felt comfortable enough to come out but were then kicked out of their homes

after this happened. Due to the rejection they experienced and the homelessness they lived through, many students were mentally and physically drained. With nowhere to go, many couch-surfed for a couple of weeks until they found other stable options. Through this experience, a few older participants were able to take advantage of resources, while those who were kicked out when they were in high school had no idea of where to start or did not meet the requirements for resources. After unpacking their interviews and thinking about some of the resources needed by participants, I suggest some ways in which resources can be introduced and utilized by those who need it the most. In the section below, I provide a call to action that addresses some of these suggestions.

Call to Action

Food was the most needed resource and the one we can make a difference on by improving a few things. Most food pantries have the option of canned, boxed, and processed foods, with the inability to accept and distribute perishable, nutritious items. One way to introduce fresher foods is by ensuring that all universities and colleges have at least one refrigerator located in their pantries. By doing this, universities will have the option of accepting donated fresh foods like milk, eggs, fruits, and vegetables which will increase the appeal and nutrition provided by pantries. Without a refrigerator, food donators do not have an option of supplying these items and students do not receive these fresh alternatives. As these fresh foods become “hot items” in pantries, universities can introduce *Fresh Days* where they distribute these perishable items on specific days. This gives the university time to gather perishable items for distribution until they can stock enough for everyday distribution. Because universities do not have refrigerators, they are also unable to partner with local restaurants that can donate excessive items. An example of this model is No Lost Food, a small local food pantry that recently received food from a new restaurant that just opened and had food made for training purposes but not used. Instead of throwing the hot, fresh food away, No Lost Food deployed volunteers to pick up the food and distribute it. The same model can be used by universities to pick up food from local restaurants and distribute it at the end of the day. This does not need to be university employees necessarily. Club members, such as those in a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), can participate and help the food pantry once a week. In agreement with Wagler et al. (2022) universities can introduce meal swipes, extend food pantry hours, and destigmatize food insecurity on campuses. I propose partnering with food truck vendors to offer discounted menu prices on campus for those who

are unable to cook hot meals and cannot travel to restaurants. This would allow for social interaction while also being able to grab a hot meal.

The worry about where you will sleep next week is not an issue high school or college students should be bothered with. While they are stressed about possibly sleeping on the street, they are unable to concentrate on their studies. Dorms are a haven some students can rely on if available and accessible. For those who go to a vocational and community college, this is not an option as most of these higher education institutions do not have dorms. A possible solution would include grant work to fund mini homes located near the campuses for students who are experiencing homelessness. In 2021, Blue Shield of California and Project Homekey built 26 mini-homes for college students needing a place to stay. Once a student applies and is admitted the “site provides one year of permanent housing and supportive services, including academic and career counseling, social services, and health care” (Blue Shield of California 2021). Of course, this would require a large grant worth millions of dollars, however, the impact would be allow students to live in a safe, and clean place.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, college dorms had to evacuate students immediately. Those students who lived abroad or had nowhere to go were put into hotels nearby. The same can be done for students who are unable to access a college dorm room. Housing vouchers can be provided by the university for hotels that can house students until they figure out where they can stay permanently. This also gives the university staff time to figure out how they can help the students with funds or find emergency housing for them. It is important to remember that while traditional emergency housing might work for most students, transgender individuals may be forced to be in their biological sex dorms, which

can potentially create unsafe environments. Hotels and mini homes can allow for a co-ed place for students to relax comfortably, regardless of sexual orientation and gender expression. The two last solutions are Adopt-A-Student and discounted realtor prices. Similar to foreign exchange student programs where a family adopts an overseas student, local families can adopt a college student who is homeless for a given semester. This would allow the student to have a warm and safe place while also building relationships with people they can trust. Lastly, universities can partner with local realtors to discount rent prices for students who are facing homelessness.

A specific resource that the LGBTQIA+ community needs within educational institutions are GSA organizations. These clubs do an amazing job of mentoring and providing information regarding resources within the school and community. As a public high school educator, I have walked the halls of many high schools with little surprise of seeing no advertisements for GSA clubs. It is not a common club and it purely depends on a high school teacher and if they want to sponsor this type of club. Unfortunately, that means students without a GSA will miss out on vital information and the ability to network within the community. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), GSA's "have been linked to reduced risk across health outcomes related to HIV and other STDs, including experiencing violence, illicit drug use and prescription drug misuse, and suicidal ideation. Prevention benefits have been documented for heterosexual youth in addition to LGBTQ youth". Not only do LGBTQIA+ students benefit, but heterosexual students learn how to become better allies for their peers. GSA's can network with larger local LGBTQIA+ resource centers. Locally, the most well-known and largest LGBTQIA+ resource center is the Texas Rainbow Center. They offer group therapy, a food pantry, community events, and even

have resources to provide hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to transgender and nonbinary conforming individuals. Ruby shared with me how the TRC pays for her hormones; a life-saving resource for her. Depending on the type of HRT and insurance status, this can cost anywhere from \$600-\$4,800 a year (Richardson 2020). GSA's should be in every public high school to allow support for LGBTQIA+ in every stage of a young person's life. Whether they just want to hang out with fellow queers or need someone to listen and provide resources; GSA's can save lives. Through my participants' stories, I can clearly see the impact of good, quality resources and the areas in which they need more help. Having resources in high school that are specific and directly for LGBTQIA+ students can make a difference in their experience with sexuality and homelessness, and this translates to how they will experience situations in other spaces like, colleges and universities.

Conclusion: We are Here; We are Queer!

This study, as any other qualitative study, had several limitations. First, I was only able to interview ten participants out of the 25,000 students enrolled at the local university. Generally, their experiences cannot and do not reflect the entire LGBTQIA+ student body population. This study was also limited to those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and therefore cis-gendered heterosexual students were not interviewed. Another limitation was that the study was advertised at the local university and not any community colleges who lack even more resources and housing compared to the university. To ensure that there is a better sample size and a diverse range of income levels and experiences, further research should be conducted at the vocational, community, and university levels.

This study reflected college students who were currently enrolled or who were college graduates. Therefore, I missed students who are LGBTQIA+ but dropped out from their university due to their inability to afford or concentrate on their academic studies. This study limitation can be resolved by ensuring that any student can participate, regardless of their current student status. As with Melissa, we ended up learning that students can be enrolled during one semester and then drop out the next semester. Ultimately, these are the students who are most likely suffering from the inability to balance homelessness and school success.

Finally, the interviews ranged based on the experience level of the interviewer. At the beginning of the study, interactions were shorter, and I did not know how to ask questions as the interview went on. However, as time went on and I got used to talking to participants about very personal and distressing situations, my interviews became fuller and more

detailed. Since most interviews were retrospective, having participants review questions before the interview could allow time for them to remember details from the past.

It is also important to understand that as the interviewer, who is openly lesbian and butch, interviews can vary. I believe my participants were able to view my outward appearance and understand that I am an in-group member, meaning that I would not judge them and could relate to some of their experiences. Although I have never faced homelessness, they were able to share their stories of why their sexuality is so important to their identity, the interactions of abuse from family and how it affected their mental and physical health, and how resources at the high school and college level can be improved. I believe that the most important issue we found through this study is the impact that rejection of sexuality by family members has on people. Along with the strains of being homeless, it creates a tremendous amount of mental and physical stress on people, often leading to feelings of hopelessness.

More than ever, we are seeing LGBTQIA+ representation and exposure in every facet of life. We must continue to adapt as the world becomes more secular and diverse. That includes ensuring we have enough information on how we are lacking the development of resources for the younger queer generations. High school and college should be a fun time filled with great memories and with the hope of a bright future. However, for those who face abuse and homelessness, these educational institutions can provide much needed resources and information. Although the stigma of being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community follows them, I hope that they find the strength to break through and do everything possible to become successful.

Goffman's stigma perfectly encapsulates the experiences one faces when stigmatized. In many cases, the first person who stigmatizes them for their sexuality is their parents. The stigma they face led to acts of discrimination in the form of mental and physical abuse. Instead of nurturing and loving their child for who they truly are, they attempt to change them, either by threatening them or kicking them out. The second stigma the participants faced was from their experiences with homelessness. Most were embarrassed to disclose their homeless status and faced self-stigmatized feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness.

I often think back to my interviews and wonder how the participants are doing. Some participants had horrible experiences with abuse, mental illness, suicide, and death and it was hard not to cry when hearing their heart-breaking experiences. While writing this thesis, I found myself having to stop to clear my head. It was difficult to not get emotional when thinking about my participants' experiences. I cannot help but wonder if they are closer to healing their bleeding wounds and finally being able to breathe freely.

There is plenty of work done on LGBTQIA+ studies around the world. However, this thesis studied the connections between sexuality, homelessness, and the resources available to members of the LGBTQIA+ community who are experiencing homelessness. My hope is that some of the suggestions that I provide in the call-to-action part of my thesis will be considered and made available to local students. In the end, we need to do more to ensure that we are helping our LGBTQIA+ youth. Fortunately, some of my participants were able to rely on their friends. Many of my participants would have had to stay in an abusive environment or sleep on the streets if they did not have a trusted friend to confide in about their homeless experience. Through the experience of interviewing and unpacking the data, I have also learned that sponsoring GSAs, donating fresh food or clothing, or just listening to

people's stories is important. This thesis was written to ensure that we hear the stories of local students, their struggles, and the resources they desperately need when facing one of the worst times of their lives. I hope their words had an impact on you, as they did on me.

Appendix

TABLE ONE: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Sexual Orientation	Pronouns	Age	Type of Homelessness	Length of homelessness
Alex	Gay	He/him; cisgender	35	Couch surfed	1 ½ months
Melissa	Pansexual	They/the m; nonbinary	21	Couch surfed, temporary housing at dorms	3 months; currently homeless
Ashley	Lesbian	She/her; cisgender	29	Couch surfed	1 year
Angie	Bisexual	She/her; cisgender	23	Hotels	1 day; 3 weeks
Isabella	Lesbian	She/her; cisgender	25	Couch surfed	1 year
Ruby	Pansexual	She/her; transgend er	24	Park bench; couch surfed	Couple of days; 2 weeks
Olivia	Bisexual	She/her; cisgender	21	Car; couch surfing	Couple of days; 1 week
Christian	Gay	He/him; transgend er	21	Couch surfed	5 months
Karina	Pansexual	She/her; cisgender	49	Car; hotel; couch surfed	8 months; 1 year; 4 months
Stephanie	Lesbian	She/her; cisgender	20	Couch surfed	2 ½ months

TABLE TWO: PARTICIPANT RESOURCES

Name	Unable to afford	Resources used	Resources needed	Social Media Platform
Alex	Rent	Bus, University food pantry	Food vouchers, housing vouchers	Instagram
Melissa	Food, transportation	Food pantry, free university therapy	More food pantries, more information for homeless students	Instagram, Twitter, Fox News
Ashley	N/A	None (did not know)	More information for homeless students	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok
Angie	Rent, food, hygiene	Food pantry	Financial help	Instagram, Twitter
Isabella	Clothing, textbooks, food	Food pantries	Fresher food, housing	Instagram, News, Twitter
Ruby	Clothes, food, cell phone, hygiene	None (did not know)	Housing, therapy, library, food, laundry, hormones	Instagram, Facebook, Twitter
Olivia	Food	None (did not know)	Clothing, Hygiene, food, place to park car safely, showers	Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Borderland Rainbow Center
Christian	Food, bills, textbooks, hormones	Local health clinic, food stamps, food pantry	Community garden, transportation, housing, fresher food pantry	Instagram, campus emails, word-of-mouth
Karina	Food, clothing, housing, therapy, medications	None (did not know)	Psychiatrist, clothing	Web MD, Mayo Clinic, drugs.com, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn

Stephanie	Hygiene products, medications	Therapist, bus, food pantry	Housing assistance, group therapy, after-school services	Instagram, Twitter, TikTok
-----------	-------------------------------	-----------------------------	--	----------------------------

ARE YOU LGBTQIA+ AND HAVE EXPERIENCED HOUSING INSECURITY OR HOMELESSNESS?

WHAT

We are conducting research on members of the the LGBTQ+ community who have faced or are currently facing housing insecurity.

WHO

- LGBTQIA+ members
- Experienced homelessness (couch surfing, shelters, unstable housing) OR housing insecurity.

WHERE/WHEN

1 hour in-person interviews
(Zoom/phone option available)



SCAN ME!



FOR MORE DETAILS PLEASE CONTACT
Michaela Castor
mdcastor1@miners.utep.edu

Receive
\$20

Interview Guide

Age:

Where did they see the flyer?

Sexual Orientation

1. What is your sexual orientation and gender expression?
2. How did your sexual orientation/gender expression affect those around you? (family, friends, coworkers)
3. Was/Is the reason for your unsheltered status due to your sexual orientation or expression? Can you tell me how it happened?
4. Can you tell me about a time where you were discriminated against due to your gender expression or sexuality?
5. What does your sexuality mean to you?
6. Why was it important for you to come out?
7. How did coming out affect your mental health? How did it affect your physical health?

Unsheltered

1. What event(s) lead to your unsheltered status?
2. How long have/were you been unsheltered? Where did you mostly stay during this period?
3. How did being unsheltered affect your mental health? How did it affect your physical health?
4. Can you tell me about a time when you were discriminated against based on your housing status?
5. How do you believe people perceive you when you tell them about your unsheltered status?
6. When you were homeless, what did a typical (school) day look like for you (morning, afternoon, night)?
7. What types of jobs do you utilize to make money?
8. What was the hardest thing about being unsheltered and/or what did you learn about life during that time?

Resources

1. What resources have you used from the City of El Paso during the time you spent unsheltered? Was there a difference during COVID?

2. What resources do you use to stay up to date with health and information?
3. Were you ever denied care, vaccines, or PPE due to your status or inability to provide required documents?
4. Did you know of any resources available to UTEP students during COVID-19? (If yes, what resources did you use?)
5. Were you able to pay for all necessities during your unsheltered status period? (books, food, clothing) (If so, how?) (If not, what did you do instead?)
6. What resources would you like to see on campus or offered near school for students facing the same situation as you.

References

- Abrams, Mere, LCSW, and Sian Ferguson. 2019. "How Many Genders Are There? A Full Identity & Expression List." *Healthline*. Retrieved April 10, 2023 (<https://www.healthline.com/health/different-genders>).
- American Psychiatric Association. n.d. *Psychiatry.org*. Retrieved April 15, 2023 (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>).
- Austin, Ashley, Shelley L. Craig, Sandra D'Souza, and Lauren B. McInroy. 2022. "Suicidality among Transgender Youth: Elucidating the Role of Interpersonal Risk Factors." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37(5–6):NP2696–2718. doi: 10.1177/0886260520915554.
- Blue Shield of California, and News Center. 2021. "College Students Facing Homelessness Move into Tiny Homes with Help from Blue Shield of California and Project Homekey." *Blue Shield of California | News Center*. Retrieved November 1, 2023 (<https://news.blueshieldca.com/2021/09/27/college-students-facing-homelessness-move-into-tiny-homes-with-help-from-blue-shield-of-california-and-project-homekey>).
- Butler, N. and Torres, F. (2023) *Housing insecurity and homelessness among college students*, *Bipartisan Policy Center*. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-among-college-students/> (Accessed: 27 October 2023).
- Cassady, Kyle J. 2023. *Causociety.com*. Retrieved November 3, 2023 (<https://causociety.com/unaffordable-housing-and-homelessness/>).
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. "Gay-Straight/Genders & Sexualities Alliances." *Cdc.gov*. Retrieved November 3, 2023 (<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/sexuality-alliances.htm>).

- Choi, Soon Kyu, Bianca D. M. Wilson, Jama Shelton, and Gary J. Gates. 2015. "Serving Our Youth 2015: The Needs and Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth Experiencing Homelessness."
- Coley, Jonathan S., and Dhruva Das. 2020. "Creating Safe Spaces: Opportunities, Resources, and LGBTQ Student Groups at U.s. Colleges and Universities." *Socius : Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6:237802312097147. doi: 10.1177/2378023120971472.
- Conron Kerith, O'neill Kathryn, Goldberg Abbie, Guardado Rubeen. 2022. "Experiences of LGBTQ People in Four-Year Colleges and Graduate Programs." *Williams Institute*. Retrieved February 13, 2023 (<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbtq-colleges-grad-school/>).
- Couch, Robbie. 2017. "A Day in the Life after You've Been Kicked out for Being LGBTQ." *Upworthy*. Retrieved March 24, 2023 (<https://www.upworthy.com/a-day-in-the-life-after-youve-been-kicked-out-for-being-lgbtq>).
- Diamond, Gary M., Guy Shilo, Erin Jurgensen, Anthony D'Augelli, Valeria Samarova, and Khendi White. 2011. "How Depressed and Suicidal Sexual Minority Adolescents Understand the Causes of Their Distress." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health* 15(2):130–51. doi: 10.1080/19359705.2010.532668.
- Diamond, Lisa M. 2008. "Female Bisexuality from Adolescence to Adulthood: Results from a 10-Year Longitudinal Study." *Developmental Psychology* 44(1):5–14. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.5.
- Gaetz, Stephen. 2009. "Attitudes about Homelessness." *Homelesshub.Ca*. Retrieved December 1, 2023 (<https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/attitudes-about-homelessness>).

- Galop. 2022. "LGBT+ Experiences of Abuse from Family Members." *Org.uk*. Retrieved October 25, 2023 (<https://galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Galop-LGBT-Experiences-of-Abuse-from-Family-Members.pdf>).
- Gallup, Inc. 2023. "LGBTQ+ Rights." *Gallup.com*. Retrieved November 16, 2023 (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx>).
- Goldberg, Abbie E., Genny Beemyn, and Julianna Z. Smith. 2019. "What Is Needed, What Is Valued: Trans Students' Perspectives on Trans-Inclusive Policies and Practices in Higher Education." *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation: The Official Journal of the Association for Educational and Psychological Consultants* 29(1):27–67. doi: 10.1080/10474412.2018.1480376.
- Gonzales, Gilbert, Emilio Loret de Mola, Kyle A. Gavulic, Tara McKay, and Christopher Purcell. 2020. "Mental Health Needs among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine* 67(5):645–48. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.08.006.
- Hennink, Monique, and Bonnie N. Kaiser. 2022. "Sample Sizes for Saturation in Qualitative Research: A Systematic Review of Empirical Tests." *Social Science & Medicine (1982)* 292(114523):114523. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523.
- Human Rights Campaign. 2018. "2018 LGBTQ Youth Report." *Hrc.org*. Retrieved October 24, 2023 (<https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/2018-YouthReport-NoVid.pdf>).
- Igoe, Katherine J. 2022. "A Comprehensive List of Sexualities to Know, from Pomosexual to Heteroflexible." *Cosmopolitan*. Retrieved February 20, 2023 (<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a39186738/list-of-sexualities/>).

- Kaiser, Michelle. 2022. "Transgender and Non-Binary Discrimination and Homelessness." *Texas Homeless Network*. Retrieved April 10, 2023 (<https://www.thn.org/2022/01/28/tgnc-discrimination/>).
- Lambda Legal. n.d. "National Recommended Best Practices for Serving LGBT Homeless Youth." *Lambdalegal.org*. Retrieved February 6, 2023 (https://legacy.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/bkl_national-recommended-best-practices-for-lgbt-homeless-youth_0.pdf).
- Lesley University. n.d. "The Cost of Coming out: LGBT Youth Homelessness." *Lesley.edu*. Retrieved April 8, 2023 (<https://lesley.edu/article/the-cost-of-coming-out-lgbt-youth-homelessness>).
- Lowell, Isabel. n.d. "What Is Transgender?" *WebMD*. Retrieved February 22, 2023 (<https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/what-is-transgender>).
- McCarthy, Lindsey, and Sadie Parr. 2022. "Is LGBT Homelessness Different? Reviewing the Relationship between LGBT Identity and Homelessness." *Housing Studies* 1–19. doi: 10.1080/02673037.2022.2104819.
- Merriam Webster. n.d. "Definition of HOMOSEXUALITY." *Merriam-webster.com*. Retrieved March 4, 2023 (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homosexuality>).
- Morton M, Samuels G, Dworsky A, & Patel S. 2018. "Missed Opportunities: LGBTQ Youth Homelessness in America." *Voicesofyouthcount.org*. Retrieved March 1, 2023 (<https://voicesofyouthcount.org/brief/lgbtq-youth-homelessness/>).
- Moya, Eva M., Amy Wagler, Jessica Ayala, Matt Crouse, Araceli Garcia, and Gregory S. Schober. 2023. "Analysis of Food and Housing Insecurity among University Students at a

- Public Hispanic-Serving Institution.” *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 18(1):21–35. doi: 10.1080/19320248.2022.2077159.
- Page, Michelle. 2017. “Forgotten Youth: Homeless LGBT Youth of Color and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act.” *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 12(2):17.
- Pew Research Center. 2013. “A Survey of LGBT Americans.” *Pew Research Center’s Social & Demographic Trends Project*. Retrieved October 25, 2023 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/06/13/a-survey-of-lgbt-americans/>).
- Pitcher, Erich N., Trace P. Camacho, Kristen A. Renn, and Michael R. Woodford. 2018. “Affirming Policies, Programs, and Supportive Services: Using an Organizational Perspective to Understand LGBTQ+ College Student Success.” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 11(2):117–32. doi: 10.1037/dhe0000048
- Rose Nose Day. 2021. “What Are the Four Types of Homelessness?” *Red Nose Day USA*. Retrieved March 19, 2023 (<https://rednoseday.org/news/what-are-four-types-homelessness>).
- Rew, Lynn, Tiffany A. Whittaker, Margaret A. Taylor-Seehafer, and Lorie R. Smith. 2005. “Sexual Health Risks and Protective Resources in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Homeless Youth.” *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing: JSPN* 10(1):11–19. doi: 10.1111/j.1088-145x.2005.00003.x.
- Richardson, Rhett. 2020. “How Much Does Hormone Replacement Therapy Cost?” *Hormone Therapy Center of America*. Retrieved November 3, 2023 (<https://ht-ca.com/blog/how-much-does-hormone-replacement-therapy-cost/>).

- Ryan, Caitlin, David Huebner, Rafael M. Diaz, and Jorge Sanchez. 2009. "Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults." *Pediatrics* 123(1):346–52. doi: 10.1542/peds.2007-3524.
- Savin-Baden, Maggi, and Claire Howell. 2023. *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice*. London, England: Routledge.
- Schmitz, Rachel M., and Kimberly A. Tyler. 2018. "The Complexity of Family Reactions to Identity among Homeless and College Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Young Adults." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 47(4):1195–1207. doi: 10.1007/s10508-017-1014-5.
- Simkus, Julia. 2022. "Snowball Sampling Method: Definition, Techniques & Examples." *Simply Psychology*.
- Strauss, P., Cook A., Winter S., Watson V., Wright Toussiant., Lin A. 2017. *Trans Pathways the Mental Health Experiences and Care Pathways of Trans Young People*. Texas Youth Helpline. Retrieved October 26, 2023 (<https://www.dfps.texas.gov/youth-helpline/youth-resources/runaway-laws-emancipation-in-texas.asp>).
- The Trevor Project. 2022. "2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health Texas." *Thetrevorproject.org*. Retrieved March 20, 2023 (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-Texas.pdf>).
- Wagler, Amy, Gregory S. Schober, Silvia M. Chavez-Baray, Jessica Ayala, Paul R. Dessauer, and Eva M. Moya. 2022. "Food and Housing Security at a US Hispanic-Serving Institution: An Examination before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in Public Health* 10:918955. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2022.918955.

Wexelbaum, Rachel S. 2018. "Do Libraries Save LGBT Students?" *Library Management* 39(1/2):31–58. doi: 10.1108/lm-02-2017-0014.

World Population. n.d. "Homeless Population by State [Updated August 2023]."

Worldpopulationreview.com. Retrieved April 4, 2023

(<https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/homeless-population-by-state>).

Vita

Michaela Dakota Castor was born in Syracuse, New York but raised in El Paso, Texas. Michaela started her higher education journey at El Paso Community College where she earned her Associates of Arts in Psychology. Promptly after, she attended The University of Texas at El Paso to finish her Bachelors of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Sociology. After graduation, she continued her Masters of Arts in Sociology at UTEP under the supervision of Dr. Aurelia Lorena Murga. She is an NSF ASPIRE Fellow which prepares graduate students to teach at community colleges. During her thesis, she received funding from the UTEP Dodson Grant. Michaela is working in the public education field and plans on obtaining a doctorate in Cultural Sociology, Education or Psychology.

Contact Information: michaelacastor22@gmail.com