Young, Queer and Trans, Homeless, and Besieged: A Critical Action Research Study of How Policy and Culture Create Oppressive Conditions for LGBTQ Youth in Toronto’s Shelter System

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This dissertation is about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ) youth and the shelter system. This work focuses on the denial of home and safety to queer and trans youth. Over approximately two years, different groups of people came together to discuss what is holding up and sustaining the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, how homophobia and transphobia occurs and is managed in the shelter system, and how broader policy issues serve to create oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth. This is a Critical Action Research study that was informed by Critical Ethnography and Institutional Ethnography.

In order to investigate what disjunctures occur for LGBTQ youth in the shelter system and how those disjunctures come about, this dissertation draws upon one-on-one interviews with LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, shelter Executive Directors, City of Toronto management, and training facilitators; focus groups with frontline shelter staff; and training observations.
This study suggests that it is both the excessive bureaucratic regulation and the lack of necessary bureaucratic regulation in highly significant areas, that play a key role in creating the disjunctures that occur for queer and trans youth in the shelter system. This dissertation describes the findings of this study in five major themes, which include: Homophobia and Transphobia in the Shelter System, LGBTQ Youth Invisibility, Inadequate, Invasive and Otherwise Problematic Rules, Lack of Knowledge, and Inconsistent Conformity to Formal Rules.

A Digital Storytelling project was created with one youth and was used as a Knowledge Mobilization strategy for this study. The film helped generate extensive media attention and facilitated change in the shelter system, at the City of Toronto, and at a policy level.

This research study has made it possible for the voices of LGBTQ homeless youth to be heard in the context of a critical public health and social justice problem. Detailed policy and practice recommendations and changes to the Toronto Shelter Standards are provided at the end of this dissertation and are meant to help Toronto’s shelter system become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth.
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Dedication

Dedicated to my beloved mummo (grandmother) Maija Liisa Ihalainen.

Deep in the Finnish forest, you taught me about respect, authenticity, and love.

When I was 3 years old, I told you that I would become Dr. Abramovich when I grew up.

This is for you, mummo.

Thank you for your teachings.

Your spirit is always with me.
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   - Excessive Bureaucratic Regulation
   - Segregation of Trans Youth as a Problematic Rule
   - Rules that have not Been Updated for Years
   - Insufficient LGBTQ Staff Training

2) Lack of Knowledge

3) Inconsistent Conformity to Formal Rules
   - Trans Youth Accessing the Shelter System
   - Lack of Monitoring of Staff Training
   - Inadequate Complaints Procedure: Lack of Processes to Make it Useful

Stories by Youth that Represent the Principles Above

   Jamie Jach
   Mouse

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Chapter 1: Introduction

[Homophobia and transphobia] is the number one reason why we have so many homeless people [...] A lot of these guys, they do not want to go to the shelter. Most of them are stubborn and stay on the street because they are afraid to be in the shelter. Do you know what they do to you in the shelter? They tie you to the bed and they beat the shit out of you (Tomlinson, 22 years old).

Between February 2010 and April 2012, a number of different groups of people came together to discuss how homophobia and transphobia occurs in the shelter system and how it is managed, as well as how broader policy issues serve to create oppressive contexts for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Additionally, training workshops for Toronto shelter staff were observed, and a Digital Storytelling film was created. These activities are all part of the research which underpins this thesis. These observations and discussions were my way of learning more about the disjunctures that occur for LGBTQ youth in the shelter system and how exactly these disjunctures occur, and it is precisely the terrain of this thesis.

This research is about LGBTQ youth and the shelter system. It is in essence about the denial of home and of safety to queer and trans youth. This is a Critical Action Research study that was informed by elements of Critical Ethnography and Institutional Ethnography, which helped enhance the analytical and conceptual quality of this work, and helped me gain deeper insights at an institutional level. In addition to exploring the disjunctures that occur for LGBTQ youth in the shelter system and how those disjunctures come about, this study investigates what
is holding up and sustaining the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, where these practices come from, and how they are maintained within the system. Answering these questions has assisted me in discovering what changes need to be implemented in Toronto’s shelter system in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth, which is discussed throughout this dissertation.

I would like to acknowledge that there is a large program of work that I have undertaken and this dissertation is one very central part of the larger work. There are various ways that I am addressing the topic of LGBTQ youth homelessness and this thesis is a major undertaking and is different from all of the other pieces, it stands on its own but it is also connected to the other parts. There is so much that has gone on within this large program of work that is not necessarily reflected in the thesis. However, I will do my best to honor the work that is not reflected in this thesis, which I will come back to in Chapters 4 and 8, when I discuss Knowledge Translation (KT) and the key Knowledge Mobilization project (the Digital Storytelling project).

The context of this thesis is at once the problems of LGBTQ youth homelessness and a missing element within the research. Focusing on the latter, there is a great deal of research and knowledge on youth homelessness in Canada. However, issues regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness are often an add-on at the end of studies, and rarely the focus. Even though studies report that these are significant issues, there is rarely any follow-up or further investigation into these problems. Therefore, little is actually known about queer and trans youth homelessness. What we do know, is that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, but underrepresented in homeless shelters, which is part of the reason that it is so difficult to scale the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness. Additionally, shelters do not collect data on
youths’ gender and sexual identities, making it even more difficult to measure the prevalence of queer and trans youth homelessness. We also know that LGBTQ youth are not only at a higher risk of homelessness, but also commonly experience homophobia and transphobia within the shelter system. Therefore, this study is tremendously important for not only scholarship on youth homelessness, but also for policy interventions and a movement towards social change.

In this day of funding it’s hard to get funding to address a problem that you can’t quantify and measure, and then measure how financially sound your proposed fix is going to be. So, it’s kind of like, we don’t know it’s broken and depending on the cost of the fix, we don’t know how cost effective that fix is going to be. We’re at the point where we really have nothing other we can do, which you have already seen in the Shelter Standards. The Shelter Standards are very clear and it’s to be open and accessible for all (K.S, Shelter Standards Workshop Facilitator, City of Toronto).

Due to gaps in knowledge and a lack of reported incidents, discrimination against queer and trans youth remains largely invisible to shelter workers and management, policy makers, and City of Toronto management, at a time when LGBTQ youth homelessness is on the rise (Abramovich, 2012; Denomme-Welch, Pyne, & Scanlon, 2008; Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Service providers offering support to homeless youth are not fully equipped or prepared to deal with issues of homophobia and transphobia. Currently there are few specialized support services and no specialized shelters in Canada that meet the needs of LGBTQ youth. Throughout this dissertation, you will discover that the City of Toronto is an evidence-based and complaint-driven system, meaning that they rely heavily on complaints and evidence in order to create new services or make changes to the shelter system and existing services. The lack of empirical
evidence in the area of queer and trans youth homelessness in Canada, particularly Toronto, is one of the main reasons for the shortage of support available to this population of youth.

This study offers evidence that may be used to implement changes to existing services and policies so that the appropriate support is available to LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. New and surprising knowledge on the epidemic of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto and the current issues faced by this group of youth are provided throughout this dissertation. This research study has made it possible for the voices of LGBTQ homeless youth to be heard in the context of a critical public health and social justice problem. This study has successfully engaged the community and situated homeless youth as knowledge makers and creators. I have also captured the voices and perspectives of the adults who work in the shelter system and at the City of Toronto Shelter Operations. It was particularly important to present the voices of the youth, as it is precisely their voices and experiences that are so often marginalized in society. This work is deeply rooted in the desire to make a difference in Toronto’s shelter system. This study has a social justice outcome and was intended from the very start, to leave the shelter system more supportive, accessible, and safer for LGBTQ youth.

This research is both personal and political for me as the researcher. I have chosen to work in this area for several important reasons, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. I come to this work with lived experience of being young and queer and having faced ongoing oppression throughout my life, due to homophobia and transphobia. My own personal coming out experience is what led me to this work. Having been a young person who dealt with little support and extreme rejection when I came out, I quickly learned how easy it is to become
homeless if you are a young LGBTQ person coming out to a homophobic and/or transphobic family.

Coming out is hard for everyone. Sometimes there is no way of knowing how homophobic your parents will be. Sometimes we are unpleasantly surprised. As an entry point into this thesis, as a solitary story that is at once unique and not unique and as such, that may give you a felt sense of the myriad of different stories, I ask you to entertain the following:

Imagine the heat of a Toronto summer day, you are young and in love for the very first time. You are aware of your every heartbeat and you are learning what the true meaning of desire is. Every love song and movie tells you that it is beautiful to be young and in love, but this feels anything but beautiful because your family tells you that your feelings are not normal and that you are not normal. They tell you that you can no longer live with them because of who you have “chosen” to love. You feel terrified every time you enter your home because of what awaits you. Imagine what it feels like to discover that there is no such thing as unconditional love, just as you fall in love for the first time. Imagine feeling like a disease that cannot be cured, unless you no longer existed. So, you begin to wish that a car would hit you every time you leave the house.

Imagine the prospect of the streets or an alleyway feeling safer than your own home. But then being met with the same threats outside, because of the way that people stare at you and the homophobic slurs that are sent your way. Imagine discovering that your house is not a home, but just a house. No place feels like home anymore, because you do not have a home. This is when you realize that you are homeless. You begin to feel paranoid in the world. You become homesick and you cry yourself to sleep at night remembering when everything was fine and you were happy.
Imagine being told repeatedly by your parents and the rest of the world that you are not normal, but that if you were normal, you would be loved and you would have a home. Imagine what it feels like to not feel at home in this world. To feel so hopeless because there is no cure for you and you have no place to go. So, you spend every dollar you have just to ride the subway all day because that is where you feel safest and because that is where you can be away from the people who hurt you. Imagine feeling locked up by other people’s words.

This is the kind of hate that starts in the home and ends on the streets. This is the kind of hate that leads young people into institutions that are ruled by homophobic and transphobic policies. This is the kind of hate that turns to suicide. This hatred is an emergency situation.

They say that sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you. Well, they were wrong, because words in a way destroyed me, but my ability to bounce back is what saved my life. This thesis has forced me to delve into the most shattered parts of my heart. On a more positive note, even though this work is rooted in a pain that may never be healed, I receive something personal from the work that I do. What is both on top of this and an essential part of this, I have managed to use my experience to help those in similar and worse circumstances and hopefully create a prevention plan --one small step in creating a world where nobody has to know what it feels like to not have a home simply for loving or being attracted to another human being.

I believe that being able to relate to this work on such a profound level has worked to my advantage as a researcher because it has not only taught me to nurture the voice of the personal, but it has also helped me connect with participants in a more reflective manner and it has taught me how to become a more reflexive researcher. It has been through my lived experience that I
have come to learn about the capacities of the human heart. I have learned that people who may have the authority to make changes can be persuaded, and that this kind of research, which uses film and visual media, may be necessary to help people truly understand certain issues.

The most important reason that I did this research was for the young people who deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia on a daily basis. I did this research for the youth, in the hopes that this work may create a necessary shift that will help make the city of Toronto a safer place for all LGBTQ homeless youth. I come to this work committed to finding strategies that will help provide the necessary evidence and policy interventions to improve the shelter system, support services, and health inequalities experienced by LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

Before I discuss the organization of this dissertation, I would like to provide a note on homophobia and transphobia, which will help contextualize and provide an understanding of the history of the discrimination and hate that underlies much of this work. Followed by a short note on language and clarification of several key terms used throughout the chapters to come.

A Note on Homophobia and Transphobia

“The thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind, it is abomination”

(Leviticus 18:22)

The American psychologist and writer George Weinberg first coined the term “homophobia” in the 1960’s, which he defined as: “the dread of being at close quarters with homosexuals” (Baird, 2004, p. 46). Audre Lorde (1984) later described homophobia as: “fear of feelings of love for members of one’s own sex and therefore hatred of those feelings in others”
Today, homophobia can be understood as the fear and hatred of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (Fone, 2000), whereas transphobia can be understood as the fear and hatred of transgender, transsexual, and gender non-conforming people. While homophobia and transphobia are different, they may occur simultaneously when a trans person identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual, which is referred to as intersecting oppressions. A high proportion of the youth that participated in this study had intersecting identities and faced intersecting oppressions on a daily basis, particularly transphobia and homophobia, and racism and homophobia. However, they rarely spoke directly about intersecting oppressions, but rather would choose to focus on the type of oppression that they felt most affected by, such as homophobia or transphobia.

Oftentimes, when we deviate from the norm and do not conform to the identity categories that are set up for us, we are most likely to be labeled and pathologized (Burstow & Weitz, 1988). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) classified homosexuality as a “mental disorder” until 1973 (Cooper, 2004). Although homosexuality was removed approximately 40 years ago, the DSM-5 still pathologizes and labels those who fall outside of the gender binary as having “Gender Dysphoria”, formerly named “Gender Identity Disorder (GID)” in the DSM-IV. GID was categorized under Sexual Disorders and Dysfunctions in the DSM-IV; however, Gender Dysphoria has a new diagnostic class and its own chapter in the DSM-5, but there are suggestions that imply that it is still considered a sexual dysfunction (Moran, 2013). The pathologization of homosexuality and gender non-conformity has led to stereotypes, stigma, homophobia, and transphobia.

Homophobia and transphobia are believed to stem from a perceived threat to fixed
sexuality and gender roles, and religious doctrines that disapprove of homosexuality and view it as a sin, for example, today there are still countless religious organizations and homophobic preachers dedicated to “curing” homosexuality through prayer and “conversion therapy” (Baird, 2004; Fone, 2000). Shortly after coining the term “homophobia”, Weinberg provided five motives underlying homophobia: “1. Religion; 2. The secret fear of being homosexual; 3. Repressed envy; 4. The threat of values; and 5. Resentment stemming from the perception that homosexuals do not procreate” (Janoff, 2005, p. 45). Faith-based groups that abide by the rules of Christianity, particularly Catholicism, run many of the organizations serving people experiencing homelessness in Toronto, which has created much controversy and has made it especially difficult for LGBTQ people to access such services.

There is a long history of LGBTQ activism worldwide, which includes LGBTQ people and allies demonstrating and campaigning for equal rights and social equity for LGBTQ people. However, homosexuality is still illegal in approximately 76 countries, resulting in punishments ranging from fines, lifelong imprisonment, forced psychiatric treatment, banishment, whippings, and death by public stoning (Baird, 2004). Abhorrence of LGBTQ people can be overt and covert and manifests in many different ways – from verbal, emotional, and physical abuse and discrimination, to organizational policies and standards, to the ways that people are treated in different cultures and faiths around the world. “Hate crimes” have come to most often refer to crimes that target a person on the basis of their sexual or gender identity and are one of the most underreported crimes to police (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2002; Janoff, 2005).

Although Canada may be considered one of the safest countries for LGBTQ people due to the legalization of same-sex marriage and legislation against homophobia and transphobia,
still there is widespread homophobia and transphobia across Canada. In many ways, homophobia and transphobia have come to be normalized and socially acceptable because many of us are conditioned to believe that it is wrong to be anything but heterosexual and cisgender, and because words and phrases such as “faggot”, “dyke”, “that’s so gay”, and “no homo”, are used habitually in people’s everyday language (Baird, 2004). The normalization of homophobia and transphobia are also well entrenched in our society’s response to homelessness, as well as in the institutional culture of the shelter system, which we will discover throughout this dissertation.

A Note on Language

The tension that exists between language and the world exists for the purpose of naming things. When we name, language lodges in the world like a hook, and brings things forward; yet, it releases them at the same time. Language organizes the world—the world resists language. When it names things, language impregnates and clarifies the world at the same time that the world, clarified, sheds language (Vernon, 1979, p. 62).

This dissertation highlights the importance and power of spoken and written language. From discriminatory words that are part of people’s everyday vocabulary, to people’s obsession with gendering everything that exists, to the institutional texts that rule organizations, language is an extremely powerful tool that can be used to further marginalize and harm individuals. Due to the absence of policies and regulations regarding the use of discriminatory language in the shelter system, homophobic and transphobic slurs have become accepted as normalized language in shelters, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7.
I think that best practices and language should really be addressed. One thing we are going to be checking in on is the language that we use at Sketch and how people gender things when they are just talking about them, how people just assume the gender of another person without asking or checking (Sketch, Project Coordinator, S.C).

A glossary of important terms used throughout this dissertation can be found in Appendix A; however, I would like to clarify several terms that are used heavily throughout this document.

The Canadian definition of homelessness states:

Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing (Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2012, p. 1).

The majority of youth that participated in this study identified themselves as street-involved, while very few youth specifically identified as homeless, even though they lacked stable living conditions and were sleeping in shelters and couch surfing (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). In line with this, the terms “homeless youth”, “street youth”, and “street-involved” are used throughout this dissertation and are used to refer to youth between the ages of 16 to 29 years who lack a stable living situation, such as living on the street, alleyways, cars, in the shelter system, couch surfing, or in temporary or marginal shelter.
For the purpose of this dissertation, I have used the acronym “LGBTQ” to refer collectively to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer people; however, today there are more inclusive acronyms and terms, such as, “LGBTQQIAA2” and “GLBTHQQA”. This study does not mean to exclude any queer and trans people in any way. My sincere apologies if the use of the acronym “LGBTQ” has excluded anyone. The terms “queer” and “trans” and the acronym “LGBTQ” are used interchangeably in this dissertation and they are both meant to denote the same thing. The term “trans” is used as an umbrella term to describe people who do not conform or identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. Therefore, the terms “trans” and “transgender” are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized by nine main chapters that explore how issues of homophobia and transphobia occur in the shelter system and how they are dealt with, as well as what changes are needed in Toronto’s shelter system in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth. A very important finding and organizing principle of this dissertation is that it is both the excessive bureaucratic regulation and the lack of necessary bureaucratic regulation in highly significant areas, that play a key role in creating the disjunctures that occur for queer and trans youth in the shelter system.

The following chapter, Chapter 2, provides information on what we know about the problem of LGBTQ youth homelessness and discusses the needs and risks of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, as well as why it is important to develop distinct policies regarding queer and trans youth homelessness.
Chapter 3 discusses this study’s theoretical framework and the main constructs and terms that are pivotal to this study. In order to provide an understanding of how the findings have been conceptualized, an initial explication of the key concepts are drawn on.

Chapter 4 articulates the study’s methodological framework in great detail. The chapter shares information on the study’s epistemological lens, methods, and research design, including reflexivity, researcher self-location and what brought me to this work, sampling techniques, recruitment strategies, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis process, research activities, knowledge translation, trustworthiness of the findings, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 5 provides introductions to the people at the centre of this work - the youth participants. Short vignettes are used to introduce and help familiarize the reader with each of the young people that participated in this study.

Chapter 6 provides detailed information about the research questions and begins to share the main findings of this study. The chapter focuses on the overall culture of the shelter system and the lack of acknowledgment of LGBTQ youths’ existence in the shelter system. Chapter 6 illustrates the disjunctures that occur for LGBTQ youth in the shelter system on a daily basis. The main themes discussed in Chapter 6, include Homophobia and Transphobia in the Shelter System and LGBTQ Youth Invisibility.

Chapter 7 focuses on how the disjunctures revealed in Chapter 6 come about and what is holding up and sustaining the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. The main themes focused on in this chapter include Inadequate, Invasive and Otherwise Problematic Rules, Lack of Knowledge, and Inconsistent Conformity to Formal Rules.
Chapter 8 begins to wrap up the dissertation by summarizing the key theoretical contributions and the major findings. A section on subjectivity is included, and the impact of this research to date is discussed, as well as the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research in this area.

The final chapter, Chapter 9, provides concrete policy and practice recommendations. This chapter includes recommendations made by the youth participants for shelter staff, the creation of specialized housing for LGBTQ youth in Toronto, and a series of concrete policy and practice recommendations made by me. The chapter provides information on what support should look like and how to hold the whole system accountable.

**Concluding Remarks**

This research is important for a number of reasons; firstly, this is one of the only Canadian studies investigating LGBTQ youth homelessness that actually shares the voices of queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness and situates them as knowledge creators. Secondly, this study provides concrete recommendations for changes that can be implemented in the shelter system, so that it may become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth. Thirdly, this thesis provides significant and unique theoretical contributions to scholarship on youth homelessness and provides knowledge on a number of important and unexplored questions. This thesis expands our scope of knowledge on LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada and helps fill important gaps in knowledge.

The chapter that immediately follows provides an overview of the literature on LGBTQ youth homelessness, and substantiates what is known about the topic. The chapter is divided into
the following seven categories: street life, substance use, health status, LGBTQ Aboriginal youth homelessness, location and mobility, homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system and on the streets, and support services. The chapter is meant to provide background knowledge so that the reader may understand how multifaceted and complex the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness truly is.
Chapter 2: Homing in on What We Know About the Problem

Figure 1 Introducing LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada

It is accepted wisdom in our culture that home is where the heart is and that our primary caregivers are supposed to love us unconditionally. Our childhood storybooks teach us that home is a place of shelter and safety, a place of refuge from the rest of the world. However, this is not the case for young people coming out as LGBTQ to an unsupportive family. It has been estimated that approximately 25-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ (Josephson & Wright, 2000). However, this statistic came from one Canadian study 14 years ago, and there is not much clarity or understanding what this number looks like today or how to begin scaling the
issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness on a national level, when services do not collect data on youths’ gender or sexual identities.

The overrepresentation of LGBTQ homeless youth has been documented for more than two decades in Canada, and the City of Toronto has specified the need for more evidence regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness in order to implement changes to existing services, as well as to create new services. However, the City of Toronto did not include questions regarding respondents’ LGBTQ identity on the first Street Needs Assessment in 2006 or in 2009. The latest round of the City of Toronto Street Needs Assessment included a question about LGBTQ identity, which was a result of a meeting that several others in the area of youth homelessness and myself had with City managers. The City of Toronto recently released its interim report from the Streets Needs Assessment; and for the first time the results confirmed that 20% of youth in the shelter system identify as LGBTQ, more than twice the rate for all age groups (City of Toronto, 2013). Although 20% is high, we have reasons to believe that the prevalence of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto is in fact even higher. For example, many youth choose to not come out as queer or trans to volunteers conducting the survey, for a variety of reasons that often stem from issues regarding safety; and countless LGBTQ youth did not have a chance to complete the survey because they are part of Toronto’s hidden homeless population and do not access services, also due to issues regarding homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system and drop-in programs. The City of Toronto has missed out on important opportunities to collect information regarding the overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth homelessness. The collection of this type of data would have been useful and could have potentially provided the City of Toronto with the appropriate evidence needed to begin addressing the needs of LGBTQ homeless youth.
The high prevalence of LGBTQ youth (defined as 16 to 29 years old) homelessness tells us that a house is not always a loving home (Abramovich, 2012; Cull, Platzer, & Balloch, 2006; Josephson & Wright, 2000; Ray, 2006). There is a multitude of reasons that lead or force youth out of the home; however, family conflict is the number one cause of youth homelessness (Cull et al., 2006; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). In particular, family conflict resulting from a youth coming out as LGBTQ is a major contributing factor to youth homelessness (Abramovich, 2008; Ray, 2006). In recent years, there has been extensive research in the area of youth homelessness both in Canada and internationally. A number of groundbreaking Canadian studies on youth homelessness have missed opportunities to collect data on LGBTQ youth homelessness, but have instead included such information as an afterthought. Therefore, little is known about LGBTQ youth homelessness.

“Youth are predominantly driven to the street, not drawn there” (Yonge Street Mission, 2009, p. 2).
The incidence of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto is on the rise, and agencies serving homeless youth have reported challenges in providing support to this population (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). We also know that many LGBTQ homeless youth feel safer on the streets than in shelters due to homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008; Ray, 2006).

Despite these findings, there are few specialized support services and no specialized housing initiatives that meet the needs of LGBTQ street-involved youth in Canada. Additionally, there are gaps in knowledge, indicating a need for research. For example, we do not know enough about how the lack of specialized services impacts this population’s health, well-being, and length of time on the street; or how experiencing intersecting or multiple oppressions (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia), both on the streets and in the shelter system, impacts LGBTQ street-involved youth.

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the literature on LGBTQ youth homelessness and substantiate what is known on the topic. Based on the literature available, what is known may roughly be conceptualized under the following categories: Street Life, Substance Use, Health Status, LGBTQ Aboriginal Youth Homelessness, Location and Mobility, Homophobia and Transphobia in the Shelter System and on the Streets, and Support Services.
Street Life

Street life is dangerous and can be extremely harmful, particularly for youth. The stressful and difficult circumstances of street life create significant challenges to youths’ physical, emotional, and mental health (Kelly & Caputo, 2007). Street youth have been found to be 10 to 12 times more likely to contract sexually transmitted infections and blood borne infections than other youth in their age group from the general population (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). The longer youth are on the street, the more likely they are to become attached to street culture, prostitution, survival sex, and drugs (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

The constant threat of violence, drugs, harassment, and illness add to the hazards of street life. Due to the precariousness of street life, homeless youth mostly earn money through means such as: squeegeeing, panhandling, and quasi-legal activities such as sex work (Barnaby, Penn, & Erickson, 2010; Kidd, 2003; O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004). Given that these are all part of the reality of street life, it is imperative that support services provide street youth with access to education regarding HIV/AIDS risk, harm reduction, and safe sex practices (Kidd, 2003; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). A high proportion of street youth rely on a Personal Needs Allowance, Ontario Works, and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), however, an even higher proportion of youth have indicated not having enough money to meet their most basic needs and therefore risk their safety and well-being to make it through each day (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Street youth have also been found to be more likely working for money than domiciled youth in their age group (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).
On January 31, 2000, the Ontario government created the Ontario Safe Streets Act, which outlawed both squeegeeing and “aggressive” panhandling (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004), bringing the criminalization of homelessness in Ontario to a new level. Homeless youth experience significantly higher rates of criminal victimization than housed youth (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2004). These rates are higher again for LGBTQ homeless youth, who experience daily incidents of homophobia and transphobia (Dunne, Prendergast, & Telford, 2002; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). However, the public discourse on crime and homelessness tends to revolve around homeless youth as perpetrators of crime, rather than victims of crime (Gaetz, 2004a). The notion that street-youth are “troubled” and “deviant” and make the streets unsafe for others is still a widely held public belief.

On January 31, 2000, both squeegeeing and “aggressive” panhandling were outlawed – bringing the criminalization of homelessness to a new level.

There is minimal knowledge and understanding on the victimization experiences of homeless youth in Canada. Gaetz (2004a) argues that due to social exclusion, youth who are homeless have limited access to shelter, employment, social capital, and healthy lifestyles, which effects their ability to be safe and increases the risk of criminal victimization.

The threat of violence and harassment on the streets is exacerbated for LGBTQ youth due to frequent encounters with homophobia and transphobia. These threats make it especially hard for youth who were forced to leave home due to homophobia or transphobia because it makes coming out and trusting people more challenging. There are also countless situations where youth are victimized, ridiculed, and beaten up on the streets and in the shelter system simply for
their gender and/or sexual identity. Regardless of their gender or sexual identity, homeless youth most often come from family situations of conflict, abuse, and neglect (Cull et al., 2006; Kidd, 2003; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). When youth are forced to leave home for reasons beyond their control, they are suddenly faced with the stress of street life: finding safety, shelter, and food, often while coping with intense feelings of rejection, trauma, and fear. Although support services for homeless youth seek to offer support, a number of LGBTQ youth report conflicting experiences, such as homophobic and transphobic violence within services. This places LGBTQ homeless youth into situations where they have little choice but to be exposed to the risk of homophobic and transphobic violence on the streets and in the shelter system.

**Substance Use**

For many youth on the streets, substance use is a part of street life that they engage in as a way of forgetting and escaping the pain, sadness, and stress faced on a daily basis (Barnaby et al., 2010; Kidd, 2003). A higher prevalence of substance use has been found amongst youth on the streets than those in shelters (Ray, 2006). This raises concern for the LGBTQ youth cohort, as there are no specialized shelters for them in Canada, leaving many youth to sleep on the streets and become further exposed to the risks of substance use. There has been extensive research on substance use and youth homelessness; however, the majority of these studies have only included a small percentage of LGBTQ identified youth. The substance use patterns of LGBTQ youth who are homeless have been associated with social stigma and ongoing discrimination (Ray, 2006).

The Youth Pathways Project (YPP) involved 150 homeless youth in Toronto and examined issues including: drug use, violence, health, mental health, nutrition, housing, and use
of support services (Ottaway, King, & Erickson, 2009). Although not all street youth engage in substance use, the most commonly used illicit drug amongst homeless youth in Toronto is marijuana (Barnaby et al., 2010; Ottaway et al., 2009). A number of studies, including the YPP study, have confirmed that poly-substance use (combining two or more different types of drugs to achieve a desired effect) is the primary method of drug use amongst street youth in Toronto (Barnaby et al., 2010; Ottaway et al., 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). The Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) found that the most common drugs injected amongst street youth in Canada were: cocaine, heroin, morphine, and speedball (cocaine and heroin combined). No differentiation was made between injection drug use of LGBTQ youth and heterosexual youth. Recent homelessness was found to be a major contributing factor to youths’ decision to injecting drug use (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006).

Poly-substance use is the primary method of drug use amongst street youth in Toronto.

The 2010 SHOUT Clinic Harm Reduction study was conducted to identify current substance use, harm reduction and sexual practices and health status of youth who are homeless and use substances in Toronto (Barnaby et al., 2010). Sources of shelter were found to influence youths’ choice of drugs. For example, those who slept on the streets were more likely to combine stimulants and alcohol (Barnaby et al., 2010). Several significant differences in the use of substances were found between LGBTQ youth and their heterosexual peers. For example, there was greater use of Methamphetamine amongst LGBTQ youth and greater use of Opioids (e.g. Tylenol with Codeine, Heroin, Oxycotin/Oxycodone) amongst heterosexual youth (Barnaby et al., 2010). Regardless of sexual orientation, youth reported harm reduction as an appropriate and useful approach to dealing with substance use related issues (Barnaby et al., 2010). The adoption
of a harm reduction approach was described as offering services to youth where and when they needed them, greater access to supplies used by youth, program options that are relevant and specialized for sub-groups of youth (e.g. LGBTQ youth), better access to educational resources, and safe injection sites (Barnaby et al., 2010).

**Health Status**

Due to gaps in knowledge and lack of support, our society does not truly understand the social and emotional complexities of coming out and how often it leads to homelessness. Our society also does not have a thorough understanding of the connection between homophobia and homelessness, and the challenges of coming out, trying to form one’s gender and sexual identity, and bearing the burden of social stigma and discrimination in addition to the everyday stresses of street life. These factors have a major impact on the well-being of LGBTQ homeless youth. For example, it has been found that LGBTQ youth are at a dramatically higher risk for suicide, “mental health” difficulties, and HIV infection than heterosexual and cisgender youth, and these risk factors are amplified by the lack of support available (Cull et al., 2006; Frederick, Ross, Bruno, & Erickson, 2011; Gattis, 2011; Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009; Quintana, Rosenthal, & Krehely, 2010; Reck, 2009). Higher rates of unprotected sex have also been reported amongst lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) homeless youth in comparison to their heterosexual peers (Cull et al., 2006). A high proportion of street youth have reported not using condoms with both their male and female sexual partners, however, males were the least likely to report using condoms with their same-sex partners (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Little is known about the reasons behind the low rate of condom use amongst homeless youth male-to-male sexual encounters, and further research needs to be conducted in this area.
As a way to ensure that youth support services can address the needs of youth experiencing homelessness today, Yonge Street Mission (2009) conducted a study that focused on the changing needs of homeless youth because “The youth of 1960 were not the youth of 1980, and the youth of 1980 are not the youth of today” (p. 12). Hundreds of homeless youth and approximately twenty support services were interviewed to identify the changing needs of homeless youth in Toronto (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Interviews with support services focused on questions regarding the youth populations that access their services and identifying youth that were not using their services. The study did not collect data on youths’ LGBTQ identities and when asked about why this information was not collected, I was told that there are LGBTQ youth spread across the city and they did not see it necessary to segregate LGBTQ youth in the data. This indicates a lack of understanding regarding the barriers to services and changing needs experienced by LGBTQ youth.

Although sexual orientation was not recorded or included in demographics, a number of significant findings and questions emerged from the study. Youth sleeping on the streets and couch surfing reported higher rates of “mental health” difficulties, in comparison to youth sleeping in shelters (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Youth also reported that social support services offering mental health care were not viewed as accessible or responsive to their specific needs and that there was fear that using such services would lead to labeling and further social stigmatization (Yonge Street Mission, 2009).
LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness are at a dramatically higher risk for suicide, “mental health” difficulties, and HIV infection, than heterosexual and cisgender youth, and these risks are amplified by the lack of support available.

In 2010, Quintana et al. published a report on LGBTQ youth homelessness. Challenges regarding access to appropriate health care services was a main concern reported amongst LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. Barriers such as discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia, not having a health card, and not knowing if the health care clinic will be LGBTQ friendly or knowledgeable make it difficult to seek health care services. Transgender youth in particular reported barriers to accessing supportive and knowledgeable health care (Quintana et al., 2010). The need for transgender youth to have access to health care professionals who have a comprehensive understanding of transgender-related issues and transition-related health care was highlighted, with it being drawn home that the health care needs of transgender youth differ greatly from those of LGB youth. For example, transgender youth may choose to start hormones, which requires monitoring, including regular blood work. The lack of specialized health care services for transgender youth often results in youth turning to unmonitored street suppliers for transition-related treatment (e.g. hormones, silicone injections), which can have severe health complications (Quintana et al., 2010). Both gender identity and sexual orientation have been identified as sources of social stigma that negatively impact youths’ health and well-being, leading to greater risks of developing habits such as substance use and self-harm (Barnaby et al., 2010).
LGBTQ Aboriginal Youth Homelessness

A long history of colonization in Canada has led to extensive discrimination, oppression, racism, and challenges for Aboriginal people. Systemic barriers in government and social supports and lack of specialized services have caused Aboriginal youth to be overrepresented in the homeless youth population (Raising the Roof, 2009). The McCreary Centre Society (2000) investigated the health of marginalized and street-involved youth in six different communities and the same study was repeated in 2006 in nine communities. Up to 54% of the youth who participated in the 2006 study were Aboriginal. A high proportion of the Aboriginal youth also identified as LGBTQ, particularly the female identified participants (Saewyc, Bingham, Brunanski, Smith, Hunt, Northcott, & The McCreary Centre Society, 2008). Amongst the various pathways leading to homelessness, the majority of youth participants had either run away or been kicked out of their homes, whereas LGB Aboriginal youth were more likely to have run away from home for reasons varying from conflict at home due to their sexual orientation, to not getting along with their parents, to feeling more accepted on the streets (Saewyc et al., 2008).

Major issues in structural systems have caused Aboriginal youth to be overrepresented in the homeless youth population.

Participants reported a lack of culturally relevant services and LGBTQ related services, as well as being discriminated against based on their race and/or skin colour (Saewyc et al., 2008). Due to the high proportion of LGBTQ Aboriginal youth that participated in this study and the lack of specialized services for LGBTQ youth and Aboriginal youth, the implementation of specialized services for this group was identified as a key recommendation. For example, programs with a cultural focus that could reconnect youth to their Aboriginal cultural traditions,
as well as accept and nurture their LGBTQ identities (Saewyc et al., 2008). Further research on the intersections of being Aboriginal, homeless, and LGBTQ was identified as a priority (Saewyc et al., 2008).

**Location and Mobility**

The transient nature of street-life forces youth to move around and change their sleeping locations frequently. It has been reported that youth have a tendency to sleep in locations other than where they hang out (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Mobility has been found to be highest among women and Aboriginal youth and lowest among youth who are in temporary housing or sleeping in shelters (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). This may suggest that mobility among LGBTQ youth is quite high because LGBTQ youth have reported not feeling safe in the shelter system (Abramovich, 2008; Denomme-Welch et al., 2008) and there are no specialized shelters or transitional housing projects in the City of Toronto or anywhere in Canada dedicated to meeting the needs of queer and trans youth.

Due to urban gentrification, an increasingly high number of businesses are either closing or changing locations in Toronto’s well-known LGBTQ Village located at Church and Wellesley (Balkissoon, 2009; Hasham, 2013). The ‘village’, as it is often referred to, has served as a place of safety for many in the LGBTQ community, especially youth who have recently come out or been kicked out of the house and have migrated to Toronto. Without the ‘village’ as a relatively safe refuge, LGBTQ youth are forced to spend time in neighbourhoods where they may face the threat of unsafe situations, especially those who are not from Toronto and do not know the city well. Toronto street youth have reported increasingly moving towards neighbourhoods in the West end of downtown Toronto (Yonge Street Mission, 2009).
As with the majority of youth groups, it has been found that homeless youth tend to rely heavily on their social networks when making day-to-day decisions (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Yonge Street Mission (2009) reported that a large proportion of homeless youth stated that their social networks consisted of people they met through a shelter or support service, or on the street. Only a small proportion of youth stated that they chose their social network because they actually liked the people, but rather because of the circumstances of where they found themselves (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). In light of this finding and the lack of research on LGBTQ youth homelessness, an important question surfaces: where do LGBTQ homeless youth create social networks within a system that poses the daily risk of homophobia and transphobia and where there are negligible services offered to this community? Without social networks to turn to for support, the risks of encountering discrimination and violence are heightened for street youth.

Youth experiencing homelessness spend a significant amount of time in parks, alleyways and street corners, which puts their lives under constant regulation and increases the likelihood of negative police attention (Ottaway et al., 2009). They are continuously kicked out of both private and public spaces, making it extremely difficult to find safe places (Gaetz, 2004a). Drop-in services and shelters also pose the risk of victimization and crime - leaving youth with few places to turn to for support and safety, also leading them to being even further excluded from the simple aspects of daily living.

**Homophobia in the Shelter System and on the Streets**

Toronto is advertised as a safe city for LGBTQ people, a place where same-sex marriage is not only acknowledged and accepted, but even becoming somewhat normalized. This
reputation for acceptance attracts thousands of LGBTQ people to Toronto (Carlson, 2012). Nevertheless, homophobic and transphobic violence remains a problem in the city.

O’Brien, Travers, and Bell (1993) conducted one of the first studies to examine homophobia in Toronto’s shelter system. The study, which was conducted over 20 years ago, investigated the everyday experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth in group homes and the shelter system through one-on-one interviews. Frontline shelter workers were also interviewed about their daily experiences working in the shelter system. The study revealed that shelter services and shelter workers were eager and enthusiastic to participate in the study and were keenly interested in implementing necessary changes to services in order to better meet the needs of LGB youth. The study also revealed that LGB youth were unsafe in the shelter system, which resulted in youth hiding their sexual identities and rarely coming out, in order to protect their safety. The frontline shelter workers who participated in the study “expressed deep concerns for the well-being” of LGB youth shelter residents (O’Brien, Travers, & Bell, 1993, p. 2).

Over the past 20 years, society's acceptance of sexual diversity has grown, and consequently, youth are coming out at younger ages (Lepischak, 2004). Nonetheless, homophobic and transphobic bullying remain a significant problem in Canadian society. Statistics Canada (2010) states that the largest increase in hate crimes were those motivated by sexual orientation (towards the LGBTQ community), which more than doubled from 2007-2008. The 2006 Statistics Canada Hate Crime Report stated that 56% of hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation were violent and most likely to end up with physical assault to victims (Dauvergne, Scrim, & Brennan, 2006).
The risks encountered on the streets by LGBTQ homeless youth versus heterosexual and cisgender homeless youth differ, largely due to homophobic and transphobic violence (Dunne et al., 2002). Unfortunately, mainstream society and the majority of support services for homeless youth often fail to recognize the specific risks and barriers faced by youth (Dunne et al., 2002).

**Transphobia in the Shelter System and on the Streets**

Although minimal research has been conducted on LGB youth homelessness, there is even less research on homelessness amongst transgender youth. There are few services in Canada that effectively meet the needs of LGB homeless youth and even fewer that cater to the needs of transgender youth experiencing homelessness. The needs of transgender youth differ from those of LGB youth, whether they are homeless or not. For instance, needs may include transition-related surgery, hormones, name changes, and identification that match their changed names. The complexity of these needs intensifies when one is homeless and does not have money, a health card, or a support network.

*Transgender youth face the highest rates of discrimination than any other youth group in the shelter system (Quintana et al., 2010).*

Discrimination against transgender youth on the streets and in the shelter system is rampant: transgender youth face higher rates of discrimination than any other youth group (Quintana et al., 2010). Agencies serving homeless youth in Toronto have reported great difficulty in supporting trans youth (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). Unfortunately, few Canadian studies have focused specifically on the needs and issues experienced by trans homeless youth,
however, there have been several studies that have investigated the needs and issues experienced by trans homeless adults.

Most shelters are segregated by birth sex, which increases the risk for gender discrimination and gender violence to occur within shelters. Shelter staff members tend to receive minimal training regarding trans-related issues, needs, and terminology. Staff often do not have an understanding of the importance of asking youth what pronoun and name they prefer, or that trans people can also identify as heterosexual and do not always fit into the category of LGB.

The City of Toronto shelter standards states: “It is expected that all shelters be accessible to transgender/transsexual/two-spirited (TS/TG/2-S) residents in their self-defined gender, and that shelters will work toward improving access to this group. Shelters will support the choices of TG/TS/2-S residents to gain access to services in the gender they identify will best preserve their safety.” (Toronto Shelter Standards, 2002, p. 14). However, female-to-male (FTM) transgender/transsexual youth who are homeless have distinctive needs that are currently unmet in Toronto’s shelter system (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008). The FTM Safer Shelter Project (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008) – a community-based research project that investigated homelessness and shelter access amongst FTMs in Toronto found that the current shelter system has been described by FTMs as unsafe for transmen. FTM participants reported not feeling welcome in either men’s or women’s shelters and that the policies and practices in the shelter system were degrading to them (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008). Among the critical recommendations that came out of the study, was a call for the City of Toronto to immediately
fund specialized shelter services and allocate beds for FTMs, as well as other men who are vulnerable or at risk of violence (Denomme-Welch et al., 2008).

The Coming Together Project (Sakamoto et al., 2010) – an arts-based, community-based participatory action research project investigated how trans and cisgender women experiencing homelessness in Toronto build support networks with one another. The study revealed that both trans and cisgender women are overrepresented in the homeless population and are at high risk of violence and trauma, and therefore, try to build social support networks as a source of protection and advocacy within the shelter system (Sakamoto et al., 2010). This study also found that transwomen, in particular, experience severe marginalization and discrimination in the shelter system and on the streets based on their gender identity, as well as sexual identity, race, class, and age (Sakamoto et al., 2010). Transwomen revealed feeling marginalized within support services and often feeling the need to “meet a high standard of femininity in order to receive the same services that non-trans women received” (Sakamoto et al., 2010, p. 18).

Support Services

The high prevalence of homelessness in Toronto has made the city known as the homeless capital of Canada (Laird, 2007; Novac et al., 2009). It is estimated that there are approximately 1,500-2,000 homeless youth in Toronto on any given night (Canadian Foundation for Children Youth and the Law, 2011; O’Grady & Gaetz, 2002). The City of Toronto provides funding to 13 youth shelters with a capacity of 529 shelter beds (City of Toronto, 2012).

Support services play a crucial role in fulfilling homeless youths’ daily needs, such as shelter, food, healthcare, and presumably safety. However, they are not equipped to deal with the
wide-ranging needs of youth, which have undoubtedly become more complex and diverse since the first shelters were established in the city of Toronto approximately thirty years ago (Youth Shelter Interagency Network, 2007). Today’s homeless youth are faced with problems such as: homophobia, transphobia, immigration, legal issues, HIV/AIDS, etc. Support services must be revised and adapted to reflect the changing needs of youth. Funding cuts have created significant gaps in the system leaving many youths’ needs unmet. For example, numerous youth may experience comorbid health concerns (e.g. emotional difficulties and substance use issues), but are forced to rely on resources that may not always be fully equipped to deal with such problems (Youth Shelter Interagency Network, 2007).

The lack of specialized services and knowledge regarding sub-populations (e.g. immigrants, LGBTQ youth) of homeless youth make it increasingly challenging for youth to find support and have their needs met. For example, we know that the needs and patterns of youth homelessness differ significantly between recent immigrants versus non-immigrant homeless youth (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). It has been found that homeless youth who are immigrants tend to use support services less frequently than non-immigrant youth and transition into housing faster (Yonge Street Mission, 2009). However, it is unknown whether there are higher rates of immigrant youth within the LGBTQ homeless youth population. Given that LGBTQ youth tend to migrate to Toronto, more research in needed in this area.

The profound impact that homelessness and the lack of support have on LGBTQ youth perpetuates issues relating to substance abuse, risky sexual behaviour, victimization, and crime (Ray, 2006). These issues make LGBTQ homeless youth more vulnerable to concerns such as depression and loneliness (Ray, 2006). Specialized services seem to be crucial in meeting the
needs of homeless youth and decreasing the threat of violence and discrimination (Cull et al., 2006; Ray, 2006). However, in the City of Toronto there is reluctance to create a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, due to a variety of opinions and beliefs. For example, some people believe that segregating LGBTQ youth in a specialized shelter will lead to further marginalization, but that allotting a number of beds to LGBTQ youth within a shelter would not cause the same problems. Although there are no shelters for LGBTQ youth in Toronto, there are several specialized evening/drop-in programs offered through the Sherbourne Health Centre: Supporting Our Youth, and the 519 Church Street Community Centre. These programs offer food, subway tokens, activities, and a place to feel safe and accepted; unfortunately, they do not offer a place to sleep.

While the City of Toronto does not have any shelters for LGBTQ youth, other Cities have invested in these resources. For example, there are a number of emergency shelters and transitional living programs for LGBTQ homeless youth in the United States (e.g. Chicago, San Francisco, Michigan, New York City). Most notable is the Ali Forney Center in New York City, which has become the nation’s largest and most comprehensive organization for serving LGBTQ homeless youth (Siciliano, 2012). The Ali Forney Center was named after a homeless transgender youth who was murdered in the late 90’s in New York City. The center offers emergency housing, transitional housing, as well as day programs such as: street outreach, medical care, HIV testing, mental health assessment and treatment, and workshops to providers regarding various issues faced by LGBTQ youth. The Ali Forney Center is recognized for the specialized care and support they have been providing to LGBTQ homeless youth since 2002 (Siciliano, 2012). Moving forward, the City of Toronto could use the Ali Forney Center as a
blueprint for creating a broader action plan to develop services and meet the needs of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

There are NO specialized emergency shelters for LGBTQ youth in Canada.

Concluding Remarks

While existing evidence regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada is relatively limited, this chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the literature that focuses on queer and trans youth homelessness in Toronto and Canada. As discovered throughout this chapter, the approaches used for the few studies that do exist, tend to focus on traditional qualitative ethnographic approaches. There have been a number of groundbreaking Canadian studies that have investigated youth homelessness, however, opportunities to explore issues regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness have been missed. Allowing youth to self identify their gender and sexual identity, rather than asking youth to fit themselves into predetermined categories on surveys and intake forms provides an opportunity to collect additional information about youths’ gender and sexual identities that may otherwise be missed. Future research in this area would benefit from exploring approached that include Institutional Ethnography, and film-based methods (discussed in further detail in Chapter 8).

This chapter has indicated that the incidence of LGBTQ youth homelessness is on the rise and that social support services are not fully equipped or prepared to deal with this population’s issues and concerns. The primary cause for youth leaving home or for being thrown out of the house is family conflict. Youth frequently migrate to Toronto because of the City’s LGBTQ
friendly reputation, however, they are often met with little support and are victims of homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system and on the streets.

This chapter has informed us that queer and trans youth have needs and challenges that differ from their heterosexual and cisgender peers, and are at a dramatically higher risk for suicide, “mental health” difficulties, and HIV infection than heterosexual and cisgender youth. Throughout this chapter, we have discovered that factors such as discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, not having a health card, and not knowing if services will be LGBTQ positive make it difficult for queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness to access healthcare services, drop-ins, and shelters. However, in the face of this alarming knowledge there are no specialized housing projects that meet the needs of queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness in Canada. Without the proper services and programs in place, LGBTQ homeless youth risk being on the streets for longer and having their needs unmet. We know that specialized services meet the needs of many groups of youth, however, the City of Toronto is reluctant to create specialized housing for this group of youth.

This chapter has also provided us with information about some of the ways that the problems and difficulties faced by youth has changed over the past 30 years. Today’s youth deal with homophobia, transphobia, immigration, legal issues, HIV/AIDS, etc. Therefore, the common “one size fits all” approach does not work in the shelter system, and support services must be revised and adapted in order to reflect the changing needs of youth and the different populations of youth experiencing homelessness. For example, the chapter identified that Aboriginal youth are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, but due to a lack of culturally relevant services, such as Aboriginal homeless youth services, and LGBTQ related
services; Aboriginal LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness have very few places to turn to for support.

Throughout this chapter we also discovered that youth who sleep on the streets experience higher rates of substance use, suggesting that LGBTQ youth fall into this category, due to the lack of support available and their tendency to avoid the shelter system. Greater use of Methamphetamine has been found amongst LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness than non-LGBTQ youth. All youth, regardless of sexuality or gender identity, report harm reduction as an appropriate and useful approach to dealing with substance use related concerns.

This chapter has informed us about what is known regarding the problem of LGBTQ youth homelessness and has provided background knowledge on the needs and risks of queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness. It has begun to clarify why it is crucial to develop distinct policies regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness. I hope that this chapter has illuminated the importance of this research study.

The chapter that immediately follows provides an understanding of the different perspectives that come together to create the theoretical framework of this study and focuses on an initial explication of the key concepts drawn on; which include the notion of home and space, borders and borderlands, love, and power.
Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

My goal has been to produce a reflexive and authentic research study that problematizes hegemonic discourses of sexuality and gender identity. From the onset of this study, I have been interested in conceptualizing an alternative discourse on youth homelessness by borrowing from the following key concepts: hooks’ (1994 & 2000) notion of transgressing boundaries and love, Anzaldúa’s (1987) notion of borders and borderlands, and Foucault’s (1975) conceptualizing of power, surveillance, and the panopticon--these different perspectives constitute my theoretical framework and have helped me create a discourse that embraces research from the margins while resisting and disrupting the normative. This chapter contextualizes the perspectives and terms that guide the framework of this study and that I have used in order to understand the issues discussed throughout this dissertation.

Terms that are pivotal to this study

What follows are the relevant constructs and terms pivotal to this study. This is meant to provide the reader with an understanding of how the findings have been conceptualized and to help direct the reader through the forthcoming chapters where the findings are discussed in greater detail.

Home and Space

I can't live where my parents live because I sacrificed living with my family to be comfortable with who I am, regardless of being homeless. A lot of people make that choice (Tiffany, 24 years old).
In theorizing homelessness it is important to make sense of the meaning of *home* and *space* and how one reclaims space (public versus private) on the streets. This work points to the tensions that exist between home and space and the complex relationships between home and homelessness. In hooks’ (1994) writing on transgressing boundaries, she argues that our traditional beliefs that the home and family represent safety and acceptance no longer hold true as we live in a culture of domination which perpetuates acts of violence and patriarchy; hooks’ argument informs my writing on how Toronto’s fast paced, capitalist society, coupled with an idealized notion of the traditional heterosexual family, promote homophobia and transphobia on a daily basis. I draw on that conceptualization in this thesis.

Even though we are well aware that far too many young people are exposed to violence in the home and that family conflict is the leading cause of youth homelessness, we are still taught to believe that the home and “idealized patriarchal family” is safe (hooks, 1994). We are taught to believe that the systems in place that are meant to protect us (e.g. homeless shelters, support services) are safe spaces for all people, but that the spaces outside of the home and outside of the places that are meant to protect us (e.g. homeless shelters, support services), are dangerous. However, this work suggests the opposite for LGBTQ youth. I engage with hooks’ (1994, 2009) notions of transgressing boundaries and belonging in order to understand how LGBTQ youth construct their lives with regards to this dichotomy, what it means to be homeless, as well as to explore LGBTQ youths’ vulnerability in public and private spaces.
Borders/Borderlands

Starting out with being trans and wondering if I start to transition, am I going to be kicked out [of the shelter] and what’s that going to mean? Covenant House was at the forefront of that problem. They would tell people, men specifically, who wore V-neck shirts; ‘you have to go change because that’s female clothing’. And when they had been informed that I was trans because I’d gone to my prom in a dress and come down femme-dressed a few times. They had actually modified my entry letter to state; ‘must wear gender appropriate clothing’. The fact that they would change a document that’s supposed to be universal for all residents is bad enough. But to state something that, as far as I knew, was not even legal to state. What is gender appropriate to begin with? […] They just wanted to get rid of me and they did. They booted me out and then; again, I became very docile (Mouse, 23 years old).

The notion of borders and borderlands play an important role in my conceptualizing of safe versus unsafe spaces on one hand and home versus homelessness. Anzaldúa’s (1987) writing on borders is similar to her reflections on society’s obsession with keeping gender roles as fixed states to which people are expected to conform:

It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the hieros gamos: the coming together of opposite qualities (p. 41).
Anzaldúa’s (1987) sophisticated notion of borders informs my conceptualizing of the meaning of home and the slippery border between home and no home, between safe and unsafe spaces:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary (p. 25).

Anzaldúa (1987) writes about crossing over borders and how the only “legitimate inhabitants are those in power” (p. 25), those who obey the rules, and those who conform to hegemonic beliefs. There are deep consequences for those who deviate from the norm and represent ‘other’, but still choose to cross over (Anzaldúa, 1987). LGBTQ street-involved youth must quickly become aware of the borders that divide safe from unsafe, because on the streets and in the shelter system, there are consequences for youth who do not fit into normative notions of adolescence or young adulthood. LGBTQ youth are often victims of discrimination and violence in the systems that are meant to be safe and helpful to them.

There are some areas you cannot go if you are gay or lesbian or look that way. They will bash you and call you names. It’s messed up. It doesn't feel good (Sarah, 26 years old).

Anzaldúa (1987) asserts that those who deviate from the norm feel the least safe in this world and are faced with the most consequences, which in turn force them to develop a deep ability to sense unsafe situations. Having the ability to sense unsafe and harmful situations often lead youth to try passing as heterosexual or cisgender, or in some circumstances if that is too
difficult, youth may avoid the shelter system altogether and remain on the streets, where threats of violence are sometimes even worse. This is further contextualized and exemplified in Chapters 6 and 7.

**Love**

My dad found out about it, and was like: “Come out to the garage, I heard Vicky is gay. You can’t be friends with her anymore. You’re not gay are you?” And I was like: “No, fuck no, of course not”, and he was like: “Okay good, cause if you were I would have to kill you.” He really meant that, it wasn’t an empty threat. So, if my father knew that I was queer and trans he really would do something to eliminate me from the world. I fully believe in his ability and his desire to do this. That was when I was fourteen (Jamie Jach, 26 years old).

The notion of love is critical to discussions of homophobia and transphobia, because these are ultimately about hate and about efforts to confine the powers of the human spirit. A deep understanding of love and of our culture’s mistrust of the capacity of the human heart is fundamental to this research. Our culture does not nurture love enough and it rarely teaches us how to love. We also rarely learn about love in academia. In the 24 years that I have spent in school, I have never heard a teacher or professor teach the classroom about love. Which may be why Canada’s largest search engine, Google Canada, indicated that the most frequently searched question in 2012 was: “What is love?” and “How to love?” came second (DeMara, 2012). Our society desperately needs to begin learning about love.
Cole and McIntyre (2006) created a methodological and epistemological framework on “loving research”, in the context of their work on caring for a loved one with Alzheimer’s disease. Many different definitions of love exist. It has been described as an intellectual, emotional, and embodied connection (Cole & McIntyre, 2006). The Oxford dictionary (Soanes, 2001) defines love as “a strong feeling of affection” (p. 531), and affection as “a feeling of fondness or liking” (p.15). hooks (2000) describes love as a “combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect” (p. 7-8), and argues that, “love and abuse cannot coexist” (p. 6), because they are the opposites of love.

The family is still thought of as the primary place where we should learn about and how to love (hooks, 2000). However, this belief is hurtful for young people who are kicked out of their homes for coming out, because this teaches them that there are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ people to love and that loving the ‘wrong’ people means losing their families’ love. Sadly, we live in a culture where some people are more comfortable with hate and violence than with love and acceptance. In order to create a culture of love and acceptance, young people must be taught about love in school and parents of young people must be taught that “love and abuse cannot coexist” (hooks, 2000, p. 6) and that forcing your child to leave home for coming out as LGBTQ is an abusive act. This lack of love and acceptance is what lies behind LGBTQ youth homelessness.
Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up” (Foucault, 1975, p. 202).

This work likewise draws on Foucault’s (1975) notion of the panopticon, which was described as a means of surveillance and mode to regulate power. Foucault’s (1975) conceptualizing of the panopticon explored power relations within institutions, and between people in positions of power and those with minimal power. This work uses Foucault’s (1975) notion of the panopticon to view the shelter system and the power relations that run the shelter system. Foucault (1975) asserted that surveillance was used as an approach to discipline and fix bodies purportedly in need of repair. The ways that the act of policing of young homeless people and criminalization of homelessness happen are similar systems of surveillance as Foucault’s (1975) notion of the panopticon. The policing and criminalization of young people experiencing homelessness also further perpetuates the belief that there is something ‘wrong’ with them and that they need to be watched. My work borrows from these key concepts by conceptualizing the shelter system as a system that surveillances, regulates, and aims to fix bodies in need of repair, or more specifically, LGBTQ bodies, and sexual and gender identities. One of the ways that the shelter system surveillances and regulates gender is by forcing people to fit into the gender binary the moment they enter the shelter system and are subjected to an intake procedure that determines if they will be placed on the male or female side of the shelter, or in a private room for trans people (described in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7), which is much like a type of
prison system (Flax, 1990; Goffman, 1961). The people who break free from the prison and discover that they do not fit into the binary are seen as the outlaws in need of repair.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has introduced the reader to key terms and constructs that have helped me shape my project and conceptualize my findings. Drawing from and working with key concepts from the critical theorists discussed has not only helped me conceptualize alternative discourses on LGBTQ youth homelessness, but it has also helped me interrogate hegemonic beliefs of sexuality and gender identity. Of particular importance are concepts and perspectives that reframe our understanding of *home*, *family*, and *love*. The following chapter highlights the methodological framework of this study and begins to investigate what this work implies for theory and research on youth homelessness.
Chapter 4: Methodology and Design

This chapter provides a detailed description of this study’s research methodology. This is overwhelmingly a qualitative study that also uses some quantitative measures and therefore has a small degree of mixed methods. The methodology employed in this study is Critical Action Research, informed by Critical Ethnography and Institutional Ethnography. This chapter provides comprehensive information about this study’s epistemological framework, methodology, and research design. Included in this regard are information on reflexivity, and my process of critical self-reflexivity, which is fundamental to research with marginalized populations; sampling techniques; recruitment strategies; participant demographics; data collection; data analysis process; research activities; knowledge translation; the trustworthiness of the findings; and ethical considerations. This chapter also describes my awareness and understanding of self in relation to this research. In the section entitled ‘My Location as a Researcher’, I position myself as a researcher and describe my research journey, how I came to this work and where I have gone in the context of this work. I also describe the impact that this research has had on me and how it has influenced me to become a more authentic researcher and human being.

I will begin by drawing a distinction between several of the critical entities that make up a research paradigm—the epistemology, methodology, and methods (Barndt, 2008; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Wilson, 2008). “Epistemology” denotes a theory of knowledge and what we consider knowledge, and “methodology” refers to the study’s theoretical and conceptual framework, such as, “Critical Action Research”, whereas, “methods” refers to the procedures used to collect data, such as, interviews, focus groups, observations, etc., as well as the
techniques used to analyze the data (Barndt, 2008; Brewer, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each of these elements is like an instrument and the instruments need to complement one another. Therefore, it has been important for me to find instruments that will not overpower each other, but rather harmonize and work together. I often think of my research as an orchestra, and of myself as the conductor, and the study as the music that is created or the symphony. What follows is an in-depth introduction to each musician and what role they played, as well as the fine details of how the music was created. I begin with a section on epistemology, which will help the reader understand my epistemological framework, and the lens that I have used to conceptualize knowledge, which is foundational to the study.

**Epistemology**

Knowledge is understood as being fluid, impossible to cast into rigid categories, as reality is multiple and always changing. [...] Knowledge is assumed to exist not only in the formal structures and institutions of society, but also as it constitutes the subjectivity of individuals (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 60).

How we come to know and claim knowledge depends largely on our epistemologies. The word “epistemology” originated from the Ancient Greek words *episteme* meaning knowledge and *logos* meaning account or rationale (Cardinal, Hayward, & Jones, 2004). Epistemology deals with theories of knowledge, how we come to know, and who can be considered a “knower” or producer of knowledge (Strega, 2005). The epistemological foundations of this study are those embedded in the viewpoint of critical theory (Given, 2008a). This study’s approach to knowledge creation can be characterized as a collaborative effort between the participants and the researcher.
I hold the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and that we learn from doing and undoing. People produce, create, and discover knowledge. We learn from social practice and from interacting with others. However, in our culture only certain people are granted the privilege of being acknowledged as producers of knowledge. Whereas, people who are homeless are often seen as the ‘subjects’ in research and are rarely given credit for being the knowers.

A major aim of this study was to begin to shift away from traditional knowledge production and to engage the community and recognize LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness as knowledge producers who are the experts of their own experiences. This research study interrogates the notion that there is an ‘us’ and ‘them’ amongst people, especially in terms of who is granted the authority of producing knowledge. The creation and conceptualization of knowledge has been a joint and collaborative process between the youth participants and myself. A constant critical questioning of the world and fighting for social justice has guided this work. This research is political and was meant from the very start to contribute to the well-being of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness and to impact positive change in the shelter system.

**Methodological Framework**

Methodology is a systematic way of finding answers to complex questions. It can be defined as: “1. A way of doing something. 2. Orderliness of thought or behaviour. The origin of methodology in Greek is *methodos*, meaning: ‘pursuit of knowledge’” (Soanes, 2001, p. 561). Methodology is also described as the theoretical framework that specific methods fit into and are validated by (Brewer, 2000).
I had originally intended for this study to be a Participatory Research study, however, the very nature of the population of youth participants made this impossible to carry out. I was also interested in the possibility of employing the elements of Community Based Research, which involves working directly with community agencies. However, with all of the constraints that I have experienced related to gaining the participation of agencies in this study, that was not possible either, and politically, collaborating with one agency may have changed the message of this study. Therefore, there were benefits to making Critical Action Research the central methodology of this study, and borrowing certain principles from Critical Ethnography and Institutional Ethnography. My methodological framework helped me answer my research questions, meet my core research objectives, break down some of the power differentials that inherently exist in research with marginalized populations, and promoted empowerment and social justice. The following section describes my methodological framework in great detail and exemplifies the ways that it was a natural fit for my research.

**Critical Action Research**

“Critical action research is based on the assumption that society is essentially discriminatory but is also capable of becoming less so through purposeful human action” (Given, 2008a, p. 140).

Action research was coined by Kurt Lewin (1946) and has been characterized by the following three qualities: “(1) a focus on problem solving, (2) an emergent nature, and (3) a collaborative effort between researchers and participants” (Given, 2008a, p. 139). The key principles of action research are to improve and to involve (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Action
research can also be characterized as an emancipatory approach that aims at improvement in the following three areas: “firstly, the improvement of a practice; secondly, the improvement of the understanding of the practice by its practitioners; and thirdly, the improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place” (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 165). This study was meant to improve the conditions of shelters, the policies that rule the shelter system, and people’s understanding of these issues, and of course, to involve the participants, mainly the youth participants, who are at the centre of this study.

Critical action research can be described as combining critical theory with the action research paradigm (Given, 2008a). It is well suited for research that intends to create social change, and the outcomes are both practical and theoretical (Given, 2008a). Critical action research can also be described as research that transforms practices and aims to achieve a “new society” (Carson, 1990, pg. 168). Critical action researchers hold the notion that people are the experts of their own experiences and that collaboration and listening to people share stories of their lived experiences leads to further knowledge production (Given, 2008a; Tripp, 1990). Critical action research is intended to empower participants and researchers through the exploration and recognition of power differentials, and collaborative efforts to create knowledge and solve institutional problems (Given, 2008a). Considerable emphasis is placed on acknowledging non-academic and local knowledge of the participants themselves and helping them solve the local problems at hand (Given, 2008a). Critical action research is a collaborative approach that views participation as an empowerment tool and promotes the distribution of power between all parties involved in the research process (Given, 2008a; Tripp, 1990).
Bjorn and Boulus (2011) have described the main principles of critical action research as the following: first, the primary purpose is to respond to local concerns and produce practical knowledge that can be useful to the local communities and organizations. Second, critical action research is a participatory and collaborative process, in which participants are involved throughout all stages of the research. Third, critical action research emphasizes the importance of an “extended epistemology” (p. 284), meaning that it “extends ways of knowing beyond the theoretical knowledge of academia” (p. 284). Fourth, the theoretical contributions should be grounded in the situations experienced by participants and should not only contribute to knowledge, but most importantly, should promote action. This research study used all of the key principles of critical action research that have been outlined above. However, as described at the beginning of this section, the very nature of the population of youth participants made it impossible for this research to truly be participatory and collaborative.

“Critical action research is an ethical choice that exposes and seeks to change existing power structures and inequalities within the community under study. It does so within a framework of smoothing out inequalities within the research structure” (Given, 2008a, p. 141).

Working within a critical action research framework helped me ensure that my research reached beyond the academy to the real world where it could have the potential to transform the shelter system and truly benefit LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. One of the key principles of critical action research is that local voices need to be acknowledged and taken into the process of policy design and changes (Given, 2008a; Tripp, 1990). Among the
recommendations that emerged from this study included the need for Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration at the City of Toronto and policy makers to collaborate with queer and trans youth experiencing homelessness in revising the shelter standards and shelter complaint procedure, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

The methods we use to collect data in research are fundamental components of the research study and “can shape the critical potential of the project” (Thomas, 1993, p. 37). I remember having a conversation with my supervisor in which she told me that the value of the answers would come from the goodness of my questions; those words have remained with me. The methods of data collection used in critical action research and critical ethnography (discussed below) can be described as open-ended and flexible, such as interviews, surveys, and most importantly observations, which make it easier for the researcher to participate directly in the participant setting (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamonth, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001; Brewer, 2000; Mertler, 2011; Thomas, 1993). Data can include a person, group of people, documents, or almost any sources that reveal cultural information, as well as what happens in the research setting (Atkinson et al., 2001; Thomas, 1993).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this study was informed by key elements of Critical Ethnography and Institutional Ethnography. All three of the methodologies that make up the methodological framework of this study value the voices and experiences of the participants, and are highly concerned with power dynamics and social justice. I was particularly drawn to the collaborative elements of critical action research and critical ethnography because I have been especially aware of the power relations that exist between the participants in this study and myself, which is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (see section on reflexivity).
Collaboration with participants, among researchers, between researcher and communities, as well as institutions, commonly occurs in critical ethnography (Horner, 2004). Critical ethnographers value collaboration because it provides the researcher with additional insights into the participants’ daily experiences, is understood as a way of dismantling the hierarchical relationships that traditionally exist between researcher and participants, and it helps make the research beneficial to both the researcher and the participant’s communities (Horner, 2004).

Participants’ voices are acknowledged and given recognition in critical ethnography, especially those who are typically unheard (Horner, 2004; Thomas, 1993). From the onset of this study, I did not want to further perpetuate hegemonic ways of thinking about sexuality and gender; therefore, I made sure that youth described their identities in their own words. I was also able to do what felt most important to me as a researcher working with marginalized youth, which was to help share their voices in a way that was an empowering experience for the youth.

The following two sections provide more information and understanding regarding the key principles of critical ethnography and institutional ethnography, and where they entered into this study.

**Critical Ethnography**

Ethnography is most widely described and understood as the study of people in their natural setting, involving the researcher participating directly in some way in that setting (Brewer, 2000; Fetterman, 2010; Thomas, 1993). Classical ethnographers study cultures to describe and understand them, whereas critical ethnographers study cultures to not just understand, but to also change them (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnographers, similar to critical
action researchers, can be described as having a radical political stance, with an aim to change the world with their emancipatory research (Brewer, 2000; Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography draws upon work in the context of critical pedagogy, once again similar to critical action research, which draws on critical theory (Brewer, 2000).

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the changes that need to be implemented in the shelter system in order for it to become safe, supportive, and accessible for LGBTQ youth. While critical action research was the central method, elements of critical ethnography helped me better understand and describe the LGBTQ homeless youth community in Toronto. I attended a number of programs for youth experiencing homelessness in order to build a rapport with youth, for recruitment purposes, and in order to develop a description of the community, which is how critical ethnography primarily entered into this study. Among the programs that I attended, the Monday night drop-in at Supporting Our Youth (SOY) was the most meaningful experience for my research. The Monday night drop-in is a popular weekly drop-in for LGBTQ homeless youth and is the only weekly drop-in specifically for LGBTQ homeless youth. I also observed shelter staff training workshops and was able to immerse myself in with the shelter staff during their training. The observation sessions provided me with the ability to get to know staff from different shelters and participate in informal conversations about what it is like to work in youth shelters and about their experiences and perspectives on homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. During the training workshops, I started discussions about LGBTQ youth homelessness whenever it was appropriate to do so.

Borrowing principles from critical ethnography helped me come up with a description of the community and evolve thick descriptions of the phenomena studied. This approach also
provided me with a deeper understanding of the nature of LGBTQ youth homelessness and the changes that need to be implemented in the shelter system in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive of this population of youth.

**Institutional Ethnography**

As a mode of inquiry, Institutional Ethnography (IE) is concerned with gaining knowledge on the operation of social processes and how power manifests extralocally to control the local actions of people; how the *institution* shapes the *local* (DeVault & McCoy, 2006). I have borrowed key concepts from IE, in order to enhance the analytical and conceptual quality of this work, and to gain deeper insights at an institutional level. Borrowing key concepts from IE allowed me to examine how key institutional documents by which shelters function create the problems and barriers that LGBTQ youth experience. IE has also helped me discover how the shelter system operates to reproduce incidents of homophobia and transphobia.

A key institutional document that I examined included the Toronto Shelter Standards created by the City of Toronto. Investigating this document allowed me to reach beyond the local experiences described by participants, and discover how the translocal social relations (e.g. bureaucracy, management, etc.) coordinate and control the local actions of individuals and in turn create the problems in question.

My reasons for borrowing key concepts from IE for this study was threefold: to examine the problems and barriers that LGBTQ homeless youth face in the shelter system by tracing them back to the internal organization of the institution; to examine the training and comfort levels of staff members and tracing this back to the internal policies and standards of the institution; and to
fabricate a list of strategies and recommendations that will help the current shelter system become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth.

**Digital Storytelling Project**

I had originally proposed for the Digital Storytelling project to be part of the data analyzed for this study. The intention was to include a group of 3-5 youth, however, due to time constraints and great difficulty recruiting youth (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8), the film project did not materialize as intended, but a film was created with one youth. While the research did not go as far as I intended, nor was as extensive, it did retain an arts-informed research and participatory flavor, included mutuality and arts as praxis. In the project, youth were to film a representation of their experiences of being a young LGBTQ person experiencing homelessness in Toronto. The young person who participated in the film project had the ability to implement any changes to the film that she deemed necessary. The entire Digital Storytelling project was a collaborative process and the editing of the film footage was completely led by the youth participant. At the end of the film project, the youth participant described it as an insightful, empowering, and therapeutic experience, by which she felt validated.

The film created did not generate a lot of new data directly, but rather indirectly, and therefore, is one small piece of data that must be understood in relation to the other data. The film project was catalytic, as it had a strong influence on people with the power to make decisions and changes in the shelter system, as well as at a policy level. The film influenced people to get in touch with me and request that it be used as a training tool for shelter staff. The film was also a significant part of the Knowledge Translation (KT) component of this study and became the main Knowledge Mobilization strategy. Additionally, the film project helped people
understand LGBTQ youth homelessness and homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system in a unique way, and helped this research move beyond traditional written text into action.

I chose filmmaking as a medium with which to work because there have been countless successful film-based projects with marginalized communities, but minimal projects of such nature with LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. I wanted to not only increase awareness about LGBTQ youth homelessness, but also engage youth in a project that would be empowering for them and had the potential to create change in Toronto’s shelter system. Using film as the medium was also a way of increasing research accessibility and making my study more accessible to the world, which is a key principle of arts-informed research (Cole & Knowles, 2007; McIntyre, 2001). Other reasons included that people generally relate to film, and film has the power to educate people about issues that they may not normally care to learn about (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8). Film can also be easily disseminated amongst the various social media networks that I engage with as part of my knowledge translation strategy.

I also created my own short-film that illustrates a collage of traumatic life experiences associated with my coming out experience. My decision to create the film was largely because I was going to be asking the youth participants to do the same and I did not feel comfortable asking others to do something that I had not done. Creating the film brought strong elements of researcher authenticity to this work, which is an important element in arts-informed research (McIntyre, 2001). It also felt important to create the film so that I could share it at lectures, talks, and conferences, as part of my discussions on researcher authenticity and self-reflection. The process of creating the film was informative and contributed to my knowledge as a researcher; it
provided me with insight and a deeper understanding of what I was going to be asking my participants to create.

The challenging aspects of this process were associated with the retrieval of painful memories and having to relive those memories in my mind and on film. This process also made me aware that the group of youth with whom I would be working (during the film project and one-on-one interviews) would most likely have had traumatic experiences occur in their recent past, whereas I have had numerous years to work through my experiences. I dealt with this issue by making sure that youth had someone to speak with if they felt triggered. Other challenging aspects included getting ethical approval from the University of Toronto research ethics board for the Digital Storytelling project. The research ethics board’s concerns were related to the youth participants stealing or breaking the cameras, and concerns regarding privacy and confidentiality, such as, youth filming inside of shelters, and filming other street-involved youth.

Reflexivity

…no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Rewriting you, I write myself anew (hooks, 1990, p. 151-152).

The Latin root of the term reflexivity is flectere, meaning to bend, and the prefix re denotes back, reversed, or against (Ashmore, 1989). This suggests that reflexivity involves looking back on an experience. Reflexivity refers to the process of “thinking more deeply about
what we do” as researchers (Ashmore, 1989, p. 32). The reflexive researcher is described as being present, aware, and reflecting on their actions, choices, and values during the research process (Robson, 2011). Reflexivity is also meant to help researchers gain a deeper understanding of how they influence the data and interpretations of the data, as well as to clearly define what role they played in the research process (Richards, 2005).

Throughout this study, I have been conscious of the intricacies of this research; the participants and those affected by this work, as well as the audience. I wrote in my research journal and recorded my own thoughts, observations, and the stories that had a strong impact on me. I allowed myself to stay with the people and stories that moved me and tried to understand why specific stories struck me more than others. As researchers, we have a great responsibility to reflect on how we come to decide what counts as knowledge and which parts of people’s stories we will share through our research (Sullivan, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial that we reflect on the stories that move us, and try to understand why certain quotes are more worth sharing than others.

Reflecting on our research processes and how they affect us is a key component to ethical ethnographic research. As an ethnographic researcher, I was constantly questioning my interpretations, observations, thoughts, ideas, and motives (Horner, 2004). Reflexivity in ethnographic research can be described as a “professional safeguard” (Horner, 2004, p. 27) against the researcher viewing their own perspectives as universal and writing the participants’ stories and experiences in their own terms. A major goal in ethnographic research is self-reflexivity, in which case the research about the ‘other’ results in the researcher learning about the self (Horner, 2004). As Creswell (2003) eloquently stated “the personal-self becomes
inseparable from the researcher-self” (p. 182). This research journey has undoubtedly taught me more about the deepest parts of myself than any other experience in all the years of my life.

I view myself as a highly reflexive researcher, which I believe has much to do with my experiences of not fitting into the norm and in many ways, having had to pave my own path as a researcher. What follows is a personal reflection of how this research has affected me and made me become a more authentic researcher and human being.

**Researching in the Context of Power Imbalances**

Both critical action research and critical ethnography are highly concerned with power dynamics and addressing issues of power (Given, 2008a; McIntyre, 2008; Thomas, 1994). In line with my methodological framework, this research has focused on empowering a marginalized population of youth and finding ways to shift the power inequities that are inherently present in research to do with disenfranchised communities. I did not want this research to perpetuate hegemonic notions of sexuality and gender identity; therefore, this research is centered around the voices and perspectives of LGBTQ homeless youth, as they are often silenced, pathologized, and ‘othered’.

During data collection, I was very aware of the power inequities that existed between the youth participants and myself, as well as between management at the City of Toronto shelter operations and myself, and how the power relations between these two groups differed dramatically. While I interviewed youth, I was always conscious and mindful of my privilege and position of power as a researcher, and often found myself feeling particularly uncomfortable with the power imbalances. My attempt to balance the differing power relations between the
youth participants and myself included me sharing parts of my lived experience with them, which is a main reason that I chose to create my own Digital Story film. Working within a critical action research framework was meant to empower youth participants.

I was also aware of the power discrepancy that existed between managers, specifically at the City of Toronto and me. I found myself feeling the need to appear powerful and in control in order to be taken seriously. Additionally, my research has received considerable media attention and people often refer to me as an expert in the area of LGBTQ youth homelessness. This has been challenging for me because I have worked hard to find creative ways to shift power so that the youth participants are seen as knowledge producers. One of the ways that I created more reciprocity when the media attention began and I was being considered an expert was by telling reporters that the true experts in this field are the people who live it on a daily basis and that my work would not be possible without the youth participants’ courage to share their stories and experiences with me. I also made sure that people understood that there was a strong participatory component to the film project in this study and that the participant was involved in the research process from the beginning to the end.

My awareness of the power dynamics within the researcher-participant relationships, followed by my awareness of the media’s perceptions of my position in relation to this work (e.g. naming me an expert), inspired deep critical self-reflection and mindfulness throughout this study. I believe that my process of self-reflection with regards to power relations and positionality, helped make this a more thoughtful, ethical, and humane research study. The following section begins to share some of the critical self-reflection that I engaged in while conducting this research.
My Location as a Researcher

I would like to locate myself as a researcher and provide some background information about who I am personally. This information is meant to contextualize my perspectives, and the factors in my life that have informed my point of view and the framework of this study.

Politically, I locate myself within the framework of critical action research and I have a strong desire to examine culture, knowledge and power in the context of social change. I socially locate myself as a queer, trans, white person who grew up in a middle-class family. I come to this work with the lived experience of being young and queer and having faced ongoing oppression due to homophobia and transphobia throughout my life. As a social justice activist, I approach my research with the knowledge that a large proportion of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness are extremely marginalized and lack appropriate supports and minimal research in Canada has been conducted in this area. I likewise come to this work committed to finding strategies that will help develop the necessary toolkit to improve the shelter system and support services for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness. It has been through my coming out experience that I have learned about the capacities of the human heart and society’s lack of understanding towards ‘difference’. Just as this dissertation uses many participant quotes, because LGBTQ homeless youth are an under-heard population, because their stories matter and need to be shared, it is also important for me as the researcher to share my personal story.

“We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1967).
My Story

I had a beautiful childhood filled with magic and forest tales. I was a very happy child and grew up in an ideal family situation. As I got older, I knew that I was attracted to women, but did not think there was anything ‘wrong’ with this, mostly because my parents were always quite liberal and taught me to ‘follow my heart’ in everything that I did. However, my world quickly shifted and became a dark and frightening place in June 2002 when I finally came out as queer to my family. I will always remember that summer as the time that I lost a little bit of my faith in humanity and stopped feeling safe in this world.

I never experienced sleeping on the streets or in a shelter, as I was fortunate enough to have a strong support network of friends. My coming out experience taught me that a house does not mean a home and that to become homeless is particularly easy for queer youth coming out to an unsupportive family. During this time I was extremely resilient and determined to make my family accept me, because I was terrified of the prospect of living on the street or in a shelter. I was also set on completing my undergraduate degree, which consisted of day and evening classes and 800 hours of placement work. For days, months, and years I fought and struggled to make my family accept me.

It was my family’s response to my coming out that made me want to better comprehend the process of coming out and the relationship between coming out, homelessness, and resiliency. It was this experience that made me become fixated with wanting to understand everything about love and our society’s inability to accept people, based on who they love and to whom they are attracted.
Approximately 5 years after my coming out, I was ready to explore my experience more deeply and to use it as a form of knowledge production. I completed my Master’s degree in the Critical Disability Studies program at York University – School of Health Policy, which is where I began the focus of my work on LGBTQ youth homelessness. Even though it has been over 10 years since I came out as queer to my family, I have learned that coming out is an ongoing process that occurs almost daily, because our heteronormative and cisnormative culture is designed in such a way that it forces people to continuously come out.

The lack of love and support that I encountered when I came out deeply affected me and has been part of shaping who I am today. Being able to relate to this work on such a profound level works to my advantage as a researcher because it has not only taught me to nurture the voice of the personal, but it has also helped me connect with participants in a more reflective manner. It is important to note that although I can relate to the topic of this study, my experience is my own individual experience and by no means does it represent that of all queer-identified people.

My Trans Identity

“Every version of an ‘other’…is also the construction of a ‘self’” (Clifford, 1986, p. 66).

There is a typical narrative that is shared about trans people; these stories tend to focus on people being aware of their trans identity from a young age and feeling like they were born in the wrong body early on in life. However, my story is a non-traditional trans narrative. I spent years straddling the fence that divided the person I was expected to be and who I truly was. Being a young person is scary, regardless of your sexual or gender identity. Being a young person who
deviates from the norm is terrifying because our culture pathologizes almost every feeling and behaviour that human beings are capable of expressing. I think it was the extreme pathologization of gender that left me straddling that fence for so long.

During the first year of my PhD, I spent a great deal of time thinking about researcher authenticity. As I spent more time with the LGBTQ homeless youth community, it became increasingly important for me to be true to myself. It did not feel right that I was doing my best to conceal my trans identity from the world, while also working with trans youth and listening to their stories and struggles of daily occurrences of transphobia, both on the streets and in the shelter system. I knew that my research was and would continue to make things better for youth. At the same time, I wondered how authentic it was if I did not reveal my gender identity to others and myself.

An incident that I often reflect back on occurred while I was interviewing a trans youth who was feeling particularly hopeless. During the interview, she looked at me and said: “You’re trans right? Do people stare at you on the subway? How do you deal with it?” It was at that moment that I knew that this was my time to be the role model that I had yearned for. This was my opportunity to set an example for young LGBTQ people and give them a chance to see someone that represented their identity, succeeding and making a difference in the world.

Another important part of my story is Kyle Scanlon. Kyle worked at the 519 Church Street Community Centre (also referred to as the 519) and he was the Trans Awareness facilitator at the Toronto Hostels Training Centre. During my interview with Kyle, he shared his knowledge of the impact that transphobia has on homeless people’s lives and suggested strategies to make the shelter system safer. Kyle and I also worked on a Homelessness Partnering
Strategy (HPS) grant proposal to carry out a film-based project with LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto. During our first meeting, Kyle took me aside and asked me what pronouns I wanted to be addressed by. This was the first time anyone in a professional context had been brave enough to ask me this question. Unfortunately, our project did not get funded, but Kyle and I decided that regardless of the lack of funding, we would find a way to make the project happen. In the beginning of July 2012, exactly one year after I interviewed Kyle, he committed suicide. Kyle’s death had a very strong impact on me; his death prompted me to begin my process of coming out as trans.

Coming out as trans in the midst of working on a PhD, has been challenging. Due to the cisnormative beliefs ingrained in our culture, I have found it extremely difficult to navigate my professional and academic life as a trans person. There are implications for researchers who identify as queer and are engaged in queer research. For example, the continuum of sexual and gender identities that human beings embody have yet to be fully accepted or understood by most conservative university settings, which result in consequences that affect the researcher and their work (Grace & Wells, 2008). Always having to come out or engage in passing (as heterosexual or cisgender) in academic settings also has negative implications on the researcher and their work. The cost of transphobia and homophobia can leave the researcher feeling like they need to not only defend and protect their research and participants, but also themselves.

Some days I find myself sitting back on that fence, but on those days I take a moment and remember the young participant looking at me with her big hopeless eyes. I remember her words and her need for someone to look up to. I remember Kyle and his activism. I tell myself that even though being trans and being different is hard work and exhausting, trans youth desperately need
role models to look up. It is critical to my work as a researcher and role model that I be explicit with my audience about my trans identity. My social and political location impacts my commitment to produce transformative research and I have an ethical obligation to the younger trans people that this work impacts. In order to understand who this work impacts and how it does so, it is important to first understand what I initially intended to do for this study and what I actually ended up doing, which is outlined in the next section.

“We are each multiple and complex subjects whose identities are caught up in the identities of others” (Grace & Wells, 2008, p. 122).

Overview: What I Proposed to Do & What I Actually Did

Before I describe the details of the research design, it is important that I provide an overview of what I had initially intended to do for this study and what I actually did and the significance of that difference. This study originally began with Institutional Ethnography as the main methodological framework. I had planned to first identify the local problems faced by LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto, by conducting one-on-one interviews with them and asking them to share their experiences of how the shelter system has let them down and where they find support. Subsequently, a smaller group of youth was going to be asked to participate in a Digital Storytelling project with myself, to visually illustrate their experiences and to explore what is needed in the current shelter system. As a start, this knowledge was meant to help enable me to trace back into the institutions and investigate how these problems were created. During the next phase, I had planned to conduct shelter staff focus groups, which were meant to explore the anti-oppression training that staff had received, and their levels of preparedness in dealing with homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. Following the interviews and focus groups, I
had proposed to study key institutional documents beginning at the shelter level and ending with documents from the City of Toronto Shelter Services. The purpose of studying institutional documents was to uncover how the deficits identified in the staff focus groups, youth interviews, and film, came to be. During the final stage of data collection, I had proposed to interview three frontline shelter staff, one shelter manager, and one manager from a relevant ministry, based on the knowledge gained regarding the youth participants’ experiences in the shelter system.

While some aspects of Institutional Ethnography were retained, the methodology of this study largely changed to a Critical Action Research study. The shift happened as my research focus became less about tracing back to how the problems were created, and more about understanding the current LGBTQ homeless youth situation in Toronto, and responding to the local concerns of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, as well as producing practical knowledge that could benefit the local community by transforming the shelter system into a safe, accessible, and supportive place for LGBTQ youth. However, this study was informed by elements of Critical Ethnography and Institutional Ethnography in order to enhance the analytical and conceptual quality of this work, which is described in greater detail in Chapter 6. What follows are the details of what I actually did during this study.

The first phase of data collection consisted of shelter staff focus groups. This sequencing was not exactly by choice. It arose because I was enrolled in a qualitative research course and this was the part of the study that received ethical approval first and therefore, made the most sense to begin with. Early on, I discovered that in order to grasp an understanding of staff’s perspectives of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system and to understand their levels of preparedness, I needed the focus groups to investigate more than just the training that staff had
received. This understood, I began delving deeply into the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system that staff had either witnessed or taken part in. Subsequently, I conducted a number of one-on-one interviews with shelter executive directors, youth program managers, and City of Toronto shelter operations management.

Both formal and informal observations were incorporated into this stage of the study. The formal observations were related to shelter staff training workshops. I observed the following three training workshops for shelter staff at the Toronto Hostels Training Centre: Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression; Shelter Standards; and Transgender/Transsexual Awareness. The training workshops were observed to gain an understanding of the training experiences that staff shared during the focus groups, as well as to learn more about the type of content that is covered during shelter staff training and whether or not their training focuses on any LGBTQ cultural competency or anti-homophobia material.

I approached these observations by first meeting with a director at the training centre and introducing the study. I was told that it would be fine for me to observe whichever training workshops I wanted to, but that I would have to pay the fees for each workshop, which ranged from $40-60 each. This observational stage allowed me to participate directly in the participant setting, which revealed additional cultural information about shelter staff (e.g. the way that shelter staff relate to one another, the questions they ask, etc.). It was through observing the training workshops that I met the training facilitators and director of the Toronto Hostels Training Centre, all of whom participated in one-on-one interviews, after I observed the training. These interviews provided me with in depth data regarding the rules and policies in the shelter
system, the process of making training mandatory versus recommended, and the training facilitators’ experiences and perspectives with regards to LGBTQ youth homelessness.

The informal observations were related to me writing out my observations after focus groups and interviews with all participants; which also included my observations of the physical space of the shelters. During my observations of the physical spaces, I was interested in where staff spaces were set up in relation to resident areas, where washrooms were located and whether or not they were gendered. I was also interested in observing the décor in the shelters, which included what posters were hanging on the walls, to what types of brochures were available to youth residents, as well as, whether or not shelters displayed the resident rules and regulations and complaints process, which is a Toronto shelter standard. My informal observations also included observations related to participant body language, certain themes that came up during interviews, and new questions that I had after interviewing participants.

The formal and informal observations provided me with a deeper understanding of the culture of the shelter system and shelter staff training, as well as the types of messages that shelters communicate to residents, based on what is up on the walls. All of these observations allowed me to connect more deeply with the participants and helped me write a more reflective thesis.

During the next phase, I interviewed LGBTQ homeless and street-involved youth. I placed emphasis on attending programs that LGBTQ homeless youth frequent and building a rapport with youth, as well as understanding and describing the LGBTQ homeless youth community. As originally planned, the following phase was a Digital Storytelling project, which later became the main knowledge mobilization project of this study. Due to difficulty with
recruitment and time constraints, I was only able to recruit 1 youth who committed to working with me and completed a 6-minute film. The 6-minute film, entitled “Teal’s Story”, visually illustrates one young trans woman’s experiences in the shelter system and what it was like for her to navigate daily occurrences of extreme transphobia in the shelter system. After the film was completed, Teal was interviewed and asked questions about her experience participating in the project and how the film illuminates what is needed in the current shelter system. The interview findings are shared in Chapters 6 and 7, along with the findings of rest of the study.

Just as I had difficulty recruiting youth for the Digital Storytelling project, I had difficulty recruiting shelters and shelter staff to participate in this study. This latter difficulty influenced my research design and strategy in a number of ways, from my sampling and recruitment techniques, to the people I ended up speaking to, and the data that was collected. For example, I conducted focus groups in two shelters outside of Toronto, which I had not planned to do. These unforeseen changes in what I had originally planned to do for this research and what I actually did, were substantial, in the sense that they led me to a deeper understanding of why so many LGBTQ homeless youth migrate to Toronto, which became a critical component in answering a number of my research questions.

Research Design

Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique utilized in selecting the 3 shelters that I had originally proposed to include was maximum variation based on: one faith-based shelter (Covenant House), one based on location; located in the heart of the gay village (Turning Point Youth Services), and one
based on popularity amongst homeless youth (Eva’s Satellite). Maximum variation was chosen to ensure that I got a group of staff members with a diverse range of anti-oppression training experiences, comfort levels in dealing with situations of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, and number of years of shelter work experience. In the end, however, due to the difficulty with finding shelters to agree to participate in my study, this phase of data collection also utilized opportunistic sampling.

An emergent aspect of the study design was a strategy that I used to make sure that I caught the vicissitudes that I needed to catch in order to understand this phenomenon. It included looking for people to give me leads and recommend other people and making sure to follow up with all of those leads, in other words, opportunistic sampling. This was a completely successful strategy, as all of the leads worked out and brought new knowledge forward. It is important to note that I was forced into this strategy because it was difficult to get people to agree to take part in my study, which became a key component in helping me understand what this study suggests about how homophobia and transphobia is engrained in the institutional culture of the shelter system (See Chapters 6 and 7). As a result of this strategy, I ended up interviewing a number of people I had not anticipated to prior to this study (see Appendix N for a list of all shelters and organizations that participated).

The sampling strategies used with the youth participants in particular included, snowball sampling and purposive sampling. These sampling techniques were used because researchers typically have great difficulty recruiting LGBTQ homeless youth. In addition to these two techniques, maximum variation was also used. Maximum variation was used as a way to ensure
diversity amongst the LGBTQ youth participants and they were recruited through various shelters and population-based support services for homeless youth.

The criteria for the youth participants in the one-on-one youth interviews were: youth who identify as LGBTQ and are between the ages of 16 and 29 years, and who are homeless or insecurely housed in Toronto. The criteria for the youth participants for the film project were: youth who identify as LGBTQ and are between the ages of 16 and 29 years and who have had previous experiences of being homeless or insecurely housed in Toronto. Lastly, the criteria for shelter staff focus groups were: non-managerial frontline shelter staff.

**Recruitment Strategies**

**Youth Interviews**

I attempted to recruit youth by placing recruitment posters (See Appendix B) at programs such as Supporting Our Youth (SOY) at the Sherbourne Health Centre in Toronto. SOY works with LGBTQ youth up to the age of 29 years old and offers “population-based” groups, such as: The Monday night drop-in: a program that includes a hot meal, as well as activities and social time for street-involved, homeless, and isolated queer and trans youth; and BQY-Black Queer Youth: a group for black queer youth to meet, socialize, and participate in workshops. Other programs that I contacted included: SKETCH (a community arts program for street-involved youth); Native Youth Sexual Health Network (an organization that focuses on and advocates for culturally safe sexuality and reproductive health services for Indigenous youth); Queer Asian Youth - ACAS (a program that offers various workshops and social spaces for LGBTQ East and Southeast Asian youth).
I soon learned that recruiting youth exclusively through posters was not enough to ensure a robust and diverse group. Quickly realizing that I needed to go to the youth, I attended both the Monday night drop-in and SKETCH. This gave me the opportunity to build a rapport with youth and gave youth the opportunity to meet me in person and hear me talk about my research, and then decide whether or not they wanted to participate. Once I attended the Monday night drop-in specifically, youth began contacting me to participate. Each youth that contacted me and asked to participate in the study, was asked a number of questions and screened prior to the interview to make sure they met the study criteria. Questions included: How old are you?, How do you identify your sexuality?, Are you currently homeless or street-involved?, Were you or are you currently homeless or street-involved in Toronto?

After I had conducted approximately 8 youth interviews, I became aware that there were not enough Aboriginal or Asian youth in the youth sample that I had interviewed. As a way to ensure that I interviewed a more diverse group of youth, I contacted the Health Promoter at the organization (Queen West Community Health Centre) and asked her if she could recommend any youth who fit the criteria and might be interested in participating in an interview. She spoke to several program facilitators at the community health centre and was able to recruit 2 Aboriginal youth. I was unable to recruit any Asian youth for this study, which may be because LGBTQ Asian youth are underrepresented in the homeless youth population, which indicates that the risk of homelessness may not be the same for all youth depending on their cultural and ethno-racial background.
**Digital Storytelling Project**

When recruiting youth participants for the Digital Storytelling phase, I contacted program facilitators at the 519 Church Street Community Centre and discussed my study with them and described the criteria for participation. The program facilitators were able to recruit a small group of youth. However, due to unpredictable changes in their lives, only 1 youth agreed to participate in the project. The reason I chose to recruit youth from the 519 Church Street Community Centre was because it was identified as a safe and supportive space by the youth I had interviewed and because they offered to help recruit youth.

**Shelter Staff Focus Groups**

I emailed the executive director’s of the shelters that I had selected for this study and asked if they would be willing to allow their frontline staff to participate in one focus group. Recruitment posters were also attached to the emails for executive director’s to post in staff designated areas (See Appendix C).

**Participant Demographics**

A total of 34 people participated in this research study. Participants can be broken-down into the following categories: Youth participated in one-on-one interviews (n=11), however, one youth interview was eliminated because the participant did not meet the criteria; Adults who work in the shelter system (Executive directors, shelter workshop facilitators, and City of Toronto shelter operations management) participated in one-on-one interviews (n=8); Frontline shelter staff participated in focus groups (n=14); and n=1 youth participated in the Digital Storytelling project.
Youth Participants

All youth (n=10) participants chose pseudonyms at the onset of each interview to protect their anonymity. All of the adults (n=8) who work in the shelter system (shelter staff and management) chose to use their first and last initials for the purpose of this study. Each focus group is identified by the name of the shelter at which the focus group took place. Lastly, the one youth that participated in the Digital Storytelling project, chose to use her real name because she appears in the film and stated that it was an empowering experience for her and would like to use the film as an educational tool in her own work. Therefore, a combination of pseudonyms, initials, shelter names, and a real name are used throughout this dissertation.

The demographic data of the youth participants is outlined in Appendix D – Table 2. The youth participants were between the ages of 21 and 29, with the average age of youth participants at 25 years old. The age categories are shared in greater detail in Table 2. The absence of representation of teenaged youth in this study is discussed in the “Limitations of the Study” section in Chapter 8.

Youth were asked to describe in their own words how they identify their gender and sexuality. In the gender category of Table 2, under the identities male and female, no distinction is made whether a participant was cisgender or transgender/transsexual. Under sexuality, the term ‘fluid’ refers to one youth who stated that they identify as gay, but prefer to be viewed as a straight female, and another youth who stated that he sometimes identifies as gay and at other times identifies as bisexual. The definitions of all the gender and sexual identity terms stated by youth can be found in the terminology sheet (See Appendix A). When asked to describe their current living situation, 70% (n=7) of the youth participants stated that they were ‘street-
involved’, which they defined as living in: their own apartment (n=3), the back of a store (n=1), a rooming house (n=1), a decrepit basement/horror story (n=1), and staying with friends (n=1). 20% (n=2) of youth described their living situations as couch surfing, which refers to moving around frequently and sleeping on different people’s couches or floors. 10% (n=1) of youth identified as homeless and reported living in a shelter.

60% (n=6) of youth identified their main source of income as welfare (Ontario Works or social assistance). Youth did not indicate whether they were receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). 30% (n=3) of the youth participants who stated that their main source of income comes from working, described their jobs as, fixing people’s bikes (n=1), working at a support service and helping other street-involved youth (n=1), and prostitution (n=1). The remaining 10% (n=1) of youth stated that their main source of income is OSAP.

**Adult Participants**

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire (See Appendix E) that focused on their previous work experiences and perceptions of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. Participants held a variety of positions, including: residential and youth counsellor, community housing support worker, outreach counsellor, as well as co-op students. The data revealed that participants’ reasons for wanting to work with homeless youth ranged from their own personal life experiences, to wanting to make a difference and help youth, to wanting to gain insight and knowledge in the area of youth homelessness. Focus group participants had been working with homeless youth from 1 week to 15 years, with the average number of years being approximately five. Fifty percent (n=7) of participants had been working with homeless youth for the same amount of time that they were
employed at their current place of employment, while 43% (n=6) of participants had been working at their current place of employment for less time than they had actually worked with homeless youth, and only 7% (n=1) of participants had been working at their current place of employment for longer than the total time worked with homeless youth.

**Data Collection**

I used the grounded theory method of saturation in my approach to data collection and completed collecting data once saturation was reached. Data saturation refers to the point at which no new findings emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I also used data-triangulation as a way to better understand the human condition from varied perspectives, as well as to ensure rigour and trustworthiness. As noted earlier, the various methods of data collection that were used for this study include: one-on-one interviews, focus groups, a short film that was made with one youth, and observations. Participants in all stages of data collection were provided with consent forms (See Appendix F for a copy of all consent forms), which I went over with them to ensure they understood the purpose and goals of the study. Interviews and focus groups in each stage of the study were audio-recorded with the permission of participants. Semi-structured interview guides were used for all focus groups and interviews (See Appendix G for question guides for: Shelter staff focus Groups, Youth one-on-one interviews, Executive Director one-on-one interviews, Workshop Facilitator one-on-one interviews, and City of Toronto one-on-one interviews). All youth participants were reimbursed for their time with 2 TTC tokens, $10 for each interview, and snacks and drinks during each interview. To ensure that all youth participants had someone to get support from if they needed to, I provided each youth with an information sheet that included helplines and support services (See Appendix H).
Data Analysis

The original driving question of this study was: *What changes need to be implemented in the current shelter system in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth in Toronto?* At the broadest level, the initial framing of this question was too linear; good research questions that help produce significant research are often nonlinear (Robson, 2011). I had to shift my approach from wanting to know and explain *why* certain things were happening the way they were to wanting to know and explain *how* they were happening, because as Dorothy Smith has pointed out, we need to know how things happen in order to change them (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). Therefore, this study addresses the following two major questions:

1) What disjuncture(s) occurs for LGBTQ youth in the shelter system?

2) How does that disjuncture come about?

A series of relevant secondary questions that arise from the main inquiry and that have helped me tackle the major questions include: i) What is holding up and sustaining the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system? ii) How does homophobia and transphobia occur in the shelter system and how is it managed? iii) How do broader policy issues serve to create oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth?

Please note that although the main question and sub-questions have been altered, the original core question is still answered throughout Chapter 9.

In order to answer the framed questions, I have had to understand the different ways that residents are victimized as LGBTQ, mapping concretely how these relate to staff policy and
practices. It has also been important for me to understand the daily experiences and challenges that LGBTQ homeless and street-involved youth face in the shelter system, as well as the awareness and perceptions of LGBTQ youth homelessness held by shelter staff members, executive directors, and the City of Toronto shelter management.

Furthermore, once I completed all of the research stages, I had difficulty making sense of all the data that I had collected. My first attempt at analysis was too descriptive, which forced me to go back and dig deeper conceptually. It was not until I had a clear understanding of the difference between themes and concepts, that I was able to have a deep conceptual analysis. In line with my methodological framework, I began engaging with the data very early on by writing out my observations, thoughts, and the main themes that emerged each time I collected data. The data analysis was an iterative process and an inductive thematic approach was employed to analyze the qualitative data, which involves examining themes in the data collected (Robson, 2011). The first steps of data analysis involved reading and re-reading the interview and focus group transcripts and writing down what sense I was making of the complex data I had collected. Once I felt ready to code and analyze the data more formally, I began the next step of analysis. The analysis generated major themes and meanings that were directly connected with the aims of the study. I also engaged in frequent debriefing with my supervisor and mentors, so as to not get caught up in the individual participants’ experiences, but to keep focused on the particular aims of the study, while remaining connected to the participant community. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim to ensure and maximize transcription quality and avoid any error or miscommunication (Poland, 1995).
An aim of this study has been to increase understanding and awareness of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto amongst individuals with divergent perspectives, which has been harder to measure. Additionally, part of my analysis has been to determine the impact of my research and films, which I discuss further in the knowledge translation section.

Research Activities

Research Journal

Beginning in the first year of my PhD, I kept a research journal and recorded all relevant information, thoughts, reflections, concerns, uncertainties, and observations of all things pertaining to my research. Each time I collected data formally (interview, focus group, and observation session) or informally (conversations, presentations, observations), I recorded detailed notes in my journal that I could refer back to during the data analysis and dissertation writing processes.

Informal Discussions and Meetings

During the first three years of my PhD, I engaged in frequent informal discussions with key people working in the youth homelessness sector. Numerous students have contacted me through my website on LGBTQ youth homelessness, requesting to interview me or meet with me about my research for their own class projects.

Additionally, I have approached and engaged with various people regarding the creation of specialized LGBTQ youth housing in Toronto. I also partnered with a local City Councillor candidate in 2010, and created a community group named “House Call” in which we invited public engagement, conversation, and endorsement for a future LGBTQ youth
shelter/transitional housing. In December 2010, we held a public meeting at Harbord Collegiate Institute in Toronto. I shared a short film and gave a presentation on my research and preliminary findings. Following my talk, participants joined together to contribute to the discussion. These informal discussions and meetings were useful in helping raise awareness of LGBTQ youth homelessness; they have also allowed me to network with others working in similar fields and have led to numerous learning and teaching opportunities. Further, I have attended political and activist events with a focus on poverty, homelessness, and LGBTQ youth justice. Attending these events has given me a presence in the community and allowed me to build a rapport with community members, and has also provided me with insider knowledge (Robson, 2011).

**Conferences and Invited Presentations**

I have presented at a number of conferences that focused on LGBTQ issues, qualitative research, and knowledge translation, in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, and Newfoundland. Beginning in the second year of my PhD, I was invited to speak and lecture about my research numerous times at various venues, including, Ryerson University undergraduate class on homelessness in Canada; the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto undergraduate class on qualitative research; a webinar for Canadian Housing and Renewal Association; and CATIE’s National HIV and Youth Knowledge Exchange Symposium.

**Filmmaking and Film Screenings**

Authenticity, which to me, is about being a genuine human being, has always been an essential part of being a researcher working with young people. It has been important for me to fully be myself and encourage youth to do the same. Allowing myself to be vulnerable and being
able to do what I ask participants to do felt important to me from the onset of this study. Therefore, I created a video entitled: Where is the Support?, that portrays my personal coming out experience. I used this video to share with the youth participants in the Digital Storytelling project, as well as during various conferences and talks in which I felt it was appropriate to provide my personal experience as a researcher.

I also co-directed a short film with a classmate entitled ‘Out on the Street’. We originally created ‘Out on the Street’ as a class project for the Creative Empowerment Work with the Disenfranchised course (AEC 1405). The film focuses on LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto, a young transman shares his lived experience of being homeless in Toronto, and a number of key people in the area of youth homelessness share their understanding from an academic, financial, and political perspective. Issues discussed throughout the film include: creating a specialized shelter and the impact of homophobia and transphobia on LGBTQ homeless youth. This video has subsequently been screened at a number of film festivals, including the Inside Out Toronto LGBT Film Festival. Our film was also chosen by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and is being distributed to various film festivals and schools. See Appendix I for links to all three films.

**Knowledge Translation**

Reduced to its essence, knowledge translation (KT) is the middle, meeting ground between two fundamentally different processes: those of research and those of action. KT connects the purity of science with the pragmatism of policy, relying upon vibrant partnerships, collaborations and, above all, personal contact between
researchers and research-users to achieve more evidence-informed decisions and more decision-informed evidence (Campbell, 2008, p. 6).

As a researcher with a strong political and social justice agenda, it has been critical for me to see a direct relationship between my research and knowledge translation (KT). I have worked hard to find ways for my research to reach beyond academia and into the world where it can have an impact and make a difference, which is why Critical Action Research has been such a well-suited methodology for this study. KT has been an integral part of my research stemming from my MA research. Some of my early work in this area is the creation of short films, my research blog, and an audio podcast (Where is the Support?) that focuses on the issues of youth homelessness. I have interviewed various researchers, academics, executive directors, and people with lived experience of homelessness for my podcast. People whom I have interviewed include: Michael Shapcott (Wellesley Institute); Pat Capponi; and Carolann Barr (Raising the Roof). My podcast is available to the public through my website, as well as through iTunes and is being used as a tool to help educate society on these pressing issues. It has been fundamental for me to engage with social media and the various online social networking sites due to the minimal information available on LGBTQ youth homelessness from Canadian sources and because I have wanted to reach a broad audience with my work and find ways to make scholarship more accessible. As one of the few people in Canada that is engaged in this type of research, I have also felt that this is one of my responsibilities.

The media attention and press coverage that my research has received has been a key factor in getting my work off the ground and into the world. I have been interviewed about my research by a number of journalists from magazines and newspapers across Canada (See
Appendix J-1 to J-8). Additionally, I was interviewed about my research for a local television show called “FoQus”, which highlights the issues and successes of the LGBTQ community in Toronto. My first media interview appeared in the Toronto Star in August 2009 and was entitled “Gay dropouts say street is only option”. This interview was the City of Toronto’s first introduction to my research.

In July 2010, I collaborated with Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans (LGBT) Youthline (an anonymous and confidential support telephone line for LGBTQ youth up to the age of 26 years) for the Toronto gay Pride parade and had the opportunity to be on their float. They agreed to raise awareness to the issues of my research and created 6 foot tall cardboard printouts that were on their float and buttons that read: *There are NO emergency shelters for LGBT youth in Canada* and *1/3 of homeless youth are LGBT* (See Appendix K). This experience helped establish a strong connection between LGBT Youthline and myself, as well as strengthened my presence in the community, which was fundamental to this study.

I have been using my website (www.ilona6.com) as a key tool for disseminating knowledge on LGBTQ youth homelessness and sharing information about my research, press coverage, short films, latest news, and upcoming presentations. Links to all of the various social media networking and educational groups and sites that I manage can be found on my website. These include: my blog which focuses on my research and presentations; YouTube channel which shares the various short films I have created on LGBTQ youth homelessness, and shares relevant films that others have made; Twitter account which I use to share the latest news and research on LGBTQ youth homelessness; LinkedIn group which is for professionals in the field to learn more about the issue, ask questions, and participate in dialogue; and my Facebook group
on LGBTQ youth homelessness which shares a large variety of information related to the topic. My website has also been used as a method to invite the broader public to engage in ongoing discussions about these issues and has proved to be successful, as most journalists, students, and people wanting to collaborate have contacted me through my website.

In addition to using the various social media tools for disseminating my work, I also use them to measure and evaluate the impact of my research. With these tools, I am able to keep track of the ways in which people are engaging with my work, how frequently, the types of dialogue it is creating, as well as how far and whom it is reaching. The analytics on my website keeps track of how many times my website has been viewed and breaks it down to the pages people have visited, allowing me to get a better sense of which pages are most visited. I am also able to track how people get to my website and which sites have directed them to mine. As well as where my visitors are geographically located, and which organizations they are visiting from. The KT work I have done has had an impact on the City of Toronto’s willingness to collaborate with me and back up my research; the results of this shift are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

**Trustworthiness**

Confirming that our research findings are accurate and true is an important component of all research and can be described as checking the trustworthiness of our research (Robson, 2011). Scientific researchers are more concerned with rigor in research, and use terms such as *validity* and *reliability* to describe rigorous research. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, employ terms such as *credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness* when describing and discussing research (Robson, 2011).
Determining the credibility or trustworthiness in qualitative research involves carefully documenting and explaining the steps you took to get to your interpretation and how you made your interpretation (Robson, 2011). The process of evaluating the trustworthiness of a research study is a significant part of anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown, 2005). This process differs between naturalistic inquiry and critical inquiry, including anti-oppressive research, because naturalistic inquiry tends to place a great deal of weight into assessing how accurate the research tools and measures were, whereas, in anti-oppressive research, it is more important to determine the degree to which the research activity changes the world (Potts & Brown, 2005).

The trustworthiness of the findings in this study has been ensured through triangulation and self-reflexive practices. Triangulation is a fundamental aspect of determining trustworthiness in ethnographic research and is often used to verify that the data has been evaluated and analyzed accurately (Fetterman, 2010; Horner, 2004). The process of triangulation can be described as testing your main findings against other sources of information and using different methods of data collection (Fetterman, 2010; Robson, 2011). In order to enhance the rigour of this research and assess trustworthiness, I used two different types of triangulation. First, I used data triangulation, meaning that I employed more than one method of data collection, and second, I used methodological triangulation, meaning that I combined different methodological approaches, including some quantitative measures (Atkinson et al., 2001; Richards, 2005; Robson, 2011). Additionally, I debriefed with my peers in the form of a monthly research support group. This gave me an opportunity to share my ideas and thoughts as they emerged after each phase of data collection. These meetings not only provided support, but also helped ensure against researcher bias. In addition to my peer research support group, I also debriefed
and checked-in with my thesis committee; another thesis support group, which my supervisor is also a part of; and several research mentors from St. Michael’s Hospital and York University involved in similar types of research to mine.

**Ethical Considerations**

The artful presentation of research findings does invoke particular ethical challenges. ‘Art moves in’, rearranges our understandings of ourselves and the world, and goes home with us in ways that traditional social science representations rarely do. Arguably, then, artful research representations have a particular potential to do harm (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 462).

Marginalized communities have a long history of being exploited by researchers and are consequently wary of participating in research studies. LGBTQ homeless youth are an especially marginalized group of people who often choose not to participate in research and are therefore difficult to recruit for studies. In this section, I will distinguish between what the ethical review board required of me as a researcher working with a vulnerable population and what I personally brought ethically to this study. This study involved human research participants and was considered high risk and high vulnerability and therefore underwent a Full Board Review by the University of Toronto (UofT) Research Ethics Board (See Appendix L for Research Ethics Board approval forms). This study also underwent ethical review by each shelter I collected data from, the 519 Church Street Community Centre, and by the Queen West Community Health Centre, where I conducted the majority of the youth interviews.
When going through the University of Toronto Ethics Board, I was required to complete a Protocol Submission Form, which consisted of detailed information regarding my study rationale, methods, participant demographics, recruitment strategies, risks and benefits, as well as the informed consent process. At the beginning of each interview and focus group, I went over the informed consent forms with participants and made sure they understood that their participation was completely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point and that choosing not to participate would not affect their independent relationship with me, University of Toronto, or with the organization they were recruited from. Additionally, the Ethics Board required information regarding confidentiality and my plans to protect the anonymity of participants. I assured participants that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected and that all data would be anonymized to ensure confidentiality and to protect their safety. Once the digital audio recordings of the one-on-one interviews and focus groups were transcribed, the original or raw data has been stored in my private, password-protected computer. Identifying codes that could connect participants or their organization with pseudonyms provided have also been stored in my private, password-protected computer in a master log sheet.

My own sense of ethics led me to go beyond the basic ethical requirements of this study in a number of ways. For example, the strongest single ethical decision that I made in this study was to create a video that shared my own personal coming out experience and where I found support during that extremely challenging time in my life. I did this because I did not want to ask youth to do anything that I did not do myself, and to make sure that I knew concretely what I was asking of them. As a researcher with lived experience of being young and queer and having faced family rejection, I have been able to relate to this work on a profound level. This has
worked to my advantage as a researcher because it has not only taught me to nurture the voice of the personal, but it has also helped me connect with participants in a more reflective manner. From the outset of this study, I have been committed to making sure that this work is done ethically, safely, and that it will benefit LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.

There were a number of ways that I ensured that the youth participants felt heard, represented, and safe throughout the entire process of this study. For example, the Digital Storytelling project engaged in a participatory editing process so that the youth who participated had complete control over how her story was told. Further, when I collected demographic information from youth during the one-on-one interviews and film project, I asked them to describe in their own words how they identify their sexuality and gender, rather than providing them with options to choose from (e.g., Female, Male, Transgender). I did this because people should have the right to decide how they identify, and I did not want this study to further perpetuate the notion that all people fit into predetermined sexuality and gender categories.

I was also conscious that there might be pre-existing relationships between the youth participants and myself, or shelter staff and myself, as I have been working in this field for a number of years and have developed connections with numerous people who are street-involved, have lived experience of homelessness, and who work in the shelter system. Fortunately, I did not run into this situation during the study, however, I did run into several situations in which I had to negotiate boundaries with youth participants because the LGBTQ community is rather small in Toronto. For instance, the Sherbourne Health Centre is the most widely used health centre for the LGBTQ community in Toronto. On a couple of occasions, I found myself sitting next to a youth I had interviewed for this study, while waiting to see my family doctor in the
waiting room. During these situations I kept to myself and let the youth decide whether or not they wanted to acknowledge my presence and say hello.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has outlined the details of this study’s epistemological and methodological framework, and research design. It has likewise situated me as a researcher. It has also explained the steps that were taken to recruit participants, collect data, and the tools and techniques that were used to analyze the data. This chapter was meant to provide the reader with a contextual understanding and awareness of the fine details of this research study, which can be used to help guide the reader through the rest of this dissertation.

Reflecting back on the research process and on doing this research, words do not do justice to the magnitude of how much I have learned and discovered about LGBTQ youth homelessness and the systemic issues, about love, humanity, and authenticity, and about becoming a more thoughtful and focused researcher.

The following chapter introduces each of the young people who participated in this research. The chapter provides an opportunity to get to know the youth participants on a more personal level through short vignettes that introduce them and their lives.
Chapter Five: Introductions to Each Youth

Finally, we come to the people who are at the centre of this work – the group of youth who agreed to participate and who form the crux of this journey. While other participants were part of this inquiry – and their contributions were highly significant – it is the experiences of these young people that form the problematic. Given the centrality of their experiences, and given that their individual voices will be heard again and again in this study, an introduction to them is in order.

The group of ten (eleven youth were originally interviewed for this study; however, one of the youth did not meet the study criteria, which was only discovered halfway through the interview) young people who participated in this study were between 21 and 29 years of age (average age of youth participant group was 25 years old), had a range of gender and sexual identities, and ethno-racial backgrounds. As mentioned in Chapter 4, detailed information regarding youth participant demographics can be found in Appendix D -Table 2. All of the youth interviewed had spent at least one night in the shelter system at some point in time. Table 1 (below) provides information on the places that youth have lived or spent nights over the course of their lives. Sleeping in shelters, couch surfing (includes staying at a friend’s house), and the street, were the most common places that youth stayed/lived.
As mentioned in the previous chapter, youth were given the freedom to answer questions and describe their gender and sexual identities, and ethno-racial backgrounds in their own words, opposed to having them fit themselves into predetermined categories. Youth are identified throughout this dissertation by the pseudonyms that they chose for themselves at the onset of their interviews. The following section provides short vignettes that introduce and help familiarize the reader to each of the youth that participated in this study. It is important to note that these vignettes reflect my interpretations and the limited time that I shared with each youth. My interpretations may have been affected by the power dynamics that existed between participants and myself; for example, some participants may have appeared more introverted or quiet because they did not feel like they could connect with me because they viewed me as a researcher from a large institution. It is also important to note that I come to this work as a young, white, trans, and queer person having faced ongoing oppression based on my gender and sexual identity, but also as a researcher with the privilege of doing my PhD at a prestigious university. I believe that my life history and lived experience have helped shape me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shelter</th>
<th>Yes: 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>No: 70% Yes: 20% Uncertain: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td>No: 70% Yes: 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detox</td>
<td>Yes: 60% No: 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>No: 60% Yes: 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couch Surfing</td>
<td>Yes: 90% No: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street</td>
<td>Yes: 90% No: 10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
into a more reflexive researcher who is sensitive to the issues and problems experienced by the young people that participated in this study. Therefore, I ask you to be cognizant of the lens through which I have made my interpretations, but also that these interpretations are based on glimpses into each person’s personality that I had during a limited amount of time.

**Jaime Jach**

Jaime Jach is a 26-year-old White gender-fluid trans man, who presented himself as an outgoing and extroverted person. He smiled often and came across as warm and friendly. He spoke about having a strong sense of self-pride and caring about what people think of him. Jaime Jach also spoke about feeling passionately about urban agriculture, sustainable living, and queer politics. His main hobby is bike riding, which he described as a big part of his life.

He spoke about being well aware of his white privilege and having spent time thinking about it and the ways it plays out in his daily life. He also spoke about people discriminating against him because of his gender identity, and therefore, feeling like he has to constantly negotiate his daily decisions based on how others perceive his gender identity, because “gendered violence is very real, and prolific on the street”. He described the experience of sleeping in his sleeping bag in a park and constantly wondering if people perceived him as a man or a woman, or something else, and how that affected the way that people would treat him. He stated that there were times that it was good to be perceived as a woman, such as, when trying to make money or doing sex work, but that there were times when being read as male had advantages, such as, when he was asleep in his sleeping bag in the park, because people think that you can defend yourself better if you are male.
Jamie Jach described a very difficult family life growing up, where he was exposed to sexual abuse and family violence beginning early in his life. He has two younger brothers, who he has often felt responsible for. He grew up between a hospital and jail, because his mother was sent to a psychiatric hospital when he was 5 years old, and his father was incarcerated. Jaime Jach first left home at the age of 13, due to family violence; however, he believes that his gender and sexual identity did play a role in him leaving the house, even though he was not out at that time. He described his father as an extremely violent and homophobic man, who threatened to kill him if he ever came out as gay. He stated: “If my father knew that I was queer and trans, he really would do something to eliminate me from the world. I fully believe in his ability and his desire to do this.” He grew up outside of Toronto, but moved to Toronto when he left home and has been on and off of the streets for thirteen years. He has been extremely covert about his homelessness experience, for reasons stemming from shame and pride.

Jamie Jach described the shelter system as a dangerous place filled with rampant homophobia and transphobia. He stated that living on the streets or in a park is safer for LGBTQ youth, than staying in the shelter system, which is why he lived in a park in downtown Toronto for 6 months, including a “very, very, cold winter”. He tried to live in isolation and be as invisible as possible while he lived in the park. He felt very ashamed about being homeless, but also had a great deal of pride, therefore, he went to great lengths to make sure that his friends and girlfriend did not find out that he was homeless. He rarely stayed at friend’s places and when he did, he would never have labeled it as “couch surfing”; instead he would just ask if he could stay the night, but never tell anyone that he didn’t have a place to stay. The following quotation portrays how Jamie Jach described the climax of his homelessness experience:
My insomnia was expedited by being on the street because I was just thinking about so much shit all the time and didn’t really have anywhere to sleep. What’s the point of even going to sleep? I would try to be invisible until 3 am or 4 am when I thought my friends would all be home from the bars and they wouldn’t see me in the park. I would sleep somewhere or try to, on a picnic table, under a lit up area that was a little bit covered. I would go to sleep or try to sleep, usually by taking pills. I had a summer sleeping bag that I stole from Walmart and I had my bike. I would try to hide my bike, I would park it somewhere else so that my friends wouldn’t see my bike and identify me. It’s really hard to sleep after a certain time in the morning when the sun comes up because it’s really bright, so I would sleep until whenever I could, then I’d wake up. I’d usually be exhausted, sometimes I’d go to Tim Hortons and get a coffee, and go to the library, which has really nice chairs but they poke you if you fall asleep. I’m also really obsessed with showering. I just personally like to shower once a day, so I would try and be clean somehow. Go in a bathroom and wash myself. Go to the laundromat and do my laundry all the time, again that was probably part of my pride thing.

Even though Jamie Jach was no longer living in the park at the time of the interview, he described it as his home and stated that his heart is still in that park because that was where he felt safest. He is currently living in what he described as a “random space” that he found on craigslist, where he sleeps in the closet, and runs a little shop in the main room, as a source of income. He described the place as providing the necessities, such as, showering, sleeping, work and hobby stuff, but that it is also not too “home-y”, so that he could still feel connected to the street experience.
Kelly

Kelly is a 27-year-old White genderqueer person, who prefers the pronoun “they”. Kelly came across as an introverted and quiet person, and took time to open up during the interview, which may have been due to the power dynamics. Kelly did not smile often and looked sad throughout the interview.

Kelly spoke about feeling passionately about LGBTQ rights and dreams of one day working in the shelter system and making it safer for queer and trans people. Kelly also feels passionately about healthy eating and spoke about the need for better food options in the shelter system and stated that they feel upset that shelter residents’ food allergies and intolerances are rarely given any consideration.

Kelly described their home life growing up as “very chaotic”. Kelly first left home at the age of 15 years old, partially due to their gender and sexual identity. Kelly described their parents as homophobic. Kelly currently has minimal contact with their father and sees their mother once in a while.

Kelly reported feeling unsafe and uncomfortable in the shelter system and drop-ins and spoke about them not being safe places for LGBTQ people, due to homophobic and transphobic violence. Kelly felt strongly that LGBTQ people should avoid the shelter system at all costs, even if it means putting oneself into another situation that is not safe. Therefore, Kelly has spent many nights sleeping wherever possible, including, parks and coffee shops. Kelly discussed the need for a specialized LGBTQ shelter and how that would be more inclusive than the current shelter system, which designates 1-2 beds for trans people and forces people to out themselves as
trans to “some random worker and everyone else in the shelter”. Additionally, Kelly spoke about the current system of 1-2 segregated beds for trans people, leading to hostility and anger amongst cisgender youth, because trans youth are then seen as receiving special treatment for getting a room to themselves.

Kelly reminisced about a time when they felt that they belonged to a LGBTQ community, but stated that there is no place for people living in poverty and experiencing homelessness in Toronto’s divided and shattered LGBTQ community.

Kelly currently lives in a very small room, in a rooming house that is segregated by male and female floors, has shared bathrooms, and many rules, such as, only being allowed to have an overnight guest for three nights per month. Living in the rooming house has created an extremely difficult living situation for Kelly because they identify as genderqueer and do not feel comfortable on neither the male side, nor the female side, which is the same dilemma that Kelly has run into in the shelter system. Kelly spoke about their experience of staying at a women’s shelter and described it as unbearable to the point of only being able to stay for one night. Kelly’s solution to their current living situation is that they pay rent to the rooming house, but only use it to store their stuff there and then stays with a friend who lives in another rooming house that is much bigger and has no rules about having people over.

**Fonts**

Fonts is a 21-year-old Aboriginal genderqueer male. During the first half of the interview, he was quiet and barely spoke beyond answering questions, which may have been because he could not relate to me or because of the power differential. He came across as a very
observant and warm person. He appeared interested in what I had to say and listened carefully to me every time I spoke. He also came across as self-conscious and not entirely certain of his answers, almost as though he needed reassurance that what he was saying was okay. He described himself as an artist and spoke about feeling passionately about making art and finding different ways to be creative.

Fonts grew up in a rural community in the west coast of Canada. He described homophobia and transphobia there as being “unavoidable”. Fonts stated that he had a “horrid” family life growing up and that he started running away when he was 15 years old because it was easier to be anywhere but his home. He described his mother as homophobic, but stated that was not what led him out of the house.

At the time of the interview, Fonts had recently moved to Toronto, and had been homeless ever since his arrival. He spent three months living in three different shelters, but then ended up living on the streets for months. He spoke about quickly learning that some neighbourhoods in Toronto are more homophobic and transphobic than others. For example, he stated:

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When I was at Horizons last year, it was [homophobic]. If I would even ask for a cigarette, those guys would say 'faggot, faggot, faggot', but I mean it's just that area, Eglinton West. You just can't be gay in that area or flamboyant, you'll get called out for it.
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Fonts stated that most of the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system is perpetrated by groups of young boys and that staff are not prepared to deal with these situations. He stated that shelter staff are less likely to intervene if an incident involves homophobic slurs
and transphobic slurs, as opposed to physical assault, and even then staff do not always step in. He expressed disappointment in shelter staff for rarely intervening and often letting such incidents slide, and suggested that shelter staff should get more training regarding how to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia.

In addition to homophobia, Fonts has also dealt with racism. Fonts talked about the importance of being vocal and assertive about homophobia, transphobia, and racism, which he stated is difficult to do, but necessary in order to put an end to discrimination and oppression. He spoke about a particular incident that occurred at a faith-based organization, where someone in a position of power was acting very obviously racist towards him. He prided himself on his ability to speak up and be vocal, but acknowledged that doing so is not easy.

He stated that there is a large proportion of LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto and that a lot of the LGBTQ youth that he knows ended up on the streets after coming out to their families. Fonts described Toronto as an unsafe city for LGBTQ homeless youth, due to widespread homophobia and transphobia, “perverts” exploiting youth, and people in positions of power taking advantage of youth. He also spoke about the different neighbourhoods that queer and trans homeless youth hang out in and stated that young LGBTQ men who are street-involved and homeless tend to hang out in the Church and Wellesley area, but that being problematic because they are vulnerable and there are “predators just waiting to exploit them”, which happens regularly.

At the time of the interview, Fonts lacked a stable living situation and described his living situation as couch surfing. He plans on staying in Toronto and hopes that through his art and
presentations on discrimination against LGBTQ youth in the shelter system, he will be able to help shelter staff become more prepared to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia.

**Landon**

Landon is a 26-year-old Native male, who came across as a friendly, open-minded, and confident person. Landon also came across as easy-going, approachable, and having a very “go with the flow” kind of personality. He presented himself as an emotional person, by laughing at times and crying at other times throughout the interview. Landon spoke about the importance of taking care of youth and feels passionately about making the world a better place for younger generations. He believes that queer and trans youth need older LGBTQ people to look up to, therefore, he tries to be a good role model to younger LGBTQ street-involved youth by “not hiding in the closet” and being out. Landon described a good family life growing up and stated that he did not leave home due to reasons stemming from his sexual identity.

Landon talked at length about community, which he described as, “deeply considering what is in the best interest of youth and looking after youth”. He stated that there is a serious lack of community in Toronto and that people do not care nearly enough about street-involved youth, which is made evident by the lack of support available, and the way that people walk by youth on the street without stopping or acknowledging them. Landon suggested that people in the general public should be less judgmental towards street-involved youth, and that they should stop and smile more often, because you never know how or why someone ended up on the streets or in a shelter.
Landon stated that the shelter system is a bad place for LGBTQ people, due to homophobia and transphobia. He suggested that big groups of boys perpetrate much of the homophobia and transphobia, and that most incidents go unreported, due to social pressures to fit in and appear tough. He also stated that even though these incidents mostly go unreported, staff still know about what is happening, but choose to not intervene. Landon described there being limited support available to LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto and stated that the existing services for homeless youth more broadly, do not provide much support aside from basic necessities, such as subway tokens.

Landon has stayed at every youth shelter in Toronto and found that they were all structured differently and that the workers were also quite different from one shelter to the next. He spoke about shelters being crowded with people and set-up in a way that makes people feel like the workers are constantly monitoring them. For all of the reasons stated above, Landon has chosen to no longer stay at shelters. He described the precarious nature of his current living situation and stated that he moves around a lot and sleeps in different places each night. Landon sees importance in maintaining a positive attitude, even under his current circumstances. For example, he stated:

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Even now I still I consider myself really lucky compared to some of the kids, because they, I don’t want to say because they’re using drugs and they’re slamming [injecting drugs] it up, but I just don’t worry about the same things they’re worried about and I just see that they can often get down about the social things. Some things can get me down and I can get negative, but at the end of the day, I’m going to make it through. If I use meth, I’m still going to be here, but a lot of my friends are slamming in an alleyway. I can’t help but care
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about so many people. It’s hard when I see everybody down there. And it hasn’t gotten to me for a long time, but now it’s starting to sink in a little bit. I really need to start to pull myself back together because I’m really blessed, I don’t really have too many problems.

Mira

Mira is a 29-year-old White female. She came across as a very independent person with a strong personality, and a great sense of style, which added to her strong presence. Mira also came across as an earnest person. She has numerous good friends who are like family to her. Mira is an artist and feels passionately about the power of the arts for activism and anti-oppression work. She also believes that art should be used more for helping youth experiencing homelessness work through some of the difficulties that they deal with. Mira has been living in Toronto on and off for the past 10 years. Her becoming homeless was partially due to her sexual identity. She left home at the age of 18 years old, following coming out to her mother. She described her mother as very homophobic and not being able to deal with her queer identity. She currently has minimal contact with her mother and stated that they get along, as long as Mira’s sexual identity does not come up at all.

Mira described the shelter system as too institutional, and therefore is currently not using it. She stated:

I would way rather sleep outside; obviously it wouldn't be ideal in winter. In fact, I do sleep outside if I'm not going to someone's house that I know and feel comfortable and safe at. I would way rather sleep outside in the city than sleep in a shelter.
Mira stated that she knows of more young queer men who use the shelter system than women, and spoke about them dealing with extreme homophobia in shelters. She believes that support services should provide youth with lots of options and help them figure out why they are there, what they need, and support them in making healthy decisions for themselves, rather than telling them what to do and not giving them many options. She also feels strongly about Toronto needing specialized housing for LGBTQ youth, which she described, as a place that would create safety and support for a large proportion of youth experiencing homelessness and would also allow shelters in other Cities, Provinces, and countries to look to Toronto to inform their shelter services.

Mira feels safer on the streets than in the shelter system, and more connected to street life and her street community. Mira described living on the streets as very dangerous, but safer for her than the shelter system. She recounted her experiences of living on the streets and spoke in depth about issues regarding safety. For example, she stated: “If you're living on the street you're more vulnerable for sure. You're vulnerable to everything; the elements, people, the whole underworld, everything. You have to be really careful and often things will compromise your ability to watch your own back.”

At the time of the interview, Mira was staying with a friend, while she earned money and experience working at a support service for street-involved youth.

**Mouse**

Mouse is a 23-year-old White transwoman, who came across as outgoing, extroverted, and a great conversationalist who likes to share stories. She enjoys playing online video games
and described it as an escape from her daily life. She also likes photography and spoke about wanting to take more photographs. Mouse came across as a very mature and caring person, who is passionate about LGBTQ rights and is willing to do whatever it takes to help make Toronto safer for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.

She stated that her trans identity added to the frustrations that led to her being kicked out of her father’s house, but that her being trans was not the only reason. Following being “kicked out of the house”, Mouse spent numerous years living in the shelter system, and finished both high school and college while she was living in a shelter. During the interview, she recounted her experiences of what it was like to navigate the shelter system as a young transwoman who was at the beginning stages of transitioning. She described a highly transphobic and homophobic system, where shelter workers do very little to help people who are new to the system and are often unapproachable, as well as there being very few rules and policies in place to protect queer and trans youth. She described feeling like her transition was very public and like she was constantly met with disapproval from shelter workers and other residents.

Prior to transition I felt safe just about everywhere because I mean I was fairly quiet, people really left me alone and they knew that if a fight broke out with me involved, it wasn’t a huge issue, I could hold my own. […] Some people didn’t know how to deal with it, some of them had personal issues with it, some of the people were just like, “I can’t handle this.” That kind of made a lot things seem less safe, especially because I knew that just being me was far more likely now to cause a fight than before. I feel like the security of everything fell. Services specifically after transition became very, very tricky because a lot of them
knew me prior to transition. I feel like maybe if I had transitioned and then gone to a drop-
in, I probably would have been more safe, but still not as safe as before.

Mouse stated that the shelter system has the potential to be doing great work, but that there are a lot of issues that need to be fixed first. She described deep systemic issues and rampant transphobia being ingrained into the institutional culture of the shelter system, which has created extreme barriers for trans youth. Mouse spoke about feeling strongly that there is absolutely no excuse for staff acting transphobic or homophobic because this is supposed to be their field and their occupation, and it should be safe to presume that they have been trained in this area, whereas with youth, most of them are coming from abusive and traumatic situations, which somehow explains their anger and discriminatory behaviour, but of course, also does not make it okay. Mouse described ways to improve the current state of the shelter system and stated that as a first step, all shelter staff should receive basic LGBTQ training, including sensitivity training.

At the time of the interview, Mouse had been living in her own apartment for a few months, but was still street-involved. She described her future plans as hoping to be able help educate people about LGBTQ youth homelessness and to find ways to create change in the shelter system, so that other queer and trans youth will not have to experience the same kind of extreme discrimination and transphobia that she did during the 5 years that she was living in the shelter system.
Tomlinson

Tomlinson is a 22-year-old Black male, who spoke about being a very social person with lots of friends. He looked stylish and smelled strongly of cologne. Tomlinson is a great storyteller. At times I had difficulty understanding what he was saying because of his heavy accent, and therefore had to ask for clarification, which did not seem to bother him. He shared lots of stories about his life with me and had a really descriptive and captivating way of describing different situations.

Tomlinson moved to Canada approximately 5 years to live with his father. He spoke about how he tried to hide his sexual identity for many years, to the point that it began making him feel ill. When he was unable to continue hiding his true self, his father found out and threatened to kill him, 3 years ago. The following quote is from his description of when his father discovered that he was gay:

I slept over at my friend’s house and I came home late and my father said, ‘Where are you coming from? You’re sleeping over at a man’s house now?’, and he started calling me names and all this stuff. He asked me if I’m gay, ‘Batty boy get out me house’, and then the man almost cut me up to pieces, so I took my stuff and I left. I disappeared for one year. For one year everybody thought I was dead. […] He wanted to shoot me. He told me that he wanted to kill me. My father is a bad man.

Immediately after Tomlinson was kicked out of the house, he spent a couple of weeks living on the street because he did not know that shelters existed and even when he started using
Tomlinson stated that there is a serious crisis regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness and that he has met numerous youth on the streets and in the shelter system who were forced to leave home after coming out to their families. He described the shelter system as extremely homophobic and violent, and stated that the majority of homophobia is perpetrated by groups of young boys with internalized homophobia. Tomlinson spoke about the issue of youth not reporting incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence and stated that it is important “to be tough and to not be called a wussy”.

He reported having had good experiences with shelter staff and even though he does not think the shelter system is safe, he stated that Toronto is a very safe city for LGBTQ people in comparison to many other cities in the world. He uses LGBTQ programs and described them as very helpful because they give him the opportunity to speak to other LGBTQ people. At the time of the interview, Tomlinson was renting a room in a house with students. He stated that he had been having a hard time finding a job, due to his lack of work experience, and that he was hoping to go to university.

RJ

RJ is a 27-year-old Black male. He came across as a very easygoing and humble person. He also came across as humorous, comfortable, and confident. For example, upon first meeting me in the private interview room, which had couches in it, he immediately took his shoes off, joked around, and jumped onto the couch and lay on his back for most of the interview.
An extremely articulate and intelligent person, RJ has amassed considerable knowledge over the years about the way that the shelter system operates. RJ has been street-involved for the past 10 years, which is as long as he has lived in Toronto. He described his family life as “complicated and tedious” and spoke about only spending the first few years of life with his mother and then being raised by his grandmother. He stated that him becoming homeless was partially due to him being gay and his family situation. He also spoke about parents in the West Indian community becoming more supportive towards LGBTQ issues over time, but that he does not recall that for himself and many other queer and trans youth that he knows, but rather “You’re gay? Goodbye”.

RJ described passing as straight. He never comes out at shelters or support services, because he believes that it is safer not to. RJ has stayed at every youth shelter in Toronto and described the shelter system as a dangerous place, set up to make youth fail, rather than help youth find support and housing. He did, however, state that shelter staff have become more sensitive towards LGBTQ youth over the years, and that a lot of the problems in the shelter system tend to be associated with the ways that admission and discharge are administered.

RJ named a lot of problems facing queer and trans youth today, including, reasonable accommodation, and interactions with older predatory LGBTQ people, who might attempt exploitative relationships with them. RJ stated that 40-60 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ, and that they were kicked out of house after coming out, and therefore, Toronto desperately needs a queer and trans youth shelter.

RJ was one of the only youth who spoke about racism. He described dealing with far more racism than homophobia, because he is not out as gay. When discussing racism, RJ stated:
I’m black; I deal with racism, which is far more important to me than homophobia, because the racism is coming from gay people. It’s rather annoying actually, or disgusting. For everybody who wants to complain about homophobia, first deal with the racism. […] No, not so much [racism in the shelter system] because they have black staff and they know black people and people of color, and can’t really go on that way there.

RJ had recently been kicked out of the house of a friend with whom he had been staying. He described having previously lived in a “decrepit” basement that was in a horrible state and that if the City was called, “the whole place would be condemned, from top to bottom”. At the time of the interview, RJ was unsure where he would live next.

Sarah

Sarah is a 26-year-old Black female, who came across as having a great sense of humour. Sarah joked around a lot and at times it was difficult to tell whether or not she was being sarcastic. Even though she had a wonderful sense of humour and made light of difficult situations, she also came across as tough. She spoke about feeling like shelter workers are often afraid of her because of her tough exterior. Interestingly, she also spoke about shelter workers having a problem with her sense of humour and often telling her to tone down her jokes. Sarah stated that she feels like life is already too serious and having a sense of humour can help lighten people’s moods, especially in a place like the shelter system.

Sarah has a strong desire to help make the shelter system safer for LGBTQ youth. She hopes to one day go to George Brown College and take the Hostels Training Program, so that she could work in the shelter system and help make some much-needed changes.
Sarah did not want to talk about her family life, but she stated that she did not become homeless because of her sexual identity, but if she had come out to her family, she would have definitely become homeless for that reason. She left home at the age of 12 years old for a different issue that she did not want to discuss.

Sarah has stayed at most of the youth shelters in Toronto, and described them as very homophobic and transphobic. She talked about other youth residents calling her homophobic names, and yelling at her, having food thrown at her, and finding water and urine in her bed. She also described some shelter staff as homophobic and stated that they often pretend to not hear or see such incidents and that when she has complained, she has been told to handle the situation herself. She stated:

They talk about ratting and how if you go to the staff you're a rat, that's what the youth call each other. You should just handle it yourself. I don't see it that way, cause I know that on certain occasions if I did handle it myself, I would be incarcerated.

Sarah described shelter staff being judgmental as a barrier to support because it makes them difficult to approach, trust, and open up to. She spoke about the extremely damaging impact that homophobia and transphobia has on people’s lives and how desperately shelter staff need to intervene and stop these incidents from occurring in the first place.

Sarah discussed feeling strongly about LGBTQ people being unable to go to certain neighbourhoods because they will get gay bashed or called names. She described those neighbourhoods as Eglinton West and Lawrence West, and stated that she would never go there.
At the time of the interview, Sarah had just procured housing and was living in her own apartment. She felt very happy about this because she no longer wanted to access the shelter system and stated that she has too much self-pride to ever live on the streets or couch surf.

Tiffany

Tiffany is a 24-year-old White 2-Spirit\textsuperscript{vI} female-identified person, who came across as a calm and easygoing person. She took her time to answer questions and spoke slowly and thoughtfully. She values good friendships and has been fortunate to make numerous good friends, despite the transient nature of her life. Tiffany spoke openly about having expensive taste in accessories, such as wigs, clothes, and makeup. She also spoke about enjoying taking time to do her eyebrows, hair, and makeup; because of the way she feels and the attention that she gets from others.

She spent the first year of her life in foster care, after which she was adopted. She has an older biological brother who was also adopted by the same family. She described her adoptive parents as giving her a good life, but stated that she sacrificed living with them to be comfortable with who she is, which is a choice that a lot of people make. She left home at the age of 14 years old and has been street-involved for the past 10 years. She stated that her gender and sexual identity played a role in her becoming homeless.

Tiffany is currently living in a shelter, which she described as a very difficult place for her to live because of her gender identity. She has found most shelters to be transphobic and stated that shelter workers rarely intervene and usually “turn a blind eye”. Tiffany is a sex worker and often works late into the night, however, there are curfew rules for shelter residents,
which make it especially hard for her. Tiffany stated that when she is not staying at a shelter, she does her best to get off of the street for the night, and will sometimes pay $24 to stay at a bathhouse for 8 hours, sleep behind a building or in a stairwell, or stay up all night if she cannot find a place to sleep. She stated that even though she has been good at finding ways to get off the street for the night, still she does not have a home.

Tiffany spoke about her experiences at each shelter being highly dependent on which staff members were working, opposed to the actual shelter standards or rules. She described feeling safest at either the 519 Church Street Community Centre or the Sherbourne Health Centre because her identity is never an issue at those places. For example, she stated:

There have been times that I've been really sketchy off Meth and half dressed up and I look really bad, like I'm half a girl and half a boy and I've came here [Sherbourne Health Centre] at 8am in the morning and used the computer up here and all the staff here are so friendly. I don't feel out of place here. Cause when you're a guy that dresses up, realistically you can't be who you are 24/7. I live on a time limit, so if I dress up at 11pm, usually by 7/8am my beard is growing in, so you need to get off the street or you need to hide somewhere. So, I've hid out here many times because it's safe.

Tiffany described feeling like there is no point in filing complaints in the shelter system because she does not believe that anything will ever change and youth will never be able to speak to the people who have the power to implement changes. She told me that I should come to youth shelters and speak to the residents about their rights and about the City of Toronto Shelter Standards because very few youth actually know about either. She also described feeling
strongly that Toronto needs a LGBTQ shelter, but that it should be hidden and that the address should not be made public, similar to several other LGBTQ youth programs in Toronto.

**Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this chapter was to bring the youth participants to life and help fix them in the reader’s mind as the memorable people that they are. This chapter was also meant to provide the reader with an opportunity to get to know the youth participants on a more personal level. For it is their unique and important experiences and stories that form the problematic and are at the centre of this work. Hopefully what you have discovered in this chapter is that LGBTQ youth are a diverse group of young people with different backgrounds, and a wide range of interests, from bike riding, to playing video games, to hanging out with friends, to being activists. Hopefully you have also discovered that even though this group of young people may appear to be like any other group of young human beings, unfortunately, they face extreme oppression on a daily basis and they struggle to find a place to sleep at night, simply because of their gender and sexual identities. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the youth stories were based on my interpretations of each young person that participated in this study, which may have been affected by the power dynamics, their ability to connect with me, and whether they viewed me as a service provider, or a researcher from a big institution.

Figure 3 in Appendix M provides a visual summary of the percentages of youth that became homeless or street-involved as a result of their gender or sexual identity.

The next chapter begins to share the findings of this research in great detail. The chapter will share information regarding the culture of the shelter system, the extreme lack of
acknowledgement of LGBTQ youths’ existence in the shelter system, and discusses homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, and LGBTQ youth invisibility. These findings will begin to tell us more about the experiences that LGBTQ youth have in the shelters and the disjunctures that occur for them in the shelter system.
Chapter 6: Homophobia and Transphobia in the Shelter System and LGBTQ Youth Invisibility

“It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite” (Paulo Freire).

In this chapter, I begin to present the major themes that emerged from the youth interviews, Digital Storytelling film project, shelter staff focus groups and shelter management interviews, and interviews with City of Toronto officials. The findings shared throughout this chapter focus on the culture of the shelter system, the everyday experiences that LGBTQ youth have in shelters, and the disjunctures that occur for queer and trans youth in the shelter system. I have been able to move from the standpoint of LGBTQ street-involved youth to a more conceptual problematic that accounts for how institutional relations organize and rule the everyday experiences of this population of youth.

Originally, I had planned to present the youth findings separately from the service provider findings; however, I decided that it was more appropriate to present the findings from both groups together for a number of reasons. Firstly, presenting them separately would create the erroneous impression that the service provider participants had never had experiences of homelessness and that the youth participants had never been in service provider roles. Secondly, certain themes reoccurred consistently throughout all of the interviews and focus groups and those are the core themes or central focus by which the data has been theorized. The findings have been organized in two separate chapters. The major themes and subthemes discussed in this chapter include:
Homophobia and Transphobia in the Shelter System - Normalization of Homophobia and Transphobia, Youth Homophobia and Transphobia: Hegemonic Masculinity, and Staff

Homophobia and Transphobia

LGBTQ Youth Invisibility - Institutional Erasure and Youth Activities Leading to Invisibility: Avoiding Shelters, Passing, and Invisible Homelessness

The chapter that follows focuses on how the disjunctures revealed in this chapter occur. Chapter 7 shares specific information pertaining to the rules, policies, and institutionalized work processes of the shelter system, and how they create and sustain oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth. The major themes and subthemes discussed in Chapter 7 include:

Inadequate, Invasive and Otherwise Problematic Rules - Insufficient Bureaucratic Regulation, Excessive Bureaucratic Regulation, Segregation of Trans Youth as a Problematic Rule, Rules that have not Been Updated for Years, and Insufficient LGBTQ Staff Training.

Lack of Knowledge

Inconsistent Conformity to Formal Rules - Trans Youth Accessing the Shelter System, Staff Training, and Inadequate Complaints Procedure: Lack of Processes to Make it Useful.

Quotes from youth narratives and accounts are used heavily throughout the following two chapters to provide a glimpse into the lives of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, and to recognize their stories and lived experience as knowledge. Quotes are also used to avoid the problem of fragmentation and decontextualization that often occurs from coding and categorizing data, as well as to not lose sense of the “storied character” (Punch, 2009, p. 190) of
this data.

Here then, one by one, is an articulation of the major themes and subthemes:

**Major Themes**

**1. Homophobia and Transphobia in the Shelter System**

It is important to ask ourselves where the homophobia and transphobia that infiltrate the shelter system stems from and what sustains it. Do these discriminatory attitudes and beliefs come from a personal place of discomfort? Or are they a result of people lacking the proper education and training regarding LGBTQ issues and concerns? Or are they due to a lack of well-established policies in the shelter system regarding LGBTQ youth?

Homophobia and transphobia are often a result of cultural, social, and institutional conditioning, however, it is more deeply about ignorance. The institutional culture of the shelter system perpetuates heterosexism and cissexism, which is the presumptive superiority of heterosexual and cisgender people and automatic assumption that everyone is heterosexual and cisgender. Heterosexism and cissexism, which are also considered institutional homophobia and transphobia, pervade the shelter system, resulting in a system of normalized oppression.

**Normalization of Homophobia and Transphobia**

| Almost all LGBTQ people going into shelters have a fear of them, because it isn't a matter of if it’s dangerous, but just how dangerous it will be. It is horrible to live in that fear everyday (Teal, 23 years old, Digital Storytelling project). |

A reoccurring question that I asked myself throughout the data collection process was—
why situations of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system are not considered extraordinary? The situations I was referring to, included but are not limited to the following: everyday verbal assaults in shelters, shelter rules that discriminate against LGBTQ youth, incidents of physical violence, and staff not receiving any basic LGBTQ training. The more people I spoke to and the more I learned about the shelter system, the clearer it became that the answer to this question was that the culture of the shelter system is an overall atmosphere of normalized oppression.

Culture forms our beliefs and values, and shares information that shapes our understanding of what is and what is not acceptable. Sadly, numerous oppressions have been normalized and are considered culturally acceptable. Even with the legalization of same-sex marriage and various global initiatives that promote LGBTQ equality, still homophobia and transphobia are deeply ingrained in our everyday behaviours. When behaviours are normalized, they are difficult to recognize because they blend in. The normalization of oppression in the shelter system makes it difficult for shelter staff to recognize when homophobia and transphobia occurs, leading them to believe that they do not occur, but instead constitute a ploy used by LGBTQ youth as an excuse or way to protect themselves during a fight or argument. Witness, in this regard, the following statement:

I've seen something here where they started an altercation but it wasn't about because he's a gay or he's a something different orientation where they are fighting with each other that was about something else. But this is a way to protect themselves, ‘Oh because I'm gay he's attacking me’. It's not true, no. It's not true in any cases, no (Blue Door Shelter, Staff Member).
Conversely, youth participants described the shelter system as a dangerous place for LGBTQ youth due to widespread discrimination that is rarely dealt with or addressed. Prolific homophobia and transphobia characterized the vast majority of experiences of youth in the shelter system. Jamie Jach, one of many youth who spoke about feeling safer on the streets than in shelters, described living in a park during the coldest months of winter as preferable to the conditions in the shelter system.

I was taking so many sleeping pills so that I would sleep through the night. […] Safer for me to be popping pills and sleeping outside in minus zero degree weather than being in the shelter system [because of] transphobia and homophobia (Jamie Jach, 26 years old).

I would like to now focus specifically on the normalization of transphobia that occurs in the shelter system. Even though the City of Toronto places major emphasis on access to the shelter system, and portrays the shelter system as a safe space for all youth, regardless of their gender and sexual identities, my data indicates otherwise. For example, staff at City of Toronto Shelter Operations spoke openly about the barriers to access experienced by trans people (e.g. not being able to stay in the shelter that they feel aligns with their gender identity, staff not addressing them by their chosen names, etc.). Correspondingly, when interviewed, a City of Toronto staff member and shelter standards workshop facilitator stated that the key focus of the shelter standards is on access and the ability to access the system with as few barriers as possible, which she described as “a human right”. However, the same participant also stated that the City of Toronto cannot guarantee this human right to trans people, she noted:
We cannot guarantee that every single shelter in our system is accessible to transgender persons; however, we do have shelters in every single area that can accommodate. So, it may not be unlimited amount of choice, but there are shelter beds available and with the limited amount of funding that we have available that is the best answer we can come to at this point (City of Toronto, Shelter Standards Workshop Facilitator, K.S).

This quote demonstrates the normalization of trans oppression that occurs in the shelter system. The reference to “shelters in every single area that can accommodate” trans people, as stated in the quote above, refers to the limited amount of private rooms that are available to trans people in several shelters in Toronto. The quote also states that the shelter beds that are currently available to trans people is the best answer that the City of Toronto can come to at this point, however, segregating trans youth in private rooms forces them to out themselves as trans to everyone else in the shelter, resulting in safety concerns (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, in the section on Inadequate, Invasive, and Otherwise Problematic Rules).

Not only is the shelter system not made accessible to trans people, but the attitudes and beliefs that govern the system are based on the assumptions that people’s lived gender identity will match the sex assigned to them at birth (e.g. that someone born female will identify as a woman) and that there are right and wrong ways for females and males to act. The beliefs are so ingrained in the culture and institutional rules of the shelter system, that staff members are often unaware of how they marginalize trans people (further discussed in Chapter 7). What follows is one youth’s description of how trans youth are perceived and treated in the shelter system:

There are a lot of people who are going to see trans men still as women and they’re going to treat them like that and that’s going to be a big barrier in that respect because in our
society that is primarily based on male supremacy. A trans woman may sometimes be seen as stronger, in the eyes of a lot of people. When they [shelter workers] come in and they’re like, ‘a trans guy wants to sleep on the guy floor, oh no, that’s so unsafe’. But when a trans woman wants to go on the women’s floor, suddenly the trans woman is fine, but everyone else is at risk. Trans women are almost seen as the aggressor immediately, whereas the trans men are, ‘this poor thing that we need to protect’ (Mouse, 23 years old).

To avoid the consequences of not fitting in and not conforming to hegemonic heteronormative and cisnormative beliefs, many youth will “conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 42), and engage in passing as heterosexual or cisgender (discussed in greater detail in the next major theme, LGBTQ Youth Invisibility). However, numerous trans youth reported avoiding the shelter system, due to difficulty with passing as cisgender, especially in the early stages of their transition.

Youth Homophobia and Transphobia: Hegemonic Masculinity

The vast majority of homophobic and transphobic incidents were reported to be directed at young queer men by other young male shelter residents. Landon was just one of numerous youth who described the majority of homophobia in the shelter system being perpetrated by big groups of boys:

There’s a lot of homophobia. There are a lot of boys in big groups, you know, when boys are in a big group, it’s very important to look straight. And a lot of gay kids get called ‘faggot’. It’s in a setting where there are a lot of boys, especially young boys, and it’s
really hard (Landon, 26 years old).

How does this gender discrepancy happen? Firstly, there is a higher ratio of homeless males than females, approximately 2:1, in Canada (O’Grady & Gaetz, 2009; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Secondly, culturally normative masculine behaviours, such as misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and aggression are a way that young males try to obtain power and dominance in the shelter system and on the streets. These types of behaviours can be conceptualized as hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; McCormack, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity tends to suggest that which is the opposite of the cultural norm for feminine behaviour.

**Staff Homophobia and Transphobia**

There is no doubt that there are well-intentioned staff in the shelter system, who are not homophobic or transphobic, and who work hard to change the system. However, there are also many staff who are well entrenched in the deeply rooted homophobic and transphobic rules and values of the shelter system. In this section, I will discuss two different types of staff homophobia and transphobia that occur in the shelter system—the first is where the staff themselves do something overtly homophobic or transphobic, and the second is where staff do not stop situations of homophobia and transphobia as they occur.

An example of staff homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system is when staff deny access to LGBTQ youth. This study revealed that LGBTQ youth are denied equal access to the same shelters as heterosexual and cisgender youth and that it has come to be accepted that certain shelters are unsafe for LGBTQ youth. For example, service providers located outside of the city
are often reluctant to admit LGBTQ youth to shelters and send them to Toronto with the false promise that there will be support available, as an attempt to protect their safety. This phenomenon of access denial with the justification that safety is being protected conveys the message that LGBTQ youth cannot be anywhere because something is wrong with them. The following quote by a shelter staff member exemplifies how this takes place:

In Newmarket we had some staff that would suggest to the kids that came out that they should go to Toronto because it's for your own safety because there's more of it [LGBTQ people] and in a small town you're one in a whole shelter (Turning Point, Staff Member).

As discussed earlier, the normalization of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system makes it difficult for shelter staff to even recognize such occurrences. In some cases, staff will acknowledge the presence of homophobia and transphobia in the shelters they work in, as well as in the shelter system more broadly, while others are so unaware that they do not believe that LGBTQ youth even access the shelters they work in. For example, 79% (n=11) of frontline shelter staff participants stated that they did not feel that their colleagues had ever contributed to homophobia in the shelter, 14% (n=2) of frontline shelter staff participants felt that their colleagues had contributed to homophobia in the shelter, and 7% (n=1) of frontline shelter staff participants did not respond to the question. Sixty-five percent (n=9) of frontline shelter staff participants felt that their colleagues had never contributed to transphobia in the shelter, 21% (n=3) of frontline shelter staff participants felt that their colleagues had at some point contributed to transphobia in the shelter, and 14% (n=2) of frontline shelter staff participants did not answer the question. When asked whether frontline shelter staff had ever witnessed homophobia in the shelter that they work at, 79% (n=11) stated that they had, and 21% (n=3) stated that they had
not. Whereas, when asked whether frontline shelter staff had ever witnessed transphobia in the shelter that they work at, 64% (n=9) stated that they had not, and 36% (n=5) stated that they had. It is important to note that although I did clarify the meaning of terms such as, ‘homophobia’ and ‘transphobia’, a large proportion of staff did not know what these words meant, therefore, their responses were most likely affected by this barrier.

Homophobia and transphobia of course originate in the dominant culture and not only translate into the things that people say and do, but also in the absence of words and actions. When situations of homophobia and transphobia enter the shelter system and are not stopped by staff, they continue to be normalized. For example, while one staff member spoke about the word ‘faggot’ being used regularly by youth shelter residents, another staff member responded by stating that homophobic slurs are a normalized aspect of youth culture that cannot be changed by staff:

Whatever language they [youth] use that's their own personal thing and you can't take that away from them. That is their culture (Blue Door Shelter, Staff Member).

This study also revealed that shelter staff do not prioritize intervening in incidents of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. For example, one shelter staff member stated:

There are many instances in the shelters and in a lot of the places that I've worked, that what happens a lot of the times is that staff will turn a blind eye to it or not address it or just not put their foot down about it and I think that that's where a lot of the gaps in the systems lie. Or just burned out staff who may not necessarily be doing rounds. Like there was an incident at one of the youth shelters with one of our clients who was beaten up
[because he was gay] in the shower there and it was a pretty brutal beating and staff didn't know about it (Turning Point, Staff Member).

Shelter staff members in focus groups alluded to walking away and ignoring homophobic and transphobic occurrences because they are overworked and stressed out. This suggests recognition, however, as soon as their colleagues in the same focus group denied such happenings, participants would either change their stories or not offer any additional information. This confirms that people want to fit in and are terrified of differing from the norm, because in this situation, it may cost staff members their jobs if they were to openly admit such occurrences.

2. LGBTQ Youth Invisibility

“Groups of people can be made invisible in both the spatial sense (“visibly” homeless people excluded from using public space) and in the policy sense (“hidden” homelessness not counted in statistics)” (Whitzman, 2010, p. 2).

There are numerous methods by which LGBTQ youth are erased and made invisible in the shelter system. The first subtheme in this section, Institutional Erasure, focuses on the institutional processes and policies that do not account for LGBTQ residents and as a result erase them from existence. The second subtheme, Youth Activities Leading to Invisibility: Avoiding Shelters, Passing, and Invisible Homelessness, looks at the different activities that LGBTQ youth engage in, as a response to the institutional policies and culture of the shelter system, subsequently leading to further invisibility.
Institutional Erasure

“Erasure is the most significant social relation in which transsexuals and transgender people are situated” (Namaste, 2000, p. 264).

Namaste (2000) describes institutional erasure as the “conceptual and institutional relations through which transsexual and transgendered individuals disappear from view” (p. 137). She argues that the erasure of trans people occurs in several different ways, such as when services do not allow trans people to identify themselves on key forms and only provide the option for people to identify as male or female. Similar to Namaste’s (2000) conceptualization of the erasure of trans people, institutions like the shelter system effectively erase LGBTQ bodies through their exclusion from forms, programs, reports, and statistics. Key institutional texts play a major role in rendering people invisible and erasing their identities. This study revealed a fundamental lack of acknowledgment of LGBTQ youths’ existence in the shelter system.

In institutional ethnography, texts are seen as sites of power, coordinating activities, and playing an important role in social relations (Campbell & Gregor, 2008; Smith, 2006). The following passage conveys how essential texts are in people’s everyday lives:

People routinely conduct their work through texts, forms, and reports. This is particularly true for occupations in the human services where people are processed. Texts are likely to be important and taken for-granted-instruments for the work. […] texts being activated by the people who handle and use them. The notion of activation expresses the human involvement in the capacity of texts to coordinate action and get things done in specific ways (Campbell & Gregor, 2008, p. 33).
Erasure begins when youth first enter the shelter and undergo a formal intake process, where they are asked a series of standard questions. These questions help determine if youth belong in the shelter and if they do, then which side of the shelter they will be placed (male vs. female)—already an erasure. Additionally, during the intake process shelters are not obligated to collect data on people’s LGBTQ identities, making it very difficult to calculate the prevalence of queer and trans youth homelessness and to therefore, determine the need for specialized services. Contrary to the intake process policy, several youth participants spoke about their desire for staff to acknowledge their trans identities during the intake and discharge processes. One of the youth interviewed, spoke at length about how he attempted to come out as trans during the intake procedure at a shelter:

The intake was so shitty in terms of trans stuff. There’s just no room for trans or even LGBTQ stuff on their intake. I tried to incorporate it in, cause they are like, ‘do you need tokens to go to your appointments?’ and I’m like ‘yes! I’m going to this trans program Monday, this trans program Tuesday, this one at Sherbourne, this one at 519’, and they just kind of ignored that (Jamie Jach, 26 years old).

Namaste (2000) describes how institutions erase trans people and render them both invisible and impossible. She argues that the use of “men” and “women” dismisses the possibility that trans people could even exist. As described earlier in the chapter, heterosexist and gendernormative beliefs—such as the assumption that all people born female will identify as women, and that all people born male will identify as men—rule the shelter system. All youth shelters in Toronto are segregated by birth sex, either male or female only shelters, or male and female floors; this enforcement of gender conformity was another form of institutional erasure.
reported by participants. One participant spoke directly about how shelters erase trans people from existence in the system:

The fact that there are only men’s and women’s shelters, the fact that youth shelters have boys and girls dorms, and they have boys and girls bathrooms. Then anytime a trans person shows up it’s an anomaly, it’s like ‘whoa, what do we do with you? There are an enormous number of trans people in Toronto and there’s a long history of trans people using social services and yet it’s still an anomaly every time. Hopefully that will start to be different if the city keeps track of trans residents. There should be more than one box, they should be keeping track of MTF and FTM, but they’re not. That’s the type of thing we can say, ‘ah ha, there’s some kind of need’. Otherwise trans people are completely absent. People who don’t exist, don’t need access to services, you know, there’s no case to be made (Trans Access Project Coordinator, J. P).

The expectation that youth will fit into the gender binary makes the shelter system an especially difficult place for trans and gender non-conforming individuals. The gender surveillance that occurs in the shelter system, as reported by youth and staff, perpetuates the erasure of trans people, making it even easier to ignore the existence of transphobia. This work presents an interesting juxtaposition between surveillance and erasure. On the one hand, constant gender surveillance occurs in the shelter system creating a distinct “us and them” division. On the other hand, LGBTQ bodies are often not accounted for and in many instances, erased from the system altogether.
Youth Activities Leading to Invisibility: Avoiding Shelters, Passing, and Invisible Homelessness

Queer and trans youth often avoid shelters due to the institutional processes, policies, and expectations, creating a situation where shelter staff and management, and the City of Toronto shelter operations believe that LGBTQ youth homelessness is not an issue and does not exist in Toronto. For example, one youth noted:

It was a women’s shelter and I didn’t feel comfortable there because I didn’t identify as female. I stayed one night and then I just stuck with friends (Kelly, 27 years old).

Queer and trans youth also avoid shelters due to discriminatory policies and invasive rules that do not meet their needs, and not knowing exactly how unsafe a shelter is going to be or how badly they will be penalized for their LGBTQ identities. When LGBTQ youth do not access the shelter system or support services, but rather sleep on the streets, behind buildings, or couch surf, they become an invisible or hidden group of homeless people and it becomes much harder to measure the prevalence of queer and trans youth homelessness. This is partially why there is such a lack of awareness regarding the epidemic of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto.

A large proportion of the youth interviewed reported that when they do access shelters and support services, they tend to hide their identities and not come out as LGBTQ. The choice to keep one’s LGBTQ identity invisible and not come out is mainly in order to feel safe and fit in, and as a way of responding to the stigma associated with queer and trans people. The decision to not come out can be understood as a survival strategy. As highlighted earlier in the chapter, youth also engage in passing as straight and/or cisgender in order to feel safe in the shelter system and as a way to try to obtain the privilege afforded to those who conform to
heteronormative and cisnormative rules. Even though choosing to pass as heterosexual and/or cisgender is a very personal and political matter, there are implications when youth are forced to do so in order to get support from the very systems that are meant to help all youth. The following quote illustrates how one young person navigated the shelter system and support services by not coming out:

I wouldn’t come out as anything there [support service for homeless youth]. I don’t hang out there, I go there, get my shit and leave. It’s 10 minutes. Other people they hang out there for an hour, two hours. I just come and go (Kelly, 27 years old).

Unfortunately, this further perpetuates the notion that LGBTQ youth homelessness is not an issue in Toronto and that homophobia and transphobia are not problems in the shelter system. When LGBTQ youth avoid the shelter system, not only do they become invisible, but also shelter staff become even less aware of their existence and needs, and therefore do not recognize their inability to provide support or their need for training in this area (Namaste, 2000).

There is a cyclical nature to these relations described that result in institutional erasure and invisibility. Firstly, staff are not being trained on LGBTQ issues and often do not feel prepared to intervene in situations of homophobia and transphobia (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7). Secondly, the lack of staff training perpetuates the dangers towards queer and trans youth in the shelter system because not only do staff not intervene in situations of homophobia and transphobia, but youths’ needs more generally are not met. As a result, LGBTQ youth avoid the shelter system, and staff end up knowing even less about how to meet their needs and how to interact with them.
Figure 4 maps the cyclical nature of the relations described above.

Figure 4 Cyclical nature of the relations

Another factor reinforcing the invisibility and erasure of LGBTQ youth within the shelter system is that the majority of youth did not consider themselves homeless, even if their primary place of residence was a shelter or couch surfing. For example, one youth who had been living in shelters on and off for the past six years and was currently spending most nights in a shelter and some nights “sleeping in a stairwell” or staying awake all night, if she missed shelter curfew, corrected me when I referred to her as homeless and stated “I’m not homeless, I’m street-involved”. On the one hand, this stems from pride and shame. On the other hand, it is a way of responding to the ongoing oppressions faced by many youth. The executive director of one youth shelter spoke about this phenomenon as follows:
A lot of these youth will spend months couch surfing before they really consider themselves homeless. You'll ask a lot of them, they don't really have a home, they've been couch surfing for months, but they don't even consider themselves homeless at that point (Youth Haven Shelter, Executive Director).

**Stories by Youth that Represent the Principles Above**

The problems highlighted throughout this chapter were described by all of the young people interviewed, however, I have selected two participants to illustrate how the problems described in this chapter take place for youth. The extended narratives share the stories of two white trans youth. I would like to point out that I understand that it may be seen as problematic that I have chosen to share the stories of two people with similar identities. My rationale for choosing these two particular participants is because these two young people spent the longest time with me during their interviews and were open, expressive, and communicative. I believe this happened because of their personalities, and because both of them had participated in research interviews in the past, but also because they may have connected with me and felt more comfortable with me based on the parts of my identity that were visible to them. It is also possible that these two young people were provided with certain opportunities due to their white privilege, which presented them with tools that allowed them to articulate themselves on a deeper level.

Additionally, it is important to note that although both of the young people highlighted in the extended narratives identify as trans, Jamie Jach identifies as gay and Mouse identifies as pansexual. Identities are complex and while some youth may identify as trans, they may also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual. Even though the extended narratives are mainly
focused on issues regarding transphobia, people have intersecting identities and deal with multiple oppressions.

The following two stories are meant to provide examples so that the reader can better understand how the problems discussed throughout this chapter occur for youth. I have selected these two particular narratives because I wanted to clearly illustrate precisely how the problems discussed throughout the chapter occur for youth and because these two participants spent the longest time with me during their interviews and were extremely articulate, I have been able to do so.

Jamie Jach

Jamie Jach was homeless during the coldest months of winter. He had just started transitioning from female to male and was terrified of the prospect of sleeping in a shelter. As a transman who looked genderqueer and did not necessarily fit into a fixed gender category, he did not know which shelter would be safe and accessible for him. On one unbearably cold night, after not sleeping for four nights, Jamie Jach was in crisis and in desperate need of a warm bed. He decided to check into a shelter late that night. Unfortunately, the shelter was full, so he was sent to Covenant House in a cab. When Jamie Jach arrived at Covenant House he went through a formal intake procedure, which he described as an awful experience because his trans identity was not only ignored, but also erased. The shelter worker accused him of lying about his name when she noticed that the name he provided did not match the name on his ID. Jamie Jach tried to come out as trans during the intake procedure, but the shelter worker did not understand what trans meant.
During his time at the shelter, he did not meet any shelter workers that he felt were able to understand his identity, nor did he find any LGBTQ posters or resources in the shelter. This left him feeling isolated and invisible. He also felt that the Christian crosses on the walls of the shelter were a constant reminder that the shelter was a Catholic organization, as well as sent out a clear message regarding the shelter’s values and beliefs. After this experience, Jamie Jach never returned to that shelter or any other shelter, instead he spent the next 6 months living in a park. During the day, he would try to keep warm in different libraries and search online for LGBTQ positive shelters in Toronto, which he never found.

Mouse

Similar to Jamie Jach, Mouse was at the beginning of her transition when she became homeless. She migrated to Toronto, as many queer and trans youth do, hoping to find specialized LGBTQ services for people experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, Mouse was unpleasantly surprised when she arrived in Toronto because she was met with hostility and discrimination in the shelter system. She described situations in which her trans identity was continuously erased. Shelter workers told her that she was not allowed to wear female clothing, including V-neck shirts, and that she had to wear “gender appropriate clothing”.

Each time Mouse would put a positive space sticker on her door at the shelter, residents would slash them. Youth residents were transphobic and violent towards her, however, staff rarely intervened or provided her with support. Instead, she was sent to an all male shelter and was forced to “de-transition”. Mouse’s transition was once again put on hold, which made her feel invisible, hopeless, and docile. During this time, she was unaware of the City of Toronto’s complaints process. Mouse was told that complaints had to be lodged internally, by filling out a
form, describing the nature of your complaint, and then submitting it to a staff member. Therefore, Mouse’s daily experiences of transphobia in the shelter system were unreported.

Throughout the 5 years that Mouse spent in the shelter system, she familiarized herself with the shelter standards and discovered that staff do not follow or understand the rules and policies. Mouse also discovered that shelter staff treated her in ways that were a violation of the rules and policies.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has shared findings on the culture of the shelter system, the everyday experiences of LGBTQ youth in shelters, and the disjunctions that occur for queer and trans youth in the shelter system. I have demonstrated that the systemic enactment of homophobia, transphobia, and hegemonic masculinity are rampant and normalized in shelters, and create extreme barriers to safe, accessible, and supportive services for LGBTQ youth.

The normalization of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system have made it difficult for shelter staff and management to recognize and acknowledge such occurrences, leading them to believe that they do not actually occur. For example, staff view homophobic and transphobic slurs as a rigid part of youth culture, rather than something that they can influence change in.

This chapter has also revealed that it has come to be accepted that the shelter system is predominantly unsafe and inaccessible to LGBTQ youth, even though the City of Toronto places emphasis on access to shelters as a main priority. Additionally, shelters located outside of Toronto do not always admit queer and trans youth as a way of supposedly protecting their
safety, and often advise them to find their way to Toronto, where they are once again met with
difficulty finding support. This has resulted in a situation where queer and trans youth end up
avoiding the shelter system altogether, which has led to a fundamental lack of acknowledgment
of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto and their erasure as a population in the shelter
system.

This chapter has likewise shown how key institutional texts erase queer and trans youths’
identities and renders them invisible. If people are not included in key institutional forms, then
they are not seen to exist, and if they do not exist then there is no need to create specialized
services for them. Moreover, this chapter revealed that there is a cyclical nature to these relations
because when LGBTQ youth avoid the shelter system, not only do they become invisible, but
also shelter staff become even less aware of their existence and needs, and therefore do not
recognize their inability to provide support or their need for training in this area.

The next chapter will examine how these disjunctures come about, as well as how
broader policy issues serve to create oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth, and what is holding
up and sustaining the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system.
Chapter 7: Specific Rules and Policies in the Shelter System that Create Disjunctures and Sustain Homophobia and Transphobia

“The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it” (Paulo Freire).

Chapter 6 revealed what disjunctures exist between shelter rules, policies, and procedures, and how shelter staff and management perceive these rules and policies, and the everyday experiences of LGBTQ youth in the shelter system. Chapter 6 described the shelter system as a dangerous place for LGBTQ youth due to widespread homophobia and transphobia, and that it is a system that denies their existence and renders them invisible.

This chapter presents findings that explain and illustrate how specific rules and policies in the shelter system create the disjunctures that were revealed in Chapter 6. This chapter also shares findings that illuminate what is holding up and sustaining the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, as well as how broader policy issues serve to create oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth.

Figure 5 provides an iceberg model, which illustrates the process described above. Chapter 6 is the tip of the iceberg, which are the events and patterns, and can also be understood as what is happening in the shelter system. This chapter focuses on the center of the iceberg -- the systemic structure and organization of the shelter system, which explains why and how the events and patterns at the tip occur (the issues revealed in Chapter 6). The bottom of the iceberg
reveals the *intervention*, or how we can change the *events* and *patterns* at the tip of the iceberg, which is described in Chapter 9.

In order to understand the ways that the rules and policies create oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth, and in order for this research to actually change certain aspects of the shelter system, as it is intended to, it is important to first grasp how those aspects work or occur (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). Therefore, I will begin by providing a brief overview of how the shelter system is structured and how it functions.

![Figure 5 - Iceberg Model of How the Shelter System Oppresses LGBTQ Youth](image)

Figure 5 - Iceberg Model of How the Shelter System Oppresses LGBTQ Youth
Preliminary Overview

The City of Toronto both operates and funds shelters, however, there are no city-operated youth shelters, only city-funded. The City of Toronto has much more control and ongoing supervision over city-operated shelters because those shelters are completely funded by the City, are located in City of Toronto buildings, and are run by City staff. City-funded shelters operate on a per diem model, meaning that the shelter receives funding for each bed that is filled per night. This type of funding model suggests that it is in the best interest of city-funded shelter providers to have their beds full each night, if they wish to receive funding. However, shelters are already operating at full capacity, considering that there are 529 shelter beds designated for youth and approximately 2,000-6,000 homeless youth on any given night in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2012; Ottaway et al., 2009). Therefore, shelter providers may not be as willing or eager to implement changes to make shelters more accessible to LGBTQ youth because there simply is not enough room for more residents.

“The shelter will provide an atmosphere of dignity and respect for all shelter residents, and provide services in a non-judgmental manner” (Toronto Shelter Standards, 2002, p. 7).

The shelter system’s funding model is quite complex. For example, if the City funds 10 beds in a 20-bed shelter, they can only oversee the 10 beds that they fund and the other 10 beds would have to be supervised by whoever funds them. City-funded shelters have a contract with the City and must comply with City of Toronto Shelter Standards and the Human Rights Code. The City of Toronto has a right to oversee city-funded shelters, but not a right to manage them and their staff, therefore, they often do not know exactly what types of incidents occur at these
shelters until they receive a complaint, which is why the shelter system is described as a “complaint-driven” system (City of Toronto, Shelter Standards Workshop Facilitator, K.S). The complaints process is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter in the section entitled: Inconsistent Conformity to Formal Rules.

The shelter system’s formal rules are outlined in the City of Toronto Shelter Standards document. The standards were created in 1996 after three shelter residents died and the inquest into their deaths concluded that these deaths could have been prevented and therefore, several key areas in the system needed to be updated, improved, and monitored (Toronto Hostels Training Centre, 2013). The Shelter Standards are meant to provide shelter managers, workers, and residents with an understanding of the expectations and guidelines that the City of Toronto has for shelters. Both city-operated and city-funded shelters are obligated to adhere to the Shelter Standards.

The major themes discussed in this chapter provide a deeper understanding of how certain aspects of the shelter system operate and how specific rules and policies perpetuate and sustain homophobia and transphobia within the system, beginning with the first theme entitled: Inadequate, Invasive, and Otherwise Problematic Rules.

**Major Themes**

1) **Inadequate, Invasive, and Otherwise Problematic Rules**

**Insufficient Bureaucratic Regulation**

Shelter workers’ activities and behaviours are largely organized through key institutional texts, policies, and rules. Interestingly, it is both the excessive bureaucratic regulation and the
lack of necessary bureaucratic regulation in highly significant areas, that play a key role in creating the disjunctures that occur for queer and trans youth in the shelter system. What follows is an example of insufficient regulation.

Shelter staff are required to complete incident reports each time there is a violent incident in a shelter, but they are not required to document the entire incident, only as much as they consider is needed. The executive director then reviews all incident reports and may follow up with the residents, depending on the circumstance. All incidents are categorized on a monthly basis; however, incidents may not get categorized as homophobia or transphobia, unless the person documenting the incident uses terminology that specifically indicates such. As discussed in the previous chapter, some staff members believe that youth use terms such as “homophobia” and “transphobia” as a way to protect themselves; therefore, staff members who hold those beliefs are highly unlikely to categorize any incidents as “homophobic” or “transphobic”. This situation would benefit from additional bureaucratic regulation to ensure that all violent incidents are being documented in full detail and categorized with the proper terminology, so that occurrences of homophobia and transphobia are not missed.

**Excessive Bureaucratic Regulation**

The City of Toronto creates and allocates the rules and policies they believe are most helpful and necessary; the executive directors of shelters assign additional rules and guidelines to shelter workers, and monitor their work in whichever ways are manageable for them; and the shelter workers follow the rules and policies which they remember and work in ways they deem appropriate; on the other hand, residents often do not find those rules and policies helpful, but rather discriminatory and invasive. The social structure of the shelter system separates
management from frontline workers, and management from shelter residents, making it incredibly difficult to efficiently monitor and manage the disjunctures that occur. The following quote portrays how one youth spoke about the social structure of the shelter system.

It’s transphobic, it’s homophobic, and it seems to just become so systematic. We need a building for people to stay in, that’s fine. Now we need all these rules, we need all these locked doors, now we need all these alarms; we need this kind of worker, that kind of worker, paperwork. It’s just a system, you know? (Jamie Jach, 26 years old).

The quote alludes to the ways in which the shelter system has become extremely structured and how that has created deep systematic issues and barriers for LGBTQ youth.

**Segregation of Trans Youth as a Problematic Rule**

In an attempt to make the shelter system safer and more accessible to trans youth, the City of Toronto implemented a rule that allocates 1-2 private rooms to trans youth in shelters. However, this rule is not a shelter standard and therefore there is no way of knowing which shelters follow this rule and how often they do. Segregating trans youth in shelters is highly problematic because it forces youth to out themselves as trans, even if they are not ready to do so, and it also may force them to be boxed into gender categories that they do not necessarily want to be placed in, which can potentially take agency away from them. This type of segregation of trans people once again contributes to the erasure of LGBTQ bodies in the shelter system, as discussed in Chapter 6.
Rules that have not Been Updated for Years

“The text comes before us without any apparent attachments. It seems to stand on its own, to be inert, without impetus or power” (Smith, 1990, p. 122).

Many of the institutional texts that organize the work of those in the shelter system came before the people who work in shelters and are often not questioned. The power of key institutional texts is often silent and unnoticed, it is a system that we tend to enter into and follow, with little input (Smith, 1990). Some shelters have old rules that have not been updated for years. For example, one of the shelters at which I conducted a focus group still had their original policies in place, which dated back to 1987. The shelter was initially created as a faith-based shelter and therefore, the rules were extremely homophobic, which were left unchallenged until the time of the focus group that I facilitated. One staff member noted:

It was actually in the procedures manual [...] it said that we weren't allowed to admit anybody [LGBTQ], but we could help them find the proper classes to help them. When I first started, no one seemed to know where that came from, like it was just in our policies and procedures manual, but the staff didn't agree with it either. It was just kind of there and no one seemed to know and then we just kind of took it out (Youth Haven, Staff Member).

If a shelter has anti-homophobic and/or anti-transphobic rules in place, then the rules will coordinate anti-homophobic and anti-transphobic actions amongst the people working and living in the shelter. Most importantly, if a shelter adheres to a value system that believes it is wrong to be LGBTQ, then the shelter cannot be a truly queer and trans positive space. As Dorothy Smith
has stated, texts coordinate people’s actions (Campbell & Gregor, 2008; Smith, 1990), therefore, it is important for the texts that coordinate people’s work to be updated and changed accordingly.

**Insufficient LGBTQ Staff Training**

The Toronto Hostels Training Centre (THTC), run by the City of Toronto, provides all mandatory training workshops, as well as additional and recommended training, to shelter staff. At the time of data collection, THTC did not offer any anti-homophobia, LGBTQ cultural competency, or LGBTQ terminology training. The closest training to this was Transgender/Transsexual Awareness Training 101, which I observed as part of this study. This training is offered by the 519 Church Street Community Centre and is not considered a mandatory workshop, but rather “recommended”. The closest mandatory training is the Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression (ARAO) workshop, which I also observed as part of this study. However, the ARAO training is not LGBTQ related, and there were mixed responses regarding whether or not shelter staff felt that the ARAO workshop had prepared them for their jobs. For example, 43% (n=6) of frontline shelter staff stated that it had somewhat prepared them for their jobs, 36% (n=5) stated that yes it had prepared them for their jobs, 14% (n=2) stated that no it had not prepared them for their jobs, and 7% (n=1) did not answer the question.

THTC did offer anti-homophobia training in 2001-2002; but the training was never made mandatory and the workshop was discontinued due to low registration. In recent years, shelter workers have made ongoing requests both verbally and on workshop evaluation forms for anti-homophobia training. After I had collected my data for this study, an introductory level homophobia and heterosexism workshop was reintroduced by THTC in May 2012. However, the reason for this change was not revealed. Unfortunately, this training was never made
mandatory for shelter staff and has since been discontinued because only two people signed up for the workshop. If training is not made mandatory with a strict timeline, then staff who are homophobic and/or transphobic will not voluntarily take an anti-homophobia or anti-transphobia workshop, or pay out of pocket, which is what they are required to do.

When asked why the City of Toronto does not make anti-homophobia training mandatory for all people working in the shelter system, a City of Toronto staff member stated:

The more you make mandatory, the harder it is on the shelters to actually be able to afford to do the training. We made what we felt was the most important things mandatory. Without having a strong case that there's a real lack in an area, it's hard for us as a funder to say 'you know what, this is your bundle of funding, it's very finite and who knows in the future days it might actually be shrinking, but right now we know it's very finite and out of this we're going to put extra onus on you to do increased training of staff beyond what you've always had to do'. Honestly, as funders, there is so much mandatory that we do make the shelters do and that we do put into the standards, that it's very hard to make the case to put another financial burden on someone to come up to a standard that we at this point cannot identify that they aren’t already doing. How much can you make mandatory when there are costs involved in mandatory training? (City of Toronto, Shelter Standards Workshop Facilitator, K.S).

In this way, providing mandatory anti-homophobia training becomes categorized as an unnecessary financial burden. The following list of mandatory training workshops for shelter staff in city-funded shelters are an example of what the City of Toronto has deemed as the “most important things” for shelter staff and management to learn about:
• Shelter Standards
• Crisis Prevention
• First Aid and CPR
• Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)
• Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression
• Case Management

None of the shelter staff and management that participated in this study had received any formal anti-homophobia training. However, numerous shelter staff participants had taken the ARAO workshop and/or the Transgender/Transsexual Awareness Training 101 at THTC as far back as 10 years ago. For example, one staff member reported that he had been working in the shelter system for 10 years and had only taken one ARAO workshop during his first year of employment and had never had any follow-up training.

The City of Toronto relies on an “evidence-based” process when deciding which training workshops should be made mandatory and which should not. The City of Toronto defines “evidence” as something that can be measured and quantified. Evidence, in this case, is restricted to whether or not people are avoiding the shelter system due to the lack of anti-homophobia training. According to a City of Toronto staff member and facilitator of the Shelter Standards workshop, in the following quote, the City of Toronto has not received sufficient “evidence” to support the need for mandatory anti-homophobia training for shelter staff.

If you could find evidence that there is a population that will not enter the shelter system because of the fear, then it doesn't become like, we don't care if you meet the standard. It
becomes like, we can identify that there is a level of the population that we are not serving in the shelter because we do not have this. If we can demonstrate that there is more entry into the system by a population because of this, than what has been because of a level of perfection, then it can become a standard, because we can identify, we can give a measurable result to having that standard out there (City of Toronto, Shelter Standards Workshop Facilitator, K.S).

Relying on evidence that can be measured and quantified in order to make significant changes to the shelter system is problematic because not all problems can be quantified, especially if they are not being reported or tracked. For example, youth may not admit or necessarily even know that they are avoiding the shelter system due to the lack of anti-homophobia training received by staff. Furthermore, staff members that are homophobic will definitely not recognize that they need anti-homophobia training or that youth are avoiding the shelter system due to the lack of anti-homophobia training received by staff.

2) Lack of Knowledge

Shelter workers and managers frequently show a glaring lack of knowledge and express ignorance with regards to LGBTQ people, such as, asking for clarification of terms that are important for all shelter workers to know (Namaste, 2000). The City of Toronto agrees that language is important, for example, the Shelter Standards workshop facilitator, who also works at the City of Toronto Shelter Operations, stated: “Language matters and we fully train staff on this.” On the contrary, there are no workshops offered on LGBTQ terminology at the THTC.
Numerous frontline shelter staff asked for clarification of terms, such as, lesbian, transgender, homophobia, and transphobia, etc. What follows are two examples of shelter staff asking for clarification of terms that all staff should presumably know:

If we call somebody, he or she, a lesbian, is it an insult? Because I heard that some of them don't like that (Blue Door Shelters, Staff Member).

I'd like to learn the transgender from bisexual from just plain gay, plain lesbian, just the terminology and what each one is and how each person would identify (Blue Door Shelters, Staff Member).

Shelter staff also display a significant lack of knowledge regarding queer and trans youth by making erroneous presumptions about youths’ LGBTQ identities and by assuming that they will somehow be able to determine youths’ gender and sexual identities just by looking at them. What follows is an example of how one staff member spoke about the prevalence of LGBTQ youth in the shelter they work at:

It's \textit{LGBTQ youth} not something we get a lot. But when we do...well, I think it depends on the person too and how they are. We don't get it \textit{LGBTQ youth} a lot (Youth Haven, Staff Member).

Making ignorant assumptions about youths’ gender and sexual identities is highly problematic because it once again normalizes oppression and perpetuates homophobia and transphobia. The following passage is an example of how one staff member ignorantly dealt with a youth residents’ homophobic remarks:
There was this issue where we had a new client and somebody looked through the window and said ‘Oh look, this new client looks like he's gay’ so it spread like a fire. We had one client say ‘Oh he's gay. I don't want him to be here. I don't want him to be in my room’ and we as staff tried to level with him. We tried to make him understand that he's probably not gay, just because somebody said that he is, doesn't mean that he actually is (Blue Door, Staff Member).

This lack of fundamental knowledge regarding LGBTQ people also manifests itself by staff participating in gossip about LGBTQ residents, and of course sensationalizing residents’ gender and sexual identities. LGBTQ people, especially trans people, continue to be othered and seen as “freak shows”. The quotation above illustrates how shelter residents often feel the need to announce and warn others if they suspect a resident may be queer or trans. In addition to this, shelter staff members also feel the need to announce and gossip about peoples’ LGBTQ identities. What follows is an excerpt from a segment in a shelter staff focus group when I was asking for clarification about what the ‘all male’ policy of the shelter meant:

*Interviewer*: What if it was a trans man? Somebody who was born female but is male identified, could they stay here?

*Participant 1*: I don't think we've ever had that.

*Participant 2*: Yes we have.

*Participant 1*: So if they're female, but dressed as a man, they can come in?

*Participant 2*: Yes. We've had two, in the past six months.
Participant 1: Really? Who? Oh, we'll talk later.

As mentioned earlier, the City of Toronto’s Shelter Standards indicates that gender identity is self-defined by shelter residents. The ‘Resident Rights and Responsibilities’ section loosely states that residents should be: free from discrimination and harassment, and treated in a non-judgmental and respectful way. The section that discusses confidentiality, states that:

Each shelter must have a written policy concerning the collection, use and disclosure of resident information. Written policies concerning confidentiality should include the following: *Shelters must not disclose personal information about a shelter resident without a signed consent form from the resident* (Toronto Shelter Standards, 2002, p. 19).

The example provided above demonstrates a breach in the confidentiality policy, which brings me to discuss the next major theme regarding shelter staff and managements’ inconsistent conformity to formal rules.

3) Inconsistent Conformity to Formal Rules

The Shelter Standards outline the rules and policies that all shelters and shelter workers must adhere to. Shelters also implement their own rules. For example, every city-operated and city-funded shelter must display a poster in the entrance area that lists resident rights and responsibilities.

The failure of shelter staff to follow the desirable rules can be explained by overwork, by other rules, by a lack of communication and understanding of the rules, and by their own personal beliefs and values. For example, if a staff member believes that homophobic and
transphobic language are part of youth culture or if they do not understand such terminology, they will be less likely to follow rules that enforce consequences around the use of homophobic and transphobic language. Therefore, the experiences that LGBTQ youth have in the shelter system on any given day are largely dependent on which staff members are working and whether or not they choose to follow the shelter rules and standards. One youth spoke directly about this issue, she stated:

It depends on the organization and what their style is and what their philosophy is and if the people working for them are trained to deal with it. I know some places, if they have a religious background, they just can't deal with the queer stuff. So they just don't feel qualified to deal with it because it's so out of their frame of reference. They don't even know anything about it and they're really uncomfortable with it (Mira, 29 years old).

The major discrepancies that exist between the rules and policies that have been created by the City of Toronto and what is actually done in shelters, can also be explained by staff and management alternating between following and not following the rules and policies. The following three subthemes provide examples of specific areas wherein rules and policies are inconsistently conformed to, beginning with access to the shelter system for trans youth.

Trans Youth Accessing the Shelter System

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 6, the City of Toronto shelter standards states that all shelters must be made accessible to transgender, transsexual, and two-spirited residents in their self-defined gender and that shelters must support the choices of trans people to gain access to services in their self-defined gender; unfortunately, this is not always the case. Trans and gender
non-conforming youth are often denied access to shelters based on their gender identity. Regardless of the shelter standards and policies, shelter workers struggle most with issues around access to services for trans people. What follows is one young trans woman’s account of what it was like for her to navigate the shelter system:

They specifically use your ID to place you on a gendered floor, whatever your ID says, regardless of how far you are in your transition. Imagine being a trans woman with bottom surgery and all, placed on the male floor. This is also against the Toronto Hostel Standards. When I got there, they refused my name, forced me to wear gendered clothing and fought with me every step of the way as I tried to fix these problems (Teal, 23 years old, Digital Storytelling project).

The disconnect between the City of Toronto’s shelter rules and policies and what is actually done in shelters was precisely exemplified in one of the focus groups that took place in an all male shelter, located in the heart of Toronto’s LGBTQ village. The principles that guide the delivery of shelter services at the City of Toronto state that shelters must work towards improving access to trans people and that: “Gender identity is self-defined. Sometimes this may not correspond with a person’s physical appearance. Service providers need to accept gender identity as defined by the individual rather than by the perception of staff and/or other residents” (Toronto Shelter Standards, 2002, p. 7).

When shelter workers were asked to describe what “all male shelter” means, they stated that it means that youth must physically present as male:
When they [trans youth] come here, they [management] say you have to tell them to take your whole dress off, if they come in dressed as a female […] Some staff will ask them and sometimes it's looked upon as for their own safety because you might have other clients who aren't comfortable with seeing that and might start harassing them (Turning Point, Staff Member).

Conversely, the Executive Director stated that shelter residents must identify as male and that they could dress however they choose to, but are strongly advised to physically present as male:

You're self-identified, so you have to say male or transgender. But if you come in and say 'I'm female', it's an issue. It's hard to intake you into an all male shelter if you're identifying as being female, so we would make a referral to either a co-ed shelter that had a female bed or to a women's shelter. You can dress however you want to, but usually we do caution to dress as male if you're identifying as male (Turning Point, Executive Director).

However, when trans youth participants were asked about their experiences in the all male shelter, their answers stood in sharp contrast to the answers given by the shelter workers and executive director. For example, one youth noted:

Places like Turning Point, which is all male and it’s in the [LGBTQ] village, for trans individuals specifically it's very tricky because a lot of them don’t know that Toronto Hostel Standards rule. Trans men are very afraid to be there, and the staff won’t always
allow them in, which is against rulings. I had to de-transition to be allowed in (Mouse, 23 years old).

There are deep institutional and systemic problems inherent in the shelter system concerning trans access to shelters. This section has illustrated issues regarding shelter workers and management inconsistently following the rules and policies, as well as not knowing the rules and policies, which evidently prevent trans youth from accessing the shelter system.

**Lack of Monitoring of Staff Training**

Individuals working in city-operated shelters are required, within the first 3 months of hire, to complete a specialized certificate at THTC, that trains them to work with people who are experiencing homelessness. As stated earlier in this chapter, there are no city-operated youth shelters, only city-funded. The training requirements and timelines for training for staff of city-funded shelters are not as strict as city-operated shelters. People working at city-funded shelters are obligated to complete a series of training workshops within 3 months to the first year of employment. Executive Directors of shelters are required to keep track of staff training and ensure that staff complete training within the mandated timelines. During an interview with the Executive Director at a Turning Point youth shelter, I asked who monitors staff training and I received the following response: “Technically me, I guess”.

Keeping track of staff training records is not monitored closely enough by Executive Directors at shelters or by the City of Toronto shelter operations. For example, during the focus groups that I conducted, shelter workers were asked if anybody was monitoring the training that
they are receiving. What follows is an example of how two staff members (in the same focus group) responded to this question:

*Participant 2*: Not really, I don't think so.

*Participant 1*: No. There's a database down at the Training Centre, but here I don't think they really have it or enforce it. I've been here for over 3 years and I still have one that I have to take through the Centre that I haven't, so it's not being monitored. (Turning Point, Staff Members)

**Inadequate Complaints Procedure: Lack of Processes to Make it Useful**

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<th>Hostel Services ensures that all shelters have solid complaints policies; that these policies are communicated to clients and staff; that the client ‘Rights and Responsibilities’ and complaints number are posted in a visible area; that we maintain confidentiality and that we have and uphold Toronto Shelter Standards. Furthermore, we are accessible in numerous ways to meet the diverse needs of our clientele (City of Toronto, Complaints Process Supervisor, N.W).</th>
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The City of Toronto created the complaints procedure for shelter residents and staff, as a way of tracking and monitoring problems that occur in the shelter system. The complaints process allows people to formally lodge complaints by telephone, fax, letter, email, or in person. The phone line accepts calls between the hours of 8:30am-4:30pm from Monday to Friday. All complaints are inputted into an electronic complaints tracker and the tracker captures who is calling, when, why, etc. Calls are tracked by sector (single women, single men, youth, etc.) and are separated by the nature of the complaint. This procedure supposedly allows the City of
Toronto to keep track of the types of complaints that are lodged, and potentially provides them with information on the problems that are occurring in the shelter system. Hostel Services receives approximately 300 complaints per year and not surprisingly, the majority of complaints are lodged by the adult sector, as adults make up the majority of the shelter system. It was found that youth file the fewest complaints and there have been no known complaints from the youth sector in relation to transphobia or homophobia dating back to 2009.

Although there are violent occurrences as a result of homophobia and transphobia in the youth sector of the shelter system, as described in the previous chapter, the City of Toronto has no record of such occurrences. This suggests that incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system are not being reported, or in some instances are being reported to shelter staff, but not as formal complaints to the City of Toronto. Tiffany was one of many youth who reported filing complaints to shelter staff, opposed to the City of Toronto, she noted:

> I've complained [directly to the shelter] many times, it's like talking to a wall. It's the same people you will always bring it up to and it's always the same answers, it's always in the end me whose losing out, cause they'll hate me more. It's just an annoyance. Whoever made up the rules can only change the rules and whoever we're talking to has no way to change the rules, so you're wasting your breath talking to them and I'll never be able to talk to that person, so really it goes nowhere (Tiffany, 24 years old).

The City of Toronto’s formal rules indicate that shelters “will respond professionally and appropriately to all complaints”. However, there were managers who stated that complaints are only investigated when there is a “serious breach” of the standards. Additionally, all city-operated and city-funded shelters are mandated by the City of Toronto to post the complaint
process in a visible area so that residents are made aware of the process and the various methods they can use to lodge formal complaints. On the contrary, 73% of the youth interviewed did not know that the complaints procedure existed, and 82% of youth stated that they would never file a complaint.

The remainder of this section focuses on the various reasons that youth do not lodge formal complaints through the City of Toronto’s complaint process. Numerous youth stated that they would never file a complaint through the City’s complaint process because it is inaccessible and unrealistic system from their point of view. The following quote illustrates the view that the vast majority of youth had regarding the complaints process:

I did not know about this, this is the first that I’ve heard of this, which is interesting, having been involved in the shelter system. You said there is a number that people can call? Yeah, all these street-involved youth have these magical cell phones with unlimited minutes to just call in this number that we are going to retain in our magic brains because we are not focused on other things. Sorry that was completely sarcastic, just to be clear. That doesn’t really sound accessible to me. Like, you know what I mean? Oh I have to take time out of my day, quarters out of my pocket to call you from a payphone, to tell you how I just got the shit beat out of me? No, that’s not happening. […] That just seems completely unrealistic, like many things that the city does. It’s a government, it’s a system and it’s not always in the best interest of the people, especially those who need it most (Jamie Jach, 26 years old).
Other youth reported that the complaints procedure was of little use to them after a threatening or violent occurrence and believed that filing a complaint would not solve or change anything:

That’s literally of no value to anyone because you are in the situation which you are trying to get out of, unless there is someone right there in order to help you, sorry not to be rude but what am I going to say, oh yeah, this happened, now what? It’s like, not worth the time (Kelly, 27 years old).

The disconnect that exists between the rules created by the City of Toronto, and shelter staff and managements’ adherence to them, contributes to the erasure of LGBTQ youth in the shelter system (as described in Chapter 6). When the complaints process is not made known or accessible to youth, it leads to fewer complaints, and since the shelter system is “complaint driven”, when youth do not complain about a problem, then the problem does not exist according to the City of Toronto, and if the problem does not exist, then there is no need to address it.

Stories by Youth that Represent the Principles Above

At the end of Chapter 6, Jamie Jach and Mouse’s stories were shared to illustrate how the problems highlighted throughout the chapter took place for them. I would like to turn back to Jamie Jach and Mouse’s stories and describe how their experiences (shared in Chapter 6) were created by the dynamics represented in this chapter. Please note that the problems highlighted in Chapter 6 were described by all of the youth interviewed and that I randomly selected two participants for the purpose of providing a couple of examples of how the problems occur for youth and then how the problems are created. I am sharing the stories of the same two youth as
in Chapter 6 because it is important for the reader to grasp the whole story as it occurs for youth (e.g. understand the problems that occur, as well as how they are created).

Jamie Jach

As reported in Chapter 6, Jamie Jach had just started transitioning from female to male when he became homeless. Even though the Toronto Shelter Standards states “the shelter will provide an atmosphere of dignity and respect for all shelter residents, and provide services to people in a non-judgmental manner” (p. 7), Jamie Jach was terrified of the prospect of sleeping in a shelter as a genderqueer person who did not fit into the “male” or “female” category. He discovered that the shelter system does not provide an atmosphere of “dignity and respect for all shelter residents”, which is why he ended up sleeping in a park for 6 months.

Jamie Jach’s chosen name and gender identity did not match the name or gender marker on his ID when he decided to check into a shelter late one night while he was in crisis. Due to a lack of staff training, lack of knowledge regarding LGBTQ issues, and no formalized policies or procedures regarding trans access to shelters, all of the reasons that Jamie Jach had been avoiding the shelter system became a reality during the intake process and his stay at the shelter. Jamie Jach was accused of lying about his name and was referred to by the name on his ID (his birth name). Jamie Jach also described a situation in which shelter staff did not know what it means to be trans, resulting in him feeling invisible and his trans identity being erased by the institution. These are examples of how staff transphobia occurs in shelters. Additionally, the presence of Christian crosses in the shelter conveyed the message that the shelter adheres to a faith-based value system, specifically a catholic value system, which is typically associated with the belief that it is wrong to be LGBTQ.
The events that took place during Jamie Jach’s stay at the shelter could have been prevented with sufficient staff training, formal policies regarding trans access and anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia, and additional bureaucratic regulation to ensure that all shelter staff comply with the shelter standards. Additionally, the presence of rainbow flags, positive space stickers, and LGBTQ resources would have made the shelter more accessible and supportive for Jamie Jach.

Jamie Jach’s story provides an example of the cyclical nature to the relations that result in institutional erasure and invisibility (seen in Figure 4, Chapter 6). His story portrays staff not being trained on LGBTQ issues and lacking knowledge regarding how to work with trans residents. The lack of staff training perpetuates the normalization of oppression towards LGBTQ people in the shelter system, resulting in LGBTQ youth avoiding the shelter system (as Jamie Jach did), and staff knowing even less about how to meet their needs and how to interact with them.

Mouse

The dynamics that created the experiences that Mouse had in the shelter system are quite similar to what is described above. Both stories represent dynamics in which the shelter system erases youths’ trans identities and renders them invisible. Mouse’s story differs from Jamie Jach’s in that she spent 5 years living in the shelter system and experienced ongoing transphobia directed at her from youth residents and shelter staff that were not trained properly and lacked knowledge regarding how to work with trans people.
Much like Jamie Jach’s experience during the intake process, Mouse was made to feel like trans identities do not count or exist in the shelter system. She was advised not to wear “female clothing”, but instead to wear “gender appropriate” clothing, which is a violation of the shelter standards. Mouse was continuously faced with transphobic violence perpetrated by youth residents, which was made worse by staff not intervening. Both these situations can be explained by a lack of knowledge and lack of formal training regarding LGBTQ cultural competency (including language, anti-homophobia, and anti-transphobia).

Mouse’s story provides an example of staff not following formal shelter rules and policies, resulting in institutional erasure and invisibility. For example, she was sent to an all male shelter and forced to “de-transition”, which made her feel hopeless and docile, and put her at high-risk for suicide. This situation could have been prevented by sufficient staff training and regulation of whether or not staff follow the shelter standards. Unfortunately, the City of Toronto does not have any evidence or record of the transphobia that Mouse faced during the 5 years that she spent in the shelter system, because she was not made aware of the formal complaints process, and therefore, never lodged any formal complaints.

Similar to the dynamics described in Jamie Jach’s story, Mouse’s experiences portray the disconnect that exists between the Shelter Standards, what shelter staff do, and the actual experiences that youth have in shelters.

**Concluding Remarks**

The last two chapters have revealed major disconnects between the everyday experiences of LGBTQ youth, and the ways that shelter staff and management, and the City of Toronto...
perceive and understand LGBTQ youth homelessness, as well as between the services and processes that are meant to be in place to support youth, and the ways that LGBTQ youth actually experience those services and processes. This chapter has discussed how these disjunctures come about and what precisely holds up and sustains the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system.

Throughout this chapter, I have provided details regarding how the shelter system operates and I have explained some of the invisible bureaucratic, organizational, and institutional processes that play a role in shaping the deeply oppressive culture within the shelter system. This chapter has indicated that the problems experienced by LGBTQ youth in the shelter system are often due to the institutional processes and the lack of rules in place. Throughout this chapter, I have also revealed that homophobia and transphobia are grossly underreported by youth in the shelter system, which is mainly due to the formal complaints process not being made accessible or known to youth.

The next chapter discusses the implications of this study, and the unexpected outcomes and impact of this research thus far. The chapter also shares the limitations, discussion, and ideas for future research. The last chapter will reveal how the data illuminates what is needed in the shelter system in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive of queer and trans youth, and will provide concrete solutions to the issues presented throughout this dissertation.
Chapter 8: Revisiting the Study: Summary of Findings, Subjectivity, Impact of Research to Date, Limitations of the Study, and Future Research

“The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love” (Paolo Freire, 1970, p. 89).

In Canada, our response to homelessness is primarily focused on implementing strategies that make homelessness less visible, rather than actually solving homelessness. For example, a great deal of the money spent on homelessness in Canada is spent on the emergency response, which includes emergency shelters and drop-ins, rather than focusing on helping youth find and keep housing. In our response to youth homelessness, it is imperative that we consider factors such as sexuality and gender, because these are major contributing factors to youth homelessness.

The issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness has been neglected and inadequately addressed by the City of Toronto for far too long. This work is meant to shift policy and thinking regarding youth homelessness in Canada. I conducted this study in order to better understand the changes that need to be implemented in Toronto’s shelter system in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth. I also conducted this study so that we could begin to understand queer and trans youth homelessness in Canada. But most importantly, I have done this work so that LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness in Canada no longer face hatred and violence in the shelter system.
More specifically, my intention right from the start was to intervene in the shelter system and actually change and improve the situation for LGBTQ youth. Indeed, this research study can be defined as interventional research because it has already started to reach key decision makers and policy makers. This study has yet to be released to the public and I have already been invited to present my main findings and recommendations to members of the City of Toronto’s City Council, as well as to train shelter staff. My commitment to ensuring that this research moves from text to action and into the hands of those who can use this work to make the system accessible, safe, and supportive of queer and trans youth is why Knowledge Translation (KT) has been a key component of this study. That intention and what has become of it is one of the major topics of this chapter.

This chapter then is in essence an evaluation. The first section summarizes the main theoretical contributions and major conclusions. Followed by a section on subjectivity, and then a section that discusses the practical contributions, impact, and unexpected outcomes that this research has had to date. Following that are limitations and ideas for future research.

**Summary of Major Conclusions**

“Knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know” (hooks, 2010, p. 185).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the relevant constructs and terms that have been pivotal to this study include, home and space, borders/borderlands, love, and power. These different constructs have constituted my theoretical framework and have helped me conceptualize the findings of this study. This study has provided both practical and theoretical contributions. The practical
contributions are outlined in the next section of this chapter entitled “Impact to Date”. The theoretical contributions of this study are grounded in the situations experienced by the participants and have been highlighted throughout Chapters 6 and 7.

The main theoretical contributions of this dissertation include:

1. Combining the relevant constructs has made it possible for this study to provide a unique perspective, as this is the first time that these concepts have been used together in a Critical Action Research study regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto.

2. This study contributes knowledge on how to interrogate and problematize hegemonic discourses of gender and sexual identity, and in doing so has created an alternative discourse on LGBTQ youth homelessness.

3. Combining home and space, borders/borderlands, love, and power have structured this research to create a reflexive and loving lens to analyze research, which has also empowered, shared the voices of, and recognized the young people at the centre of this research as the experts of their own experiences.

This study has contributed knowledge that is grounded in the situations experienced by the participants, and has most importantly, promoted action. The major conclusions and theoretical contributions to discourse on youth homelessness include, that the culture of the shelter system can be summarized as an overall atmosphere of normalized oppression and that homophobic and transphobic violence frequently occurs in shelters. This work suggests that it is young males who often perpetrate incidents of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, but that shelter staff also play a role in contributing to these incidents by not intervening
and rarely acknowledging the existence of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. There is also a significant lack of acknowledgement of LGBTQ youths’ existence in the shelter system. What has been shown is that the shelter system erases LGBTQ youth from the system by means of institutional erasure, however, LGBTQ youths’ presence are also erased by them avoiding the shelter system due to homophobia and transphobia and problematic rules and policies.

This study has likewise revealed that it is both the excessive bureaucratic regulation and the lack of necessary bureaucratic regulation in highly significant areas that play a key role in creating the disjunctures that occur for queer and trans youth in the shelter system. This work also suggests that there are specific rules and policies in place that create and sustain oppressive contexts for LGBTQ youth in the shelter system. The recommendations provided in the chapter that directly follows give hope for the possibility of a safer and more inclusive shelter system for LGBTQ youth.

**Subjectivity**

“If research doesn’t change you as a person, then you aren’t doing it right”

*(Wilson, 2008, p. 83).*

Self reflection is an important factor in assisting the researcher in understanding how their own subjectivity affects the research, as well as how the research affects them as a researcher (Given, 2008b). I would like to share some of my reflections about how subjectivity affected my research, how this research study changed me as a person, and what this study means to me.
The subjective lens of the researcher can be powerful for the research process and for shaping data (Given, 2008b). Throughout the entire research process I was aware of my own experiences and perspectives in relation to the experiences and perspectives of the participants. I was also mindful that some participants accepted me because they viewed me as one of them, while others viewed me as a researcher from a big institution and, therefore, did not feel as connected to me. This experience made me even more aware of the power dynamics between the participants and myself, which was discussed in Chapter 4. Being mindful of the power differentials that exist between the participants and myself made me even more aware of my own lived experience, race, class, and identity as a queer and trans person, which I believe enriched my data collection, analysis, writing experience, enhanced the findings of this study, and actually made me a better researcher.

This research study undoubtedly changed me as a person; for example, it encouraged me to come out as trans and begin my transition during the study, which was not an easy path to travel. However, this experience helped me become a more authentic and reflexive person and researcher (discussed in Chapter 4). I am aware that my coming out as trans during this research study helped the young people at the core of this work connect with me and respect me. I hope that it has also provided an opportunity for education and trans awareness to those around me and involved in this work.

This has been a very significant research journey for me and this study is part of a large body of work that I call my “life work”. The stories that the young people who participated in this study shared with me were beautiful, tragic, sad, enriching, and heartbreaking all at once. I continue to hold these painful and tragic stories close to my heart and transform them into energy
that will help me advocate for a safe, accessible, supportive, and affirming shelter system for LGBTQ youth.

**Impact of Research to Date**

As I near the conclusion of this dissertation, I reflect on the how this work has impacted the shelter system, as well as education and policy on youth homelessness over the past four years. In Chapter 4, I outlined my Knowledge Translation (KT) strategies and discussed how I use various social media tools to disseminate my research and create public dialogue. An important outcome of this study is that this research became so well known that people in highly regarded positions, with the power to make significant changes in the system, have and continue to contact me. What follows are several concrete examples of the impact that this research and my KT activities have had.

**Collaborating with the City of Toronto**

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the City of Toronto was first introduced to my work in 2009, after the Toronto Star interviewed me about my research. The General Manager (GM) at the City of Toronto Shelter Operations wrote a response letter to the Toronto Star stating that he was dismayed at the editors report on LGBTQ youth homelessness. In his defense, he stated that the City has Shelter Standards and a formal complaints process in place, which protect LGBTQ people. He also stated that the shelter system is in fact accessible to and inclusive of trans people and alluded to it being highly unlikely that the reported accounts of homophobia and transphobia actually happened in Toronto’s shelter system. After his letter appeared in the Toronto Star, I contacted the GM to request a meeting, which he declined. This did not stop me from
continuously trying to meet with management at the City of Toronto Shelter Operations. Eventually, during the first year of my PhD, I interviewed Trish Horrigan from the City of Toronto (Manager of Operations and Support Services) for my podcast (Abramovich, 2009). The interview focused on the City of Toronto’s perspectives and understanding of LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto. This interview helped formulate much of my early understanding of the City of Toronto’s position on LGBTQ youth homelessness. I also used key information from the interview to inform and develop my research questions and early presentations in this area.

Shortly prior to beginning the fourth year of my PhD, the director of the Streets to Homes program at the City of Toronto, Gordon Tanner, contacted me through my website. He stated that he was aware of my research and advocacy regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness and specialized housing, and that he was interested in learning more about and supporting my work. Following this meeting, the Executive Director at the 519 Community Centre, Maura Lawless, agreed to join us and also advocate for specialized housing for queer and trans youth. The 519 Community Centre is a prominent LGBTQ organization that receives funding from the City of Toronto and, therefore, attends frequent meetings with the City. After a community reference meeting regarding homelessness, the City of Toronto agreed to meet with Gordon, Maura, and I, as well as several other key people working in the area of LGBTQ youth and homelessness. Our meeting focused on LGBTQ youth homelessness and the lack of tailored services in Toronto. The meeting provided a real opportunity to begin to increase the visibility and strategic public policy response on the issue of queer and trans youth homelessness, and was described as the first discussion of a series of discussions focusing on these issues.
On September 18, 2013, I deputed before the Community Development and Recreation Committee, which consisted of a full boardroom of City Councillors and City staff at Toronto City Hall. The Committee met to review several key items, including the latest results of the Street Needs Assessment and the creation of a new housing allowance program with three target groups - homeless and at risk seniors, aging adults in the shelter system, and people who are homeless sleeping outdoors. I started my deputation by stating that the City of Toronto has inadequately addressed the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness for far too long and that this issue is an emergency situation. The main points of my deputation included an introduction to my research study, the key findings of my study, and asking the City to consider LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness as a fourth priority group for the housing allowance. I ended my deputation by stating that I have developed concrete policy and practice recommendations, as well as recommendations for changes to the shelter standards in order for it to become more LGBTQ inclusive.

In response to my deputation, Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam asked me to forward all of my recommendations to City Council and I was then invited to meet with her to discuss the recommendations of my study. Xtra Magazine interviewed me for an article that focused on the City meeting (See Appendix J-3). City officials were also interviewed for the article and publicly announced that their response to the growing population of LGBTQ homeless youth will implement three of the main recommendations from my study. My meeting at City Hall with Councillor Wong-Tam provided me with an opportunity to explicitly ask the City to advance my key recommendations forward.
More recently, on December 4, 2013, I once again deputed before the Community Development and Recreation Committee. During my deputation, I expressed my feelings of frustration that it was almost 2014 and I was still asking the City to provide shelter workers with basic anti-homophobia training. I also helped Councillor Wong-Tam create a Motion that was passed at the meeting. The Motion asked the City to create a working group made up of people with lived experience and people working in the area of youth homelessness to oversee the City’s response to LGBTQ youth homelessness, as well as asking the City to report back on the feasibility of creating specialized housing for LGBTQ youth. Xtra Magazine interviewed me after my deputation and covered a thorough and exciting story about my research and deputation, and the City’s willingness to collaborate with me and begin meeting the needs of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness (See Appendix J-4). This is an exceptional achievement, given that there was so little interest on this subject when I first started this study, and the City of Toronto was not even willing to speak with me about this issue.

**Reaching a Broad Audience**

A large part of my achievements arises from the efforts that I have made to ensure that my work reaches decision-makers. Over the years, I have become passionate about KT. As a researcher with a strong political and social justice agenda, it has been critical for me to see a direct relationship between my research and KT. I have worked hard to find ways to make my research reach beyond academia and into the world, where it can have an impact and make a difference. Figure 6 in Appendix O provides a general overview of the activity on my website from the first year of my PhD in 2009 to now. The graph indicates that almost 4,000 visitors have visited my website. The majority of visitation peaks occurred after conference
presentations, talks, lectures, and media appearances (newspapers, magazines, television). People from 72 countries visited my website during the timeframe, most visits were from: Canada, United States, Germany, Brazil, and United Kingdom. The most popular keywords that people used to get to my website included: Ilona Alex Abramovich; LGBT homeless youth; homeless youth Toronto; and arts-informed research. A surprising discovery is that the City of Toronto has been a frequent visitor of my website, which has led me to wonder if they have visited my site to ‘keep track of my work’ or because they have been interested in my work. Visits from the City of Toronto have become more frequent each year since the beginning of my PhD in 2009, with the most visits occurring in 2012. This was surprising to me because the City of Toronto has been reluctant to engage in dialogue with me about LGBTQ youth homelessness since my Master’s study and up until the fourth year of my PhD (as described above). It has been primarily through my website that people have contacted me with questions about my work and that I have received media requests.

**Social Media Networks**

Currently, there are almost 900 followers on my Twitter account and I have discovered that people frequently share my work and engage in discussions regarding my research on Twitter. The most surprising outcomes from my involvement on Twitter were, firstly, that an editor at Huffington Post contacted me through Twitter and invited me to write an article about my research. Secondly, an organization in Glasgow contacted me through Twitter and asked me to have a discussion with them in their organization’s chat room. During this discussion they advised me that a policy maker in Glasgow introduced them to my work and they are eagerly waiting for me to complete my PhD so that I may help shift policy in Glasgow regarding
LGBTQ youth homelessness. Thirdly, and perhaps most surprisingly, Anna Maria Tremonti’s assistant contacted me on Twitter and invited me to be interviewed on The Current, CBC. I was advised that the team at The Current had viewed my Digital Storytelling film and were interested in Teal and I coming in for an interview together. On September 9, 2013, Anna Maria Tremonti interviewed Teal and I about LGBTQ youth homelessness (See Appendix J-2). This interview has truly helped raise awareness to the issue of queer and trans youth homelessness and has also resulted in numerous media interviews (e.g. CBC Radio Kitchener-Waterloo, CBC Radio Ottawa, The Metro-Ottawa).

There are almost 300 people in my Facebook group on LGBTQ youth homelessness, most of whom I have never met. This group provides a forum for people to ask questions and post resources. Numerous young LGBTQ people with lived experience of homelessness across Canada and in the United States have contacted me through this group to thank me for creating it, to ask how they could help, and to share their stories with me. Additionally, my LinkedIn group on LGBTQ youth homelessness has over 100 members who frequently engage in discussion and ask questions regarding queer and trans youth homelessness. The greatest impact of my involvement on LinkedIn has been the people who have contacted me over the years, including Senior Policy Advisors (discussed in the following section).

**Impact on Policy**

In 2012, I was invited to write a chapter for a book entitled ‘Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice’. The book launch drew a large audience of people mainly working in the area of policy. During the book launch, I was invited to speak on a panel with leading experts on issues regarding youth homelessness. Shortly after the book was
published in 2013, I was contacted by a Senior Policy Advisor working for the Government of Alberta, who asked me to provide key policy recommendations for a project that is reviewing policy related to emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, and youth shelters.

In June 2013, I was invited to meet with a Senior Policy Advisor at the Ontario Human Rights Commission, who is currently implementing changes to existing policy on gender identity/gender expression and housing. I was invited to discuss my research, provide policy recommendations, and answer numerous questions about LGBTQ youth homelessness. This meeting was said to be the first of a series of meetings regarding changes to policy regarding sexual and gender identity and housing.

**Knowledge Mobilization Project - Digital Storytelling Film**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Digital Storytelling film was the key knowledge mobilization project of this study and has turned into a project that goes beyond the scope of my PhD study, and is part of a larger initiative that I am working on with the 519 Church Street Community Centre that aims to create specialized housing for LGBTQ youth in Toronto.

An unexpected outcome of the Digital Storytelling project is that it was catalytic. It influenced shelter providers to invite me to speak to and train shelter workers. This was surprising because at the outset of this study, I had great difficulty getting shelter providers to simply respond to my emails, let alone agree to participate in this study. However, once I released the film to the public online, numerous people, including Executive Directors and shelter workers invited me to speak about my research and facilitate training for shelter staff. Additionally, and perhaps more surprising, was that a number of shelter workers and managers,
people working in the area of homelessness, and several senior policy advisors stated that this film is a necessary training tool in the shelter system and have already requested that the film be used as part of staff training. Therefore, it is safe to say that the film project played an important role in helping this research shift from written text to action.

**Limitations of the Study**

The greatest limitation of this study is associated with the reluctance of shelters in Toronto to participate in this study, which instinctively made it difficult for me to conduct this research in the Toronto Shelter System. Due to the refusal of certain shelters to participate, I was unable to conduct interviews or focus groups in several key youth shelters in Toronto, as I had originally planned. Collecting data from Covenant House and Eva’s Satellite would have been particularly informative and enriching to the data set because both shelters are busy and well-known shelters amongst street-involved youth in Toronto and the youth participants reported mixed reviews and experiences about these two specific shelters.

The lack of participation and interest from Toronto-based shelters suggests that shelter management are well aware of issues regarding homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, but perhaps fear the repercussions of coming forward and speaking about these issues. It also suggests that there is fear of consequences regarding what the findings of such a study could reveal about the lack of enforcement and regulation concerning staff and management following shelter rules, standards, and policies.

Interestingly, a number of the management at Blue Door Shelters identify as LGBTQ and the Executive Director at Youth Haven Shelter identified herself as an LGBTQ ally. Further,
Turning Point Shelter is located precisely in the LGBTQ village at Church and Wellesley, which I believe impacted their decision to participate in this study. This may suggest that those who are either part of, or allies of the LGBTQ community are better able to see the importance of this work in the context of this study.

Another limitation of this study is associated with the recruitment of youth participants. As discussed in Chapter 4, the youth participants were between the ages of 21-29 years old. The average age of youth participants was 25 years old and there were no teenaged youth represented in this study. The age range for youth in studies on youth homelessness is predominantly categorized as 16-26 years of age, and the average age of youth in a number of studies on youth homelessness in Toronto was approximately 19-21 years old (Gaetz, 2004b; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Raising the Roof, 2009). Although we are all well aware of teenaged youth homelessness, there were no teenaged youth represented in this study. This may suggest something about the LGBTQ homeless youth cohort in Toronto, which we know very little about. This may also suggest that teenaged youth are less likely to frequent the programs and services that the youth participants were recruited from. Additionally, this study did not focus on intersectionality, as it rarely came up in the data. However, I was aware that while some youth identified as trans, they also identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or pansexual, and that while some youth identified as gay or lesbian, they were also racialized.

The Digital Storytelling project was originally meant to involve approximately 3-5 youth in the creation of a short film. However, due to difficulty with recruitment, the film was created with only 1 youth participant. This being the case, it is important to keep in mind that the film is one small piece of data that must be understood in relation to the other data. The difficulty that I
had with recruiting youth for the Digital Storytelling project may have been partially due to the highly personal nature of the film and youth not feeling like they knew me well enough to participate in the project and share such intimate details of their lives on film. Other reasons include that it may be harder for those who are no longer homeless to relive their experiences by sharing their stories, as well as the timing of the project, as I had originally recruited three youth for the project, but they were unable to participate due to other factors that came up in their personal lives. However, I plan to continue this piece of the project in the near future, when there is special funding available, more time, and when I have built a rapport with more of the potential participants.

**Future Research**

Throughout this research journey it has become increasingly apparent that more Canadian research is needed in the area of LGBTQ youth homelessness. Although I have been keeping a running list of potential research studies, what follows are suggestions for the main projects that I believe are the most important and urgent in this area of research.

The most obvious next step is to begin scaling the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness on a national level, so that we may better understand the prevalence of queer and trans youth homelessness in Canada, which is something that we have minimal understanding and knowledge about. Research on LGBTQ health is relatively new and Canadian knowledge on LGBTQ health is limited, particularly knowledge on the health concerns and health needs of LGBTQ homeless youth. The collection of more comprehensive data would assist in providing knowledge on public health risks, health and social well-being, and the unique health needs of LGBTQ homeless youth.
I also highly recommend that a needs assessment of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness be conducted in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. This will help us understand the needs of queer and trans homeless youth in the cities in Canada that have the highest populations of LGBTQ people, which is where youth are most likely to migrate to if they have been kicked out or forced to leave home after coming out.

As a personal next step, I am interested in learning more about this population’s access to health care and finding ways to reduce the health inequalities experienced by LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto. More specifically, I would like to employ the *Brokered Dialogue* method, which is a qualitative method that uses film to help promote respectful conversation amongst groups of people who would not normally speak to one another (Parsons & Lavery, 2012). Through the *Brokered Dialogue* method, controversial issues in healthcare and social policy are investigated and better understood. *Brokered Dialogue* is theoretically informed by narrative inquiry and visual anthropology (Parsons & Lavery, 2012). I am interested in using *Brokered Dialogue* to facilitate meaningful dialogue among LGBTQ homeless youth, the General Manager of Shelter Operations at the City of Toronto, and a senior policy maker from the City of Toronto or a Toronto City Councillor. *Brokered Dialogue* is a natural fit for this project, and will not only help promote respectful conversation amongst the participants, but it will also reveal the structural and systemic barriers that often result in health inequalities, as experienced by this population of youth.
Concluding Remarks

“Research that empowers resistance makes a contribution to individually and collectively changing the conditions of our lives and the lives of those on the margins” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 10).

During an interview with a manager from the City of Toronto Shelter Operations, I was told that in order to implement changes to the shelter system’s existing policies and standards, such as, making anti-homophobia training mandatory, the City of Toronto relies on and requires evidence to prove that changes are necessary. This study has provided the evidence needed. Moving forward, it is my hope it will be recognized as such and used to implement the recommended changes. At the bare minimum, there is no longer any excuse. The issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness has been inadequately addressed by the City of Toronto for far too long.

Significant changes must be implemented in the shelter system and specialized housing must be created in order for the needs of queer and trans youth to be met in Toronto. Changes to Toronto’s shelter system are absolutely necessary so that Jamie Jach does not have to spend another cold winter living in a park, so that Kelly no longer has to be in hiding, and so that Fonts and Sarah do not remain victims of homophobic slurs and attacks. This thesis already has provided the general ammunition needed. Going still further, the chapter that directly follows, which is the final chapter of this dissertation, offers concrete recommendations made by the youth participants and myself, for changes that can help make Toronto a safe, accessible, and supportive city for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness.
Chapter 9: Informing Policy and Practice

“It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act.” (Dalai Lama)

This final chapter provides concrete solutions to major issues raised throughout this dissertation and helps inform policy and practice with recommendations that have been made by the youth participants and myself to shelter providers and policy makers for how to make the shelter system safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth. Throughout this chapter I clearly distinguish between what the participants recommended and what I as the researcher am recommending.

The chapter begins with recommendations made by the youth participants. As part of this section, as a researcher immersed in this question, I have taken it upon myself to flesh out what doing this work properly will entail. That is, I expanded on the recommendations made by youth, in the process of turning them into concrete suggestions for shelter staff. The following section focuses on the creation of specialized housing for LGBTQ youth in Toronto, which was suggested by the youth participants and myself, as well as information regarding which services and programs in Toronto youth find most and least safe and supportive. The chapter concludes with general policy changes needed, as well as concrete changes needed to current policies.
Youth Recommendations

You can’t just keep creating new systems and new hotlines and fax numbers, you need to go to the root of the problem and create spaces that are queer and trans inclusive. […] There does need to be some kind of reporting system or accountability process, some transformative justice happening (Jamie Jach, 26 years old).

Due to the lack of specialized support available to LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness in Toronto, they often only utilize the shelter system to meet their basic needs, which they described as: food, shelter (including LGBTQ positive spaces), and TTC tokens. However, youth expressed the desire for widespread support and acceptance, and for the shelter system to become a more accepting and safe space where LGBTQ youth do not have to constantly fear their safety.

Before entering a service, youth often rely on visual cues, such as the rainbow flag, to assess how safe a shelter or support service will be. For example, one youth stated:

The rainbow flag is helpful, definitely helpful. Because it's a visual thing that triggers like 'oh yeah, ok so they're queer friendly in some way'. I don't know. I guess you just go in somewhere and you see how it goes. I just analyze and read people all the time. If someone goes out of their way to express that it is that [LGBTQ friendly] that's cool or some people are just obviously queer, queer friendly, which is cool (Mira, 29 years old).

However, youth also acknowledged that a shelter or support service could have as many queer staff and posters, but can still be an extremely homophobic and/or transphobic
organization and that anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia rules and regulations need to be built into organizational structures in order for them to truly be queer and trans positive.

I think they need somebody like you to come in and talk with the kids, cause it’s not really talked about. The people that are doing it [coming in and talking to youth], it’s stuff that we don’t really care about (Landon, 26 years old).

Few studies in Canada have included the voices of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, however, shelter providers and the City of Toronto Shelter Operations can benefit from a more youth inclusive approach. A youth inclusive approach would involve taking into account what LGBTQ youth state their needs are from services, and what they believe would make services safe, accessible, and supportive for them. What follows is an extensive list of ways to deal with the homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, as well as how to make the shelter system safe, accessible, and supportive of queer and trans youth, which was provided by the youth participants. All of the sub-headings below are the recommendations that were directly provided by the youth participants. Some of the youth participants provided examples and explanations with their recommendations, however, I have expanded on the explanations provided by youth and integrated them with my own explanations in order to provide coherent and concrete suggestions, which are listed after each sub-heading.
Integrated Recommendations Made by Youth Participants and Researcher

Create more LGBTQ inclusive spaces:

Youth reported that more queer and trans inclusive spaces would help them feel safe and decrease the need to hide their sexuality and gender identities. LGBTQ inclusive spaces can be defined as spaces that have clear anti-discriminatory, anti-homophobia, and anti-transphobia policies (these policies are described below). LGBTQ inclusive spaces are marked with a rainbow flag or rainbow triangle sticker on the front door to publicly indicate that such policies are in place and that there are LGBTQ allies present in the space. LGBTQ inclusive spaces also ensure that queer and trans youth have full access to services and are not turned away from services because they are considered “unsafe for LGBTQ youth”. Inclusive spaces are made safe for LGBTQ people through several different ways, including: the policies in place; the staff have received specialized training and have an understanding of LGBTQ terminology; and ensuring that no forms and questionnaires use heteronormative and cisnormative language, but rather LGBTQ inclusive language. In order to utilize LGBTQ inclusive language, forms and questionnaires should be written in ways that do not assume that people either identify as female or male, or that people are heterosexual or homosexual, etc.

Create specialized housing for LGBTQ youth:

All youth interviewed reported the need for specialized housing for LGBTQ youth in Toronto (described in greater detail in the next section and in the section on Policy and Practice Recommendations).
Increase LGBTQ visibility in the shelter system:

Youth reported the need for more openly out LGBTQ shelter staff. Youth residents and shelter staff should be encouraged to come out, as this will make it easier for youth to relate to others and not feel the need to hide their identities in shelters.

Enforcement of rules and policies:

Stronger enforcement of rules and policies will influence shelter staff and management to consistently follow shelter standards and rules and will create standardization within the shelter system. Enforcing shelter staff and management to conform to the same set of formal rules and regulations will help youth know what to expect from shelter staff and create a more predictable shelter system for youth.

Emphasis on prevention:

More emphasis should be placed on prevention of homophobia and transphobia, including mandatory LGBTQ training for all shelter staff (described in greater detail in the section on Policy and Practice Recommendations), as well as awareness raising and education for parents and children in the school system.

Provide more resources for LGBTQ youth:

It was suggested that shelters should provide the option for queer and trans mentors (queer and trans people with lived experience of homelessness) and LGBTQ workshops for youth residents. Suggested workshops for youth should include: anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia workshops, as well as LGBTQ specific workshops, such as, coming out, safe sex, etc.
Prepare residents for their ongoing lives:

Youth reported the need for shelters to provide more support and information that can help prepare them for their ongoing lives beyond shelter life. Such support should include: gender transition related information regarding hormones, surgery, name change, and how to navigate different bureaucratic institutions as a trans person, and information and support regarding how to get and keep housing, and how to become an independent adult.

Update the intake procedure:

Youth expressed the desire for shelter workers to begin providing information regarding shelter rules and regulations related to homophobia and transphobia, as well as a reminder of the complaints process, each time a youth checks in at a shelter (during intake). In addition to the verbal reminder, youth stated that they would benefit from being provided with a form that contains all the necessary information to lodge a formal complaint. Youth stated that this would not only provide them with helpful information, but that it would also create a more LGBTQ inclusive atmosphere and help youth feel more comfortable being there.

Specialized Housing for LGBTQ Youth

“The mandate of the Shelter, Support, & Housing Administration Division is to contribute to healthy communities by ensuring that people have a range of shelter and affordable housing options” (Toronto Shelter Standards, 2002, p. 5).

Rather than adopting a ‘one size fits all’ approach, it is crucial that programs and policies reflect the diverse population of youth experiencing homelessness in Canada. Youth need to be
involved in the development of strategies and programs that are meant to support them, because as highlighted in the previous two chapters, there are major disconnects between the City of Toronto, frontline shelter workers, shelter management, and youth residents.

As noted throughout this dissertation, the City of Toronto does not offer any specialized housing for LGBTQ youth, a concept that has already been well established in the United States. Use of the term ‘specialized housing’ denotes either emergency shelter or transitional housing. All participants were asked a series of questions regarding the idea of specialized housing for queer and trans youth. There was consensus amongst the youth participants that such housing is necessary and urgently needed in Toronto and would have been helpful to them at different points while they were homeless, especially during crisis situations. A number of shelter workers, executive directors, and workshop facilitators were shocked to find out that there are is no specialized housing for LGBTQ youth in all of Canada. However, they held varying views on the need for such housing, specifically regarding the need for a specialized emergency shelter. Some believed that it would be an essential service to help youth feel comfortable and safe, while others were uncertain because they worried about the implications of a segregated shelter and whether other shelters in the broader system would stop working towards creating an inclusive environment for LGBTQ youth. The importance of getting insight from LGBTQ homeless youth on whether they would access such a shelter was agreed upon.

Support services play a fundamental role in fulfilling homeless youths’ daily needs, such as shelter, food, healthcare, and presumably safety. However, it is essential that services be equipped to deal with the wide-ranging needs of youth, which have undoubtedly become more complex and diverse since the first shelters were established in the city of Toronto approximately
thirty years ago (Youth Shelter Interagency Network, 2007). Support services must be revised and adapted to reflect the changing needs of youth. Both the adult and youth participants felt strongly that even with a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, it would still be crucial for other shelters to work on inclusion and safety, so that there is not just one designated space for LGBTQ homeless youth. This was mainly because there would still be LGBTQ youth accessing other shelters for various reasons (e.g. if they were discharged or restricted from the specialized shelter, not all LGBTQ youth could access a specialized shelter, etc.).

The City of Toronto is reluctant to create specialized housing for LGBTQ youth, due to a variety of opinions and beliefs, and funding cuts that have purportedly put Toronto into ‘shelter shutdown mode’. For example, some people believe that segregating LGBTQ youth in specialized housing will lead to further marginalization, but that allotting a number of beds to LGBTQ youth within a shelter would not cause the same problems, as discussed in Chapter 7. However, all of the youth interviewed talked about the value of such a resource, including, that it would provide youth with a LGBTQ inclusive space, people they could relate to, services that specifically meet the needs of queer and trans youth, and a break from the constant fear of harassment and violence. While specialized LGBTQ housing is not a solution to homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, it is a way of responding to a situation that youth have described as unsafe. For example, one youth stated:

They need to have more LGBT housing workers to go around and deal with the queer youth to get them off the street. There should be someone going around and doing more outreach for the people who are in Cawthra Park [Toronto’s LGBTQ village] at 2 o’clock in the morning, cause they have nowhere else to sleep (Kelly, 27 years old).
Shelters are part of the emergency response to homelessness and are meant to be an entry point for people to gain access to the proper services that they need in order to help them out of homelessness and into housing (Raising the Roof, 2009). The inability of the current shelter system to provide safety and support to LGBTQ youth is a major barrier in moving these youth out of homelessness and into housing. It is important to note that the solution to these issues is multifaceted. A crucial part of the solution is the creation of specialized housing for queer and trans youth. Another part of the solution is to hold the whole system accountable, so that every shelter has a plan in place to deal with and eliminate issues of discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia, and is made safer for LGBTQ youth.

**Informing Policy and Practice**

Systemically there aren’t policies that necessarily protect people and talk about inclusion from a useful perspective, address the kinds of barriers that exist for trans people for example. They need policies about access and intake. There need to be policies that say if a trans person comes into the shelter, they will be served in the gender in which they’ve identified as the safest and most comfortable for them. […] The onus is on the agency to make the space safer. That needs to be there and that hasn’t happened yet (519 Community Centre, Training Education & Research Consultant, K.S).

The theorizing that appears throughout this dissertation, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7, informs the policy and practice recommendations listed below. Ending youth homelessness must be made a national priority by developing a comprehensive strategy to end youth homelessness in Canada. Based on the suggestions made by the youth participants in the Youth
Recommendations section, and my knowledge and observations throughout this study, I have created a list of concrete policy and practice recommendations as a suggestive model for what staff might work on to make the shelter system a safe, accessible, and supportive place for LGBTQ youth.

**General Policy Changes Needed**

**Add LGBTQ resources to all shelters:**

All shelters must be equipped with appropriate and diverse resources, both written (pamphlets, fliers) and verbal for youth (e.g. information about coming out as LGBTQ, sexual identity, gender identity, safe sex, LGBTQ terminology, as well as information on any local services that address gender identity and sexual orientation), as well as knowledge to refer transgender youth to transition-related treatment (e.g. hormone therapy, name change, counseling). This recommendation requires that shelter staff are made aware of the LGBTQ specific programs available, so that they can refer youth to these services when necessary.

**Measure LGBTQ youth homelessness:**

In order to calculate the prevalence of LGBTQ youth homelessness, services should begin collecting data on residents’ LGBTQ identities. Collecting such information would require shelter workers to begin asking youth about their LGBTQ identity during the intake process. In order to determine the most respectful and least invasive way of asking such a question, queer and trans youth should be consulted with. Collecting this type of data will help us scale the issue of LGBTQ youth homelessness, which has not been done in approximately thirteen years.
Identifying as LGBTQ inclusive:

Shelters that have implemented all of the above changes and training should openly identify as LGBTQ positive/inclusive by posting a rainbow flag or positive space sticker on their front door.

Government funding:

All levels of government should provide funding for specialized LGBTQ transitional housing to be developed in the City of Toronto immediately. This type of housing would provide a positive, safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth, as well as short-term and longer-term assistance, food, clothing, treatment and counseling, health care, separate washrooms and showers, private rooms, information and referrals. The following models could be used for guidance: specialized LGBTQ supportive housing facilities in the United States (e.g. The Ali Forney Center and the True Colors Residence), and the Foyer Model of transitional housing for youth: http://www.homelesshub.ca/ResourceFiles/foyer_report23112012.pdf

The role of research:

Funding and resources need to be provided for further research on LGBTQ youth homelessness in Canada, specifically to measure the incidence and prevalence of queer and trans youth homelessness on a national level.

Concrete Changes Needed to Current Policies

Specific changes needed to the Toronto Shelter Standards:

Updating the following sections in the Shelter Standards will help create LGBTQ inclusivity in
the shelter system, as well as a more accessible, safe, and supportive shelter system for LGBTQ people:

*Section 2 - Guiding Principles:* There are fourteen Guiding Principles that are meant to “help guide the delivery of shelter services” (p. 7). However, none of the guiding principles mention homophobia or transphobia, with the exception of #5, which states:

“Gender Identity is self-defined. Sometimes this may not correspond with a person’s physical appearance. Service providers need to accept gender identity as defined by the individual rather than by the perception of staff and/or other residents” (p. 7).

A sentence that might be worded as follows should be added to this guiding principle: “Staff must respect residents’ chosen names and pronouns.”

Additionally, guiding principle #1 states: “[…] Discriminatory and racist incidents or behaviours are not tolerated” (p. 7).

A possible new wording is: “Homophobia, transphobia, racist, and other discriminatory incidents or behaviours are not tolerated in the shelter system.”

*Section 4 - Access to Shelter:* Section 4.7 of the Shelter Standards is entitled: “Meeting the Needs of Transgendered/Transsexual/Two-Spirited Residents”. The last two sentences of this section states: “For shelters that are not yet able to accommodate TG/TS/2-S residents, referrals to programs and services that are able to meet their needs, in their identified gender, must be completed.”
“Shelters are encouraged to organize staff training regarding TG/TS/2-S people, which is facilitated by these communities” (p. 14).

These two sentences are problematic because all shelters should be able to accommodate trans people. The City of Toronto Shelter Operations should either make the entire shelter system accessible to trans people (by implementing the recommendations provided in this chapter) or clearly state which shelters are already accessible to trans people, so that there is an understanding of which shelters trans people should be referred to. A possible new wording for the last sentence is: “All full-time and part-time staff must receive training regarding TG/TS/2-S awareness within the first three months of employment.”

**Section 5 – Resident Rights and Responsibilities:** Each shelter is obligated to post the Resident Rights and Responsibilities in a common area of the shelter, as well as communicate the list to residents during their admission to shelter. The section on resident responsibilities states:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residents are responsible to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow the rules of the shelter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Treat shelter staff and other shelter residents with respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Respect the private property and belongings of other shelter residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Respect the private property and belongings of the shelter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Work with staff to improve their housing situation within their capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A sentence that might be worded as follows should be added: “5. Agree to refrain from using homophobic and transphobic language and behaviour at all times.”

Section 6 – Program Standards: Section 6.1 provides information on the delivery of essential services in the shelter system. Part of this section states:

To assist residents in meeting their hygiene and sanitary needs, each shelter must provide a minimum of:

- One toilet for every 15 residents up to the first 100 residents, and one toilet for every 30 residents thereafter (urinals may replace up to half the number of required toilets)

- One washbasin for every 15 residents (with liquid soap and paper towels)

- One shower for every 20 residents.

A sentence that might be worded as follows should be added as a standard in Section 6.1 of the Shelter Standards: “Every shelter should have a gender-neutral bathroom wherever there are Male and Female bathrooms and a private shower for residents to access.”

Section 6.9 highlights the Staff Code of Conduct. There are two lists provided which outline what is and what is not considered professional behaviour for shelter staff. The list indicating what is not considered professional behaviour, states: “1. Discriminate against any person on the basis of race, ethnic/cultural background, sexual orientation, age, (dis)ability, religious belief, socio-economic status, etc.” (p. 21). A possible new wording for this sentence is: “1.
Discriminate against any person on the basis of race, ethnic/cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, (dis)ability, religious belief, socio-economic status, etc.”

Section 10 – Glossary of Terms: “This glossary of terms is intended to support the shelter standards and provide a greater understanding of some key expressions as understood by the City. The definitions in the glossary reflect the meanings of terms as they are used in the implementation and operation of the shelter standards” (p. 29). It would be important to add a section on LGBTQ terminology, as this study has revealed a definite need for shelter staff to understand basic LGBTQ terminology. Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of LGBTQ terminology that can be used for this purpose. The definitions provided for the terms “Passing” and “Two-Spirited People” are incorrect and should be updated. Currently, the definition provided for “Passing” states: “This refers to the act of convincing people that you are not transsexual, for safety or other reasons. In other words, if a person passes, no one can tell that he or she is transsexual. Passing is difficult and expensive, as it often requires costly surgeries and medical procedures. Passing is not possible for many transsexual people” (p. 31).

The definition for passing should be changed. A possible new wording is: “Passing refers to a person’s ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or to be seen as heterosexual. People engage in passing for numerous reasons, including, safety, acceptance, shame, personal choice, etc. The ability of trans people to pass as the gender/sex they identify as is often associated with hormones and costly surgeries that are not covered under OHIP. Trans people who do not pass as their preferred gender/sex are often subjected to discrimination and violence.”

The definition provided for “Two-Spirited People” states: “Lesbian or gay persons of aboriginal ancestry” (p. 32). This definition should also be changed. A possible wording is: “Two-Spirited –
This term is culturally specific to the North American Aboriginal community and refers to queer Aboriginal people who identify with both a male and female spirit. This term is not exclusive to gender identity, and can also refer to sexual orientation.”

Additionally, the use of the word “Transsexual Man” should be changed to: “Transman” and should include the term “FTM” and the use of the word “Transsexual Woman” should be changed to: “Transwoman” and should include the term “MTF”. That stated, it is important to note that the terminology that people use to identify themselves changes quickly and the suggested changes to terminology that I have made are words that might be best used today. Therefore, I also suggest that it become part of the policy that the Shelter Standards keep up to date on terminology used.

*Enforcing the Shelter Standards:* The City of Toronto Shelter Operations, as well as Executive Directors at each shelter should have guidelines to monitor that the shelter standards are being followed. If each shelter worker follows the Shelter Standards there will be a more standardized model of care and youths’ experiences will not vary so widely depending on which staff member is working.

*Revise the complaints procedure:*

The shelter system is complaint-driven and relies on complaints from residents in order to monitor issues occurring in the system, therefore, in order to find out how to make the complaint procedure more accessible and useful, and how to get youth to report incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence, youth should be involved in the revision of the complaints process. Additionally, section 5.2 in the Shelter Standards on Admission and Discharge, states: “Shelter
rules and resident rights and responsibilities must be explained to all residents at admission or as soon as reasonably possible” (p. 11). A sentence that might be worded as follows should be added: “The complaints procedure and the importance of reporting incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence must be explained to all residents at admission, and residents must be provided with a form that includes all the necessary information to lodge a formal complaint.”

**LGBTQ training for shelter staff:**

The City of Toronto needs to revise the shelter standards to include stronger guidelines for mandatory and ongoing LGBTQ training for all shelter staff, management, and volunteers, to occur in the first three months of hire. The Transgender/Transsexual Awareness Training that is offered at the Toronto Hostels Training Centre (facilitated by the 519 Church Street Community Centre) should immediately become a mandatory training workshop. However, due to the absence of any anti-homophobia or LGBTQ specific training, the City of Toronto should also make LGBTQ competency training (LGBTQ terminology and anti-homophobia) mandatory and ongoing. This type of training should be offered through the Toronto Hostels Training Centre and can be facilitated by numerous organizations that already provide such training, such as, Planned Parenthood Toronto, Rainbow Health Ontario, Egale, etc. Additionally, ‘Teal’s Story’ (the Digital Storytelling film from this study) might be used as a training tool for all shelter staff.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has offered suggestions for recommendations that will help solve some of the problems that have been discussed throughout this dissertation, and that will help make
Toronto’s shelter system safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth and eliminate the systemic discrimination faced by queer and trans youth on a daily basis. Shelter standards and policies should strictly prohibit the gender surveillance and policing of gender presentation that occurs in the shelter system. More bureaucratic regulation of the benign nature is needed -- regulation that can benefit and protect queer and trans youth residents, as well as to ensure that all shelter staff are following the Toronto Shelter Standards. The City of Toronto Shelter Operations, shelter providers, and policy makers must begin listening to the perspectives and needs of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness because this will help decrease the disconnect and disjunctures that were revealed in this study. Taking queer and trans youths’ perspectives and needs into consideration will help service providers create services that are safe, accessible, and supportive of LGBTQ youth.

This study has demonstrated the dire need for the creation of specialized services and safe spaces for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness, for stricter policies in the shelter system against homophobia and transphobia, and for more discussions of inclusion and acceptance among shelter providers and workers -- may we start this important work immediately.

To conclude with a powerful quote from one of the youth participants:

> Everybody seems to be down and when we have these pressures [homophobia], well guess what? Now people have to guard themselves all the time. That guy’s crying, this girl’s crying, that kid looks so sad, this kid just wants to talk to somebody, that kid’s dying on the inside. It’s a big problem. There’s a big social thing going on here with all the kids and they’re all dying to just talk to somebody. […] A community
would look like people looking out for the best interests of kids; that’s a community.

I’m Native, we know that. It’s about the kids; it’s not about nobody else. You’re supposed to be watching out for them, no matter what (Landon, 26 years old).
References


Barnaby, L., Penn, R., & Erickson, P. G. (2010). *Drugs, homelessness and health: homeless youth speak out about harm reduction.* Retrieved from


Retrieved from http://tinyurl.com/mtgoph


Appendices
Appendix A. Glossary of important terms

**Cisgender** – When a person’s gender identity matches with their body and sex assigned at birth.

**Coming out** – The process of coming to terms with one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity and disclosing it to others. Heterosexuality and fixed gender states that fit into the binary of “female” and “male” are typically assumed by others, therefore, coming-out is an ongoing process.

**FTM** – A person, who was assigned the female sex at birth, but identifies as male. Also, trans man or transman. FTM is the acronym for Female-to-Male.

**Gender identity** – A person’s deep internal feeling of whether they identify as being female, male, something in between, genderqueer, or something other.

**Gender-normative** – Refers to when people conform to what is considered culturally appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour.

**Heteronormative** – The belief that heterosexuality is the ‘normal’ sexual orientation. Also refers to the belief that female and male gender roles are fixed.

**Homeless** – People who lack a stable living situation, such as those who are living on the streets, in the shelter system, couch surfing, or in temporary or marginal shelter.

**Homophobia** – Feelings of rage, hate, and disapproval of homosexuality. Homophobia can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks.
LGBTQ – Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer, questioning.

LGB – Acronym for lesbian, gay, and bisexual.

MTF – A person, who was assigned the male sex at birth, but identifies as female. Also, trans woman or transwoman. MTF is the acronym for Male-to-Female.

Pansexual – When a person is sexually, romantically, and emotionally attracted to people of all gender identities and sexes.

Passing - Passing refers to a person’s ability to be accepted as their preferred gender/sex or to be seen as heterosexual. People engage in passing for numerous reasons, including, safety, acceptance, shame, personal choice, etc. The ability of trans people to pass as the gender/sex they identify as is often associated with hormones and costly surgeries that are not covered under OHIP. Trans people who do not pass as their preferred gender/sex are often subjected to discrimination and violence.

Queer – An umbrella term for LGBTQ. Also a term of self-identification for people who do not identify with binary terms that describe sexual and gender identities.

Sexual identity – How a person identifies whom they are sexually and romantically attracted to (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.)

Transgender – An umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity does not match with the sex they were assigned at birth. This term can encompass those who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, cross-dresser, and others whose gender identities challenge gender norms.
**Transphobia** - Feelings of rage, hate, and disapproval towards transgender people or people who are gender-nonconforming. Transphobia can be manifested in numerous ways, such as verbally, emotionally, and through physical attacks.

**Two-Spirit** - This term is culturally specific to the North American Aboriginal community and refers to queer Aboriginal people who identify with both a male and female spirit. This term is not exclusive to gender identity, and can also refer to sexual orientation.

**Youth** – People between adolescence and young adulthood. Youth programs typically categorize youth between the ages of 16 and 26 years old, however, the City of Toronto categorizes youth up to the age of 29 years old.
Appendix B. Youth Recruitment Poster

I want to listen to YOU...

“No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”

1. My name is Alex Abramovich and I am a PhD student at the University of Toronto – OISE. My research focuses on LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto. I am very interested in hearing from you about your experiences of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system.

2. Who’s eligible? Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, and queer youth between the ages of 16 and 26 years, who are homeless or insecurely housed in Toronto.

3. What’s involved? You are being invited to participate in a 60 minute interview facilitated by Alex. You will receive $10, 2 TTC tokens, and beverages and snacks for your participation.

4. Benefits of joining? You will have the opportunity to share your experiences and knowledge of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. Your input will help improve the shelter system for all LGBTQ youth. You can help make the shelter system become a safer place for LGBTQ youth.

To participate or for more information please contact me at:
Alex: (416) 560-0665 ilona.abramovich@utoronto.ca
Appendix C. Staff Recruitment Poster

You can make a difference...
“No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”

My name is Alex (Ilona) Abramovich and I am a PhD student at the University of Toronto – OISE.

My research focuses on LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto.

I am very interested in hearing from YOU about the training you have received and your experiences in dealing with homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system.

Who’s eligible?
Non-managerial frontline shelter staff members

What’s involved?
You are being invited to participate in a 60 minute focus group facilitated by Alex (principal investigator), with 3-5 of your colleagues.

Benefits of joining?
You will have the opportunity to share your experiences and thoughts on any areas for improvement in anti-oppression training. Your input will lead to greater knowledge on how to better equip staff to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. You can help make the shelter system become a safer place for LGBTQ youth.

To participate or for more information please contact me at:
Alex: (416) 560-0665
ilonabramovich@utoronto.ca
Appendix D. Table 2 Youth demographics chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>26: 30% (n=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27: 20% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male: 40% (n=4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female: 30% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transman: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genderqueer: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-Spirit: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Queer: 20% (n=2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gay: 30% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pansexual: 20% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluid: 20% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesbian: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>White: 50% (n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black: 30% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginal/Native: 20% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current living situation</td>
<td>Street-involved, but housed: 70% (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couch Surfing: 20% (n=2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homeless Shelter: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main source of income</td>
<td>Welfare: 60% (n=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working: 30% (n=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OSAP: 10% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E. Focus Group Participant Questionnaire

1. What is your current position? -

2. How long have you been working here?

3. Have you worked at any other shelters prior to this one?

4. How long have you been working with homeless youth?

5. What is your main reason for wanting to work with homeless youth?

6. Do you feel that the anti-oppression training you have received has prepared you for your job?

7. Have you ever witnessed homophobia in the shelter?

8. Have you ever witnessed transphobia in the shelter?

9. Do you feel that you or your colleagues have ever contributed to homophobia in the shelter?

10. Do you feel that you or your colleagues have ever contributed to transphobia in the shelter?
Appendix F. Consent Letters

Staff Participants – Focus Groups

From Researcher: I. Alex Abramovich

Date: __________________________

Dear Staff at (Insert name of shelter)

Thank you for considering participating in or contributing to my research study. I am a Doctoral student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am doing this research as part of the requirement for my Doctoral degree. I will also be drawing from this data for publication and conference presentations. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing and to decide whether or not to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Dr. Burstow at (416) 978-0887 or me (the researcher) Alex Abramovich, at (416) 560-0665.
The name of this research project is: “No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”

The nature and purpose of the research is to take a closer look at the anti-oppression training that staff members in the shelter system receive and to allow staff to identify any gaps in training and training needs that they have. The outcome of this research is intended to help staff feel more equipped and prepared to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia. As well, to identify any gaps in the anti-oppression training received and to make recommendations to fill these gaps.

The number of participants is 3-5 per focus group. There will be one focus group in each shelter. The total number of participants is 9-15.

What, essentially, I am doing is conducting 3 focus groups with frontline staff from 3 different shelters to learn more about the anti-oppression training that staff members receive, as well as to allow staff members to identify any gaps in training.

The reason that I am inviting you to participate is because I want to hear about your specific experiences and because your input can help make a difference.

Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in one focus group discussion with approximately 3-5 of your colleagues. You will be asked to share your knowledge and experiences regarding anti-oppression training and your feelings of preparedness or lack of preparedness to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. You
will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire with questions focusing on your length of employment, previous work experiences in the shelter system, etc.

To give you more information, you will be one of approximately five people (your colleagues) in a focus group discussing the anti-oppression training you have received and how it has been helpful, as well as any areas for improvement that you have noticed.

The duration of the focus group is approximately 1.5-2 hours. The focus group will take place at your workplace on a mutually agreed upon date and time.

The group as a whole will be audio-taped. I (the researcher) will be facilitating the group. Enclosed please find examples of questions, which I will be asking, as well as the questionnaire you will be asked to fill out. Pseudonyms will be used for confidentiality purposes and other information that leaves you vulnerable to being identified will be eliminated. Focus group members are asked to respect the confidentiality of others. However, I cannot guarantee that other members of the group will respect this request given that it will be a small group and everyone will know each other. I will be writing observations on the group, using pseudonyms and pseudonyms will appear on the transcripts and in the final research project. Once the audio-tapes of the focus groups have been transcribed, the original or raw data will be stored in my private, password-protected computer.

Only I will have access to this raw data. Identifying codes that could connect you or your organization with pseudonyms provided will also be stored in my private, password-protected computer. The timing for the destruction of the tapes and/or raw data is 5 years.

You have the right to withdraw at any time, including after the completion of the focus group and you may decline to answer any questions.
As is clear from the foregoing, I will be taking measures to protect your confidentiality. Potential limitations in my ability to ensure your confidentiality and privacy are that in the highly unlikely event that staff members who do not participate in the focus group may be able to identify their fellow colleagues in the final report and I cannot guarantee that participants in the focus groups will respect the confidentiality of others given that it will be a small group and everyone will know each other.

While there will be no compensation, potential benefits which you might derive from participating are that you will have a chance to reflect on and share your experiences with anti-oppression training in the workplace. This can be helpful in the development of improved future anti-oppression training for all staff, which can lead to safer spaces for LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

Potential harm if any is extremely minimal and involves the risk that you may disagree with the findings of this study and that your colleagues may breach confidentiality.

Below, there is a place for you to sign to give your consent, should you decide to do so. There is also a place for you to add any stipulations. Should you decide to participate, please return one signed and dated copy to me and keep the other for your reference.

All participants will receive a summary report of the research findings.

Thank you.
Sincerely,

(Insert signature)

Address:

Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

252 Bloor St. West, 7-242, Toronto ON, M5S 1V6

Phone:

(416) 560-0665

To Be Completed by People Choosing to Participate

I have read through this document. I understand and am satisfied with the explanations offered, feel that my questions have been addressed, and agree to participate in the ways described. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:
Consent Letter to Administrators/Shelter Providers

From Researcher: I. Alex Abramovich

Date: __________________________

Dear: (Insert name of shelter)____

Thank you for considering giving me permission to conduct my research project at your organization. As I noted in our first contact, I am a Doctoral student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am doing this research as part of my Doctoral research study. I will also be drawing from this data for publication and conference presentations. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing, and to decide whether or not to give permission for me to conduct my research at your organization. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants will be free to withdraw at any time. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Dr. Burstow at (416) 978-0887 or the researcher Alex Abramovich, at (416) 560-0665. Both participants and the organization will receive summaries of my research findings, upon request.
The name of this research project is “No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”

The nature and purpose of the research is to take a closer look at the anti-oppression training that staff members in the shelter system receive and to allow staff to identify any gaps in training and training needs that they have. The outcome of this research is intended to help staff feel more equipped and prepared to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia. As well, to identify any gaps in the anti-oppression training received and to make recommendations to fill these gaps.

The number of participants is 3-5 per focus group. There will be one focus group in each shelter. The total number of participants is 9-15.

How I am choosing participants is by providing a flyer of my research study to all non-managerial frontline staff members who will have the option to respond to my flyer if they wish to and participate in my study.

What, essentially, I am doing is conducting 3 focus groups with frontline staff from 3 different shelters (one focus group in each shelter) to learn more about the anti-oppression training that staff members receive, as well as to allow staff members to identify any gaps in training.

What the participants are doing is participating in an approximately 1.5-2 hour long focus group and sharing their knowledge and experiences regarding anti-oppression training and their feelings of preparedness or lack of preparedness to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system. Participants are also being asked to fill out a short
questionnaire with questions focusing on their length of employment, and previous work experiences in the shelter system, etc.

What I am asking from you or your organization is to give your staff member’s permission to take part in my research and to allow me to run the focus group in a private office in (insert name of shelter).

As well, if you can please email my flyer to your staff members and post it in a common area shared by staff.

As is clear from the forgoing, I will be taking measures to protect participants’ confidentiality and privacy. Potential limitations on my ability to ensure confidentiality and privacy are in the highly unlikely event that staff members who do not participate in the focus group may be able to identify their fellow colleagues in the final report and I cannot guarantee that participants in the focus groups will respect the confidentiality of others given that it will be a small group and everyone will know each other.

While there is no compensation, potential benefits to participants are that they will have a chance to reflect on and share their experiences with anti-oppression training in the workplace. This can be helpful in the development of improved future anti-oppression training for all staff, which can lead to safer spaces for LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

Potential benefits to your organization are that I will identify any gaps in the anti-oppression training, as well as staffs’ feelings regarding their preparedness to deal with homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system, I will also make concrete recommendations on what staff have identified as their needs in training and in feeling well equipped to deal with these situations.
Potential harm to the participants is extremely minimal and involves the risk that they may disagree with the findings of the study or their colleagues may breach confidentiality.

Potential harm to your organization is also extremely minimal and may involve a conflict between my findings and your organization’s views, as well as the risk that your organization may disagree with the findings of my study.

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the letter to participants, which I am providing for information purposes. Below, there is a place for you to sign to give administrative consent. There is also a place to add any stipulations. Should you decide to give your consent, please return one signed and dated copy to me and keep the other for your reference.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Insert signature)

Address:
To Be Completed by Administrator Providing Permission

I understand what is being asked. I am satisfied with the explanations provided, have the authority to authorize to give the administrative consent requested, and am giving it. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are

_____________________________ (Signature)

_____________________________ (Printed Name)

_____________________________ (Date)
Consent Letter to Youth Participants - Interviews

From Researcher: I. Alex Abramovich

Date: ______________________

Thank you for considering participating in or contributing to my research study. I am a Doctoral student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am doing this research as part of my Doctoral research study. I will also be drawing from this data for publication and conference presentations. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing and to decide whether or not to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Dr. Burstow at (416) 978-0887 or me (the researcher) Alex Abramovich, at (416) 560-0665.

The name of this research project is: “No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”

The nature and purpose of the research is to learn about the ways that the shelter system has let you down and the kinds of problems and barriers that you have run into in the shelter system.
What, essentially, I am doing is conducting 8-10 one-on-one interviews with LGBTQ youth between the ages of 16 and 26 years old. The main purpose of these interviews is to identify the problems experienced by LGBTQ youth in the shelter system.

The reason that I am inviting you to participate is because I want to hear about your specific experiences and because your input will help make a difference.

Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in one interview with me.

You will be asked to share your knowledge and experiences regarding what it is like for LGBTQ youth in Toronto’s shelter system.

The duration of the interview will be approximately 1 hour. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon location, date and time. The interview will be audio-taped. Pseudonyms will be used for confidentiality purposes and other information that leaves you vulnerable to being identified will be eliminated. Once the audio digital file of the interview has been transcribed, the original or raw data will be stored in my private, password-protected computer.

Only I will have access to this raw data. Identifying codes that could connect you with pseudonyms provided will also be stored in my private, password-protected computer. The timing for the destruction of the tapes and/or raw data is 5 years.

You have the right to withdraw at any time, including after the completion of the interview and you may decline to answer any questions.
As is clear from the foregoing, I will be taking measures to protect your confidentiality. Potential limitations in my ability to ensure your confidentiality and privacy are that in the highly unlikely event that shelter staff members will be able to identify you in the final report.

You will be compensated with ($5-10: insert when known) and 2 TTC tokens. Potential benefits from participating in this study are that you will have a chance to reflect on and share your experiences in the shelter system. This will be helpful in making Toronto’s shelter system a safer place for LGBTQ youth and in the development of improved future services for LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

This study has minimal risks. The greatest risk of the study is that you may feel sad or emotional after or during the interview from discussing your personal experiences in the shelter system. I will provide you with the name and telephone number of a counselling service that you can contact.

Below, there is a place for you to sign to give your consent, should you decide to do so. There is also a place for you to add any stipulations. Should you decide to participate, please return one signed and dated copy to me and keep the other for your reference.

All participants will receive a summary report of the research findings, upon request.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Address:

Department of Adult Education and Counselling
Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
University of Toronto

252 Bloor St. West, 7-242, Toronto ON, M5S 1V6

Phone:

(416) 560-0665
I have read through this document. I understand and am satisfied with the explanations offered, feel that my questions have been addressed, and agree to participate in the ways described. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

__________________________ (Signature)
__________________________ (Printed Name)
__________________________ (Date)
Consent Letter to Youth Participants – Digital Storytelling Project

From Researcher: I. Alex Abramovich

Date: ______________________

Thank you for considering participating in or contributing to my research study. I am a Doctoral student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am doing this research as part of my Doctoral research study. I will also be drawing from this data for publication and conference presentations. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing and to decide whether or not to participate. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Dr. Burstow at (416) 978-0887 or me (the researcher) Alex Abramovich, at (416) 560-0665.

The name of this research project is: “No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”
The nature and purpose of this digital storytelling, photovoice film project is to help formulate an even deeper understanding of the problems faced by the LGBTQ homeless youth population in Toronto.

This project will involve 3-5 LGBTQ youth (between the ages of 20 and 28 years old) with lived experiences of homelessness in Toronto. Each youth will be provided with a digital point and shoot camera and asked to take both still photos and video footage of the problems they have encountered in the shelter system, as well as a representation of where they have found support due to the problems they have encountered in the current shelter system. The short videos created by each youth will be used to generate a short film containing each youth’s individual story. The short film will help provide a broader context of each youth’s individual experiences in the shelter system and on the streets of Toronto.

The reason that I am inviting you to participate is because I want you to share your specific experiences and because your story will help make a difference.

Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in a series of meetings with 3-5 other youth and myself (the researcher). With my guidance and support, each youth will be provided with the appropriate tools to create a short video.

The duration of our meetings will range from 1-3 hours each time. We will all meet at mutually agreed upon locations, dates and times. Pseudonyms will be used (in the film and written report) for confidentiality purposes and other information that leaves you vulnerable to being identified will be eliminated. All of the original or raw data will be stored in my private, password-protected computer.
Only I will have access to the raw data. Identifying codes that could connect you with pseudonyms provided will also be stored in my private, password-protected computer. The timing for the destruction of the tapes and/or raw data is 5 years.

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

As is clear from the foregoing, I will be taking measures to protect your confidentiality. Potential limitations in my ability to ensure your confidentiality and privacy are that in the highly unlikely event that shelter staff members will be able to identify you in the final report or through the film. I also cannot guarantee that participants in the film project will respect the confidentiality of others given that it will be a small group and everyone will get to know each other.

You will be compensated with TTC tokens for transportation to and from our meetings. Potential benefits from participating in this study are that you will have a chance to reflect on and share your experiences in the shelter system in a creative and innovative way. This will be helpful in making Toronto’s shelter system a safer place for LGBTQ youth and in the development of improved future services for LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

This study has minimal risks. The greatest risk of the study is that you may feel sad or emotional from discussing and reflecting on your personal experiences coming out and in the shelter system. I will provide you with the name and telephone number of a counselling service that you can contact.
Below, there is a place for you to sign to give your consent, should you decide to do so. There is also a place for you to add any stipulations. Should you decide to participate, please return one signed and dated copy to me and keep the other for your reference.

All participants will receive a summary report of the research findings, upon request.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Insert signature)

Address:

Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

252 Bloor St. West, 7-242, Toronto ON, M5S 1V6

Phone:

(416) 560-0665
I have read through this document. I understand and am satisfied with the explanations offered, feel that my questions have been addressed, and agree to participate in the ways described. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

__________________________________ (Signature)

__________________________________ (Printed Name)

__________________________________ (Date)
Consent Letter to Executive Directors, Workshop Facilitators, City of Toronto Management, and Program Managers - Interviews

From Researcher: I. Alex Abramovich

Date: __________________________

Dear: (Insert name of potential participant)

I am a Doctoral student at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The name of this research study is “No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless”. I am doing this research as part of my Doctoral research study. I will also be drawing from this data for publication and conference presentations. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information that you will need to understand what I am doing, and to decide whether or not you would like to participate in an interview with me. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants will be free to withdraw at any time. Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact Dr. Burstow at (416) 978-0887 or the researcher Alex Abramovich, at (416) 560-0665. Both participants and the organization will receive summaries of my research findings, upon request.
The nature and purpose of my research is to learn more about the changes that need to be implemented in Toronto’s shelter system, in order for it to become safe, accessible, and supportive for LGBTQ youth. As well as to learn more about the needs that LGBTQ youth who are homeless have, and the needs of shelter staff in order for them to provide support to LGBTQ youth.

What, essentially, I am doing is conducting 5 interviews with shelter staff, shelter management, and a manager from the City of Toronto to discuss the knowledge gained in my research study regarding the youth participants’ experiences in the shelter system.

The reason that I am inviting you to participate is because I want to hear about your specific perceptions and knowledge and because your input can help make a difference.

Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in one interview with me. I will share with you the knowledge gained through my research regarding the youth participants’ experiences in the shelter system and you will be asked questions about their specific experiences. The duration of the interview is approximately 1-1.5 hours. The interview will take place at your workplace on a mutually agreed upon date and time.

You have the right to withdraw at any time, including after the completion of the interview and you may decline to answer any questions.

While there will be no compensation, potential benefits which you might derive from participating are that you will have a chance to reflect on and share your thoughts on the youth
participants’ experiences in the shelter system. This can be helpful in the making Toronto’s shelter system safer, more accessible, and more supportive for LGBTQ youth. As well as in the development of improved future programs for LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

Please take some time to think about the importance of this study and the impact your participation can have. If you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, or should you decide to participate, please contact me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

(Insert signature)

Address:

Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

252 Bloor St. West, 7-242, Toronto ON, M5S 1V6

Email:

ilonabramovich@gmail.com
Phone:

(416) 560-0665
Appendix G. Semi-Structured Focus Group and Interview Guides

i. Shelter Staff Focus Group Questions

1. Let’s start off with going around the circle and having everyone introduce themselves and one reason why you have decided to take part in this study.

2. What training (group, individual, reading, etc.) did you receive when you first started working here (and/or at other shelters)?

3. Have any of you received any additional training since you initially started working here?

4. How many of you have taken the workshops through the City of Toronto? Did you take these workshops together as a team or individually?

5. How many have taken the Anti-Oppression workshop? If not, was it because of the $67 fee?

6. Did you find it useful? Describe (was it particularly positive or negative).

7. Have you received any anti-oppression, anti-homophobia, or anti-transphobia training aside from the City’s workshop?

8. Have you recognized any areas for improvement in the anti-oppression training you have received?

9. What was good about the training?

10. Do you think that homophobia happens in the shelter system? Is it problematic?

11. Do you think that transphobia happens in the shelter system? Is it problematic?

12. Can you describe an experience that involved homophobia that you felt you (or a colleague) dealt with well because of the training you have received?

13. Can you describe an experience that involved transphobia that you felt you (or a colleague) dealt with well because of the training you have received?
14. Can you describe an experience that involved homophobia that you felt you (or a colleague) could have dealt with better or did not know how to deal with?

15. Can you describe an experience that involved transphobia that you felt you (or a colleague) could have dealt with better or did not know how to deal with?

16. Do you feel well equipped and prepared to deal with situations of homophobia?

17. Do you feel well equipped and prepared to deal with situations of transphobia?

18. What changes do you believe need to be implemented in the shelter system for it to be safer for LGBTQ youth?

19. Is there anything additional you wanted to add in that I did not ask you about?
ii. Youth One-on-One Interview Questions

1. How old are you?

2. How would you describe your gender?

3. How would you describe your sexuality?

4. Have you ever spent any time in: foster care, a shelter, a squat, detox (live in or drop in), a hospital, group home, prison, couch surfing, the street? How long were you at each place? How old were you?

5. Where do you live right now and how long have you lived there?

6. What is your main source of income?

7. Which shelters in Toronto have you stayed at?

8. What is your impression of the shelter system?

9. Do you feel that the shelter system has let you down in any way? Please describe.

10. What kinds of problems or barriers have you faced in the shelter system?

11. Have you ever dealt with homophobia or transphobia in the shelter system? Perpetuated by youth or staff?

12. Do you feel that shelter staff are prepared to deal with homophobic and transphobic situations?

13. Which services in Toronto have you found to be least homophobic and transphobic?

14. Which support services and/or shelters are you currently using?

15. Where do you go in a crisis situation?

16. What are your main needs from a support service?
17. What makes a support service helpful?

18. What types of programs do you look for in a service?

19. Are there any support services that you think you would benefit from that you would like to see in Toronto?

20. Do you think Toronto is a safe city for LGBTQ homeless youth?

21. Where do you feel safest?

22. Would you mind describing what a day in your life looks like?

23. How was your home life growing up?

24. Is your family homophobic or transphobic?

25. Are you still in contact with your family?
iii. Executive Director One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Can you please introduce yourself, a bit about your background, and what you do?

2. Why did you get involved in this type of work? How long have you been involved in this type of work?

3. Can you tell me a bit about (insert name of shelter)? (age group, demographics, faith-based?)

4. Where does (insert name of shelter) receive funding from?

5. I know that (insert name of shelter) must follow the Shelter Standards created by the City of Toronto, but how exactly does that work (how do you make sure staff are following the standards and how does the City know that the shelter is following the standards?)

6. Does (insert name of shelter) have its own policies and shelter standards, aside from the City’s? Who created those? When?

7. How does staff training work? (do staff have to pay out of pocket, is it monitored?)

8. Is there mandatory training? How is that tracked and recorded? Are there forms for this process?

9. Are there any other rules or guidelines for (insert name of shelter) created by the City of Toronto, that are not available on the website?

10. Are there any shelter guidelines posted on the wall in the shelter? What is the purpose of posting the guidelines (For youth? For staff? Required to?)

11. Are there any forms that need to be completed when staff witness fights or violence? Incidents involving homophobia and/or transphobia? Where did these forms come from?
12. Do you think that homophobia and transphobia are problems that youth face in the shelter system? Why do you or don’t you think it is a problem?

13. Do you think the shelter system is safe for LGBTQ youth?

14. Have you witnessed any homophobia or transphobia at (insert name of shelter)?

15. How do you think we can overcome this issue?
iv. Workshop Facilitator One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Can you please introduce yourself, your background, and what you do?

2. Can you tell me a bit about the workshop(s) that you facilitate for the Toronto Hostels Training Centre.

3. How did you get involved with the Toronto Hostels Training Centre?
4. How long have you been facilitating the workshop for?

5. Who created the workshop that you facilitate?

6. Why was the workshop created? (e.g. Were there any incidents leading up to it?)

7. Can you explain the process of creating such a workshop?

8. Are there any rules or guidelines created by the City of Toronto, that you must follow in order to facilitate the workshop?

9. Is your facilitation of the workshop being monitored by anyone?

10. From your experience of working with the shelter system, do you think that homophobia and transphobia are problems that youth face in the shelter system? Why do you or don’t you think it is a problem?

11. Do you think the shelter system is safe for LGBTQ youth?

12. Have you witnessed any homophobia or transphobia while training shelter staff/management?
13. How do you think we can overcome these issues?

14. Do you think there should be an “Anti-Homophobia” training workshop for shelter staff? Explain.
v. City of Toronto Complaint Line Manager One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Can you please tell me a bit about your background and the work that you do?

2. Can you tell me a bit about the shelter complaint line: when it first started; why it started (did a particular incident lead to its creation?); how does it operate?

3. Do you answer the calls/or is it a machine operated line?

4. If there is someone who answers the calls: what kind of questions do they ask callers? Are referrals made?

5. How do you keep track of what people are calling and complaining about?

6. What kind of investigation takes place when a complaint is made?

7. Is an investigation/follow-up made for every complaint?

8. Is the complaint line open to shelter staff as well & do they make complaints?

9. Are stats kept on how many complaints are made by shelter staff vs. shelter residents?

10. Is it one line for all City of Toronto shelters? Same line for youth and adults?

11. Do you receive more complaints from youth or adults?

12. Can you describe the general nature of complaints that are received?

13. Are complaints made about homophobia and/or transphobia?

14. Can you comment on the complaints made about homophobia and/or transphobia: Approximate number of complaints?; Are incidents generally between shelter residents?; Who are the majority of these complaints made by (staff, youth, adults, etc.)?

15. What rules or guidelines must be followed in order to operate the complaint line?

16. Who monitors the complaint line?

17. Can you see any reasons why both shelter staff and shelter residents might choose not to lodge complaints through the complaint line?
18. Is the complaint line the City’s main method of finding out/ knowing what kinds of problems are occurring in the shelter system?
vi. Toronto Hostels Training Centre (THTC) Manager One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Can you please tell me a bit about your background and the work that you do?

2. Can you tell me about the history of THTC: When it first started; Why it started; Were shelter staff receiving any training prior to the creation of THTC?

3. What is the process for deciding which workshops become mandatory for shelter staff? and who decides?

4. Is the process different for deciding which workshops become mandatory for shelter staff vs. managers?

5. Are mandatory workshops meant to be ongoing (how often) or one time?

6. Who reviews the evaluation forms given to attendees at the end of each workshop?

7. What kind of investigation takes place when a complaint is made on an evaluation form? Is an investigation made for every complaint?

8. Are the evaluation forms the main method that workshops are evaluated?

9. Can you describe the general nature of complaints or recommendations that are received on the evaluation forms?

10. Are complaints made about homophobia and/or transphobia occurring in the workshops? Can you comment on the nature of these complaints?

11. Has anyone ever expressed interest or recommended that Anti-Homophobia or LGBTQ 101 training be provided?

12. Has THTC ever offered Anti-Homophobia or LGBTQ 101 training?

13. What is the process of implementing a new workshop? (e.g. Does the facilitator contact THTC or does THTC contact potential facilitators?, Who reviews and approves workshop proposals?)

14. What kind of rules or guidelines must be followed in order to operate THTC?
15. Which are the most and least attended workshops?

16. Is there anything I did not ask you about that you would like to add in?
vii. Digital Storytelling Project One-on-One Interview Questions

1. Could you describe how being part of this project has been for you.

2. What did you enjoy most about this project?

3. What did you least enjoy about this project?

4. How does the information in the video illuminate what is needed in the current shelter system and what is needed in the current shelter system?

5. Who do you want to see this video?

6. Who don’t you want to see this video?

7. What do you hope this video will bring to the world or change in the world?
Appendix H. Youth Resources

1. LGBT Youthline (Free anonymous phone line for LGBTQ youth)
   1-800-268-9688 (4pm-9.30pm)

2. SHOUT Clinic (Community-based health care clinic for homeless youth, counselor’s available)
   168 Bathurst Street, Toronto, ON

3. Sherbourne Health Centre
   333 Sherbourne Street, Toronto, ON, (416) 324-5077

4. The 519 Community Centre
   519 Church Street, Toronto, ON, (416) 392-6874

5. Griffin Centre (Multi-service mental health agency providing support to youth)
   24 Silverview Drive  North York, ON, (416) 222-1153

6. Central Toronto Youth Services-CTYS (Community-based mental health service for youth)
   65 Wellesley Street East, Suite 300, Toronto, ON, (416) 924-2100

7. Kids help phone (For youth up to the age of 20 years)
   1-800-668-6868

8. The distress line
   416-408-HELP (4357)

9. Gerstein Centre – Crisis line
   (416) 929-5200
Appendix I. Short Film Samples

(2012) Teal’s Story. Abramovich, I.A. PhD study Digital Storytelling Project:
http://www ila6 com/videos/

Currently being distributed by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (CFDC):
http://www ila6 com/videos/

Appendix J. Selected Media coverage of my work (See www.ilona6.com for full media coverage)

J-1

Toronto’s homeless gay youth frequently face abuse in shelters: study | Toronto Star

Toronto’s homeless gay youth frequently face abuse in shelters: study

U of T researcher Alex Abramovich finds sexual minorities are often verbally or physically attacked by other shelter users, and staff lack training to respond.

Alex Abramovich has been researching the situations faced by homeless sexual-minority youth for his dissertation at the University of Toronto.

By: Eitan Weinberg | Staff Reporter
Published: Aug 12, 2013

Homeless youth who are members of a sexual minority often experience verbal and physical abuse in Toronto’s shelters — a problem staff aren’t properly trained to deal with, according to a University of Toronto researcher.

A city study recently revealed that almost one in five homeless youth are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer. U of T doctoral candidate Alex Abramovich is calling on the city to open a shelter specifically for that group, and to provide staff at other shelters with mandatory training for dealing with homophobia and transphobia among shelter users.

Young gay and transgendered people flock to Toronto from across the province, Abramovich said, driven from their homes by intolerant families and stifling small-town values. Many expect a warm welcome in the progressive metropolis.

But youth shelters can be harrowing places, he found during seven years of research.

“You know what they do in the shelters,” one queer youth told Abramovich.

“They tie you to the bed and beat the s--- out of you.”

Another gay youth Abramovich heard about from shelter staff was beaten up in the shower. “It was a very brutal beating, and it was because he was gay,” Abramovich said.

In his unpublished dissertation, Abramovich writes that the shelter system’s dangers are driving queer youth onto the streets. One told him of spending months living in a city park rather than braving the taunts and threats of physical attack in youth shelters.

“It’s become accepted that (shelters are) an unsafe place for LGBT youth,” Abramovich said.

There are no firm statistics on homophobic incidents in youth shelters, because victims rarely report them.

As one youth told Abramovich, “I’ve just been beaten up for being gay — the last thing I want to do is call the City of Toronto.”

Young people are widely reluctant to file official complaints, whether in hospitals, schools, or homeless shelters, said Maureen Lawless, executive director at the Gay Village community centre, gmj.

Though shelters are required to publicly display a complaint-line phone number, staff rarely explain how to lodge a complaint, Abramovich said.

“I spoke to 11 youth for this study, and not one of them had heard of this complaint line,” Abramovich said.

In his research, Abramovich detected a pattern of staff turning a blind eye to homophobic and transphobic incidents.

“The staff see it and don’t do anything about it,” Abramovich said. “They hear homophobic slurs and just walk away.”

He suggests this occurs because workers in the city’s 11 youth shelters haven’t been trained to detect prejudice against gay and transgendered people. One shelter staff asked Abramovich if the word “lesbian” was considered an insult.

Though shelter managers receive mandatory “anti-oppression” training, Abramovich sat in on one session and found it contained little information about homophobia.

“They do mention a tiny bit about homophobia, but it’s such a minor, minor part of the course,” he said.

Training on transgendered issues is “recommended” for shelter staff, but not mandatory.

Patricia Anderson, the city’s shelter, support and housing spokesperson, wrote in an email that, “in the City’s view, transgendered clients are the most vulnerable within an already vulnerable group.”

Apart from improved training, Abramovich wants the city to create a transitional housing facility specifically for LGBTI youth.

No such facility exists in Canada, though they are a familiar sight in U.S. cities such as New York and Chicago.

Anderson said the city would not take a position on a gay-specific shelter before September, when the department will release a fuller report on Toronto’s homeless population.

Lawless, who worked in the city shelter system before moving to gmj, supports a specialized youth shelter.

“There very clearly is a need, until queer folk are welcome” in other youth shelters, she said. “The city needs to step up and put a proposal out.”
Vulnerable LGBT Homeless Youth

Tuesday, September 10, 2013 | Categories: Checking In, Episodes: 0

Barresi Escobar, 19, goes to the far end of Brooklyn to sleep in an abandoned house with dozens of other homeless kids, cuddling for warmth. (AP/Ebetsu Matthews)

It's hard enough to be 18 year-old in school and homeless when you are transitioning from male to female in a shelter where the rules don't fit. Today, we're looking at the challenges facing LGBT youth who considered the most vulnerable of vulnerable homeless people.

Homeless LGBT Youth are failing through the cracks

"I was scared at first seeing the big shelter and the people in front of it. I wasn't like these people. Almost all LGBTQ people going to shelters have a fear of them, because it isn’t a matter of if it’s dangerous but just how dangerous it will be. It was just all a big blur of crappy experiences."

— Taoi Jacques, Former homeless transgender woman

20 - 30% of homeless Canadians between 16 and 24 years old, are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender.

Nowhere in Canada is there a shelter specifically for LGBT youth. Toronto is examining what to do because it's identified Transgender youth as the most vulnerable of the homeless, with many reports of discrimination and abuse at the shelters.

Taoi Jacques joined us in our Toronto studio to share her experience being homeless as a teenager and transitioning from male to female.

Alex Abramovich is working on his Ph.D. studying LGBT homeless youth at the University of Toronto.

The city of Toronto is expected to release a report next week on the needs of LGBT homeless youth.

New York's Homeless LGBT Youth

New York City officials have also grown aware that young LGBT people are disproportionately represented in the homeless population.

In 2012, Carl Siciliano founded New York City’s first shelter specifically for LGBT homeless youth. He’s the Executive Director of the Ali Forney Center.

This segment was produced by The Current's Catherine Katzfeld.
City of Toronto strives to improve the lives of homeless LGBT youth

BY BRADLEY TJRCOTTE
Published Fri, Oct 4, 2013 8:14 pm EDT

Researcher says ‘anything at all’ is helpful for overlooked population

A University of Toronto doctoral candidate is hoping the ‘emergency situation’ of homeless gay, lesbian and trans youth is now on city staff’s radar after a presentation to city councillors Sept 18.

Alex Abramovich has studied homelessness among LGBT youth for the past seven years and says councillors Kristyn Wong-Tam and Josh Matlow were most receptive to his presentation at a community development and recreation committee meeting concerning the housing stabilization fund last month.
Abramovich informed the committee of the three main findings his research uncovered.

The culture of Toronto’s shelter system has an overall normalized atmosphere of homophobia and transphobia, Abramovich says, and youth participants describe the system as a dangerous place because of widespread discrimination that’s rarely addressed.

“One youth who I spoke to spoke about living in a park for months because he didn’t feel safe in the shelter system,” Abramovich says, noting that his interviewee said he felt safer taking pills to help him sleep through the night, and outside in below-zero weather, rather than being in the shelter system because of discrimination.

Staff at Toronto’s shelters are not being trained on gay and trans issues, Abramovich says, adding that they aren’t prepared to intervene in situations of homophobia and transphobia.

“The 519 Church Street Community Centre provides trans access training, which is a great start, but clearly, we need much more than that. We need ongoing monitoring of training as well,” he says.

Abramovich also told the committee that his data shows “major discrepancies that exist between the rules and policies that have been created by the City of Toronto and what is actually done in shelters.”

Staff and management at the city’s shelters alternate between following and not following the rules, he says.

He cites examples in which trans and gender-nonconforming youth are often denied access to shelters based on their gender identity, noting that shelter workers struggle the most with issues around access to services for trans people.

Another area in need of a major overhaul is the shelter system’s complaints procedure, he says.

“The city receives the least amount of complaints in the youth sector. There have been no known complaints in the youth sector in relation to transphobia or homophobia dating back to 2009. But my study confirmed frequent incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system. The lack of formal complaints lodged by youth is due to youth not being aware of the complaints process,” he contends.
Abramovich ended his presentation by pointing to the final chapter of his dissertation, which contains policy and practice recommendations to improve the shelter system for LGBT youth.

The housing stabilization fund is a $3.7 million fund earmarked to improve the lives of priority populations, including "at-risk seniors and aboriginal households."

The standing committee of community development and recreation made a recommendation to add gay, lesbian and trans youth to the list of priority populations.

"I specifically did ask that the staff consider the LGBT population a priority population," Wong-Tam says. "I don't anticipate that there will be any debate around that."

The community development and recreation committee has asked Phillip Abrahams, the general manager of the shelter, support and housing administration, to report to the committee on Oct 28 to outline how the allowance "will be designed to meet the needs" of these populations "consistent with the findings of the most recent Street Needs Assessment."

Patricia Anderson, manager of partnership development and support for the city’s shelter, support and housing administration division, points to the street-needs assessment as evidence the city is working to improve conditions for gay, lesbian and trans homeless youth.

The city will address safety and accessibility issues through the delivery of staff training and workshops, improve shelter standards and reform the complaints process "to ensure LGBTQ clients receive the support they are entitled to," Anderson says.

"The staff report also speaks to the development of new partnerships with community organizations working with LGBTQ youth," she says. "This builds on funding relationships the city already has with such organizations as the 519 Community Centre and Sherbourne Health Centre. The focus of the three projects already in place is to improve access to safe shelter and housing for LGBTQ youth through such initiatives as training for housing workers, housing providers, social work students, social service staff, and staff in the Toronto shelter system."
These projects, funded through the federal government’s Homelessness Prevention Strategy, will address employment, making workplaces trans-inclusive, increasing resilience and self-sufficiency among LGBT youth, and addressing practical and immediate needs, Anderson adds.

Wong-Tam, who is a lesbian, acknowledges that while the city was aware of the crisis regarding homeless gay, lesbian and trans youth before Abramovich’s speech, she appreciates Abramovich’s findings and plans to meet with him to discuss his recommendations.

“It really reinforced what the staff was already reporting in their findings. I don’t think that it hurts ever to raise those issues at city hall,” Wong-Tam says. “We live in an environment and work in an environment that is extremely heterosexist. We assume everyone is straight. Often the political leaders do not have LGBT issues on their radar. So I think it was very helpful for the councillors to hear that message reinforced, that this is a population that needs attention.”

Wong-Tam says she has spoken with various shelter managers and executive directors who are “very keen to learn more.”

The fact that homeless gay, lesbian and trans youth are soon to be a priority is a “step in the right direction,” Abramovich says, adding “anything would help” because “this is a group of youth that they don’t even consider for anything.”

Abramovich will be in Ottawa Oct 29 to present his findings at the National Conference to End Homelessness.
Toronto moves closer to creating a homeless shelter for LGBT youth

BY ANDREA HOUSTON
Published Thu, Dec 5, 2013 4:16 pm EST

New research identifies urgent need for better LGBT sensitivity training in existing facilities
Groundbreaking research is helping to convince councillors and staff at city hall that Toronto needs a shelter specifically for homeless LGBT youth.

At the Dec. 4 committee for community development and recreation, University of Toronto doctoral candidate I Alex Abramovich, who has been studying homelessness among LGBT youth for the past seven years, explained that the situation is bleak for LGBT homeless youth, particularly trans youth, in Toronto. His study, which will be released in March, finds queer youth feel unsafe and unwelcome at most shelters.

Abramovich helped Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam draft a motion to create a new working group. The motion, which passed, compels councillors to reform the shelter system to make sure it’s free of oppression and ensure staff members are trained in responding to trauma, Wong-Tam says.

“The working group will look specifically at homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system and report back in the second quarter of 2014,” she says. “The working group will also report back on the feasibility of creating an LGBT youth shelter.”

The group will include Abramovich, shelter service providers, researchers and experts. Shelters and organizations taking part include Covenant House, Planned Parenthood, the Wellesley Institute, Homeless Hub, the Sherbourne Health Centre, the AIDS Committee of Toronto and St Michael’s Hospital.

After the group completes its work, it will report back to the committee. Wong-Tam says she then hopes to include a funding request for an LGBT youth homeless shelter in the 2015 budget. It would involve city money combined with community fundraising, she says, noting that while it’s too early to comment extensively on costs, the best-case scenario involves using an existing city-owned facility. “Then all we would need to deal with is legal costs, construction improvements and capital modifications,” she says.

Abramovich identified key problems in Toronto’s emergency shelter system that make shelters unsafe and inaccessible for LGBT youth —
problems that he says could be fixed right now. One example is the shelter paperwork, which forces youth to choose whether they are “male” or “female.”

According to the "Toronto Shelter Standards" report, all people have the right to shelter regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It also states that service providers must accept that gender is defined by the individual seeking service.

"However, my PhD study revealed that this is actually not the case,” Abramovich says. “Shelter workers struggle most with issues around access around trans people, and most trans people I spoke to feel safer on the streets than they do in the shelter system. This is due to transphobia in the shelter system and staff not knowing how to respond to these issues.”

Councillor Josh Matlow spoke passionately about the need for more protection, safety and support for the city’s most marginalized people.

"Are we treating this issue different than we would if a disaster hit Rosedale or Forest Hill?” he asked. “If something big happened in one of the city’s more affluent areas, there would be a disaster plan created that night. The media would be all over it.”

Abramovich says city staff are well aware of the barriers faced by trans people, but they have yet to take action. Some city staff members even described access to the shelter system as a basic human right. “[City staff] cannot guarantee every shelter is accessible to trans people because shelters don’t know what to do when a trans person walks in the door,” he says.

Community agencies like the 519 Church Street Community Centre offer comprehensive training for shelter staff. But, Abramovich says, the city has not made this training mandatory.

“We need mandatory training,” he says. “We need cultural competency training. We need training around language and pronouns and anti-homophobia training. It may come as a surprise to learn there is no mandatory basic anti-homophobia training.”
Frontline shelter staff get mandatory anti-oppression training, but that focuses mainly on racism and sexism, he says. "That is absolutely important, but they need the full picture. The training must be made mandatory. People who are homophobic and transphobic will not voluntarily take anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia training."

"These are really basic things," he says. "It angers me that I have to keep coming here and do this. It's almost 2014 and we are still talking about whether there should be basic anti-homophobic training for shelter staff. It is absurd to me."

Phillip Abrahams, general manager of shelter, support and housing administration, says Abramovich's research is powerful and convincing. He says that he is moving forward with making LGBT training mandatory for all providers and that it will happen "soon."

"While the [current] training is pretty good, and with good intentions, what we are finding out is that in practice, it's not as great as it should be," he says. "We need to make sure, and we are working with The 519 on this, to make sure that anti-oppression training is robust enough to get to specifics like LGBTQ sensitivity."

Abrahams says the current mandatory shelter anti-oppression training curriculum was developed in 2002.

"There wasn't as much sensitivity to LGBT issues as there is now," he says. "It's time to update."

"In general terms, staff needs to learn how to work with people who experience trauma. We understand that the homeless population is marginalized to varying degrees. Is it enough to meet people's needs? What we are hearing from people is that it's not," Abrahams says.

According to 2013 research by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network, about 25 to 40 percent of homeless youth between 16 and 26 years old are LGBT, compared to five to ten percent who identify as LGBT within the general public. "The large number of LGBTQ youth who are homeless tells us that a house is not always a loving home," it states. "Family conflict resulting from a youth
coming out as LGBTQ is a major contributing factor to youth homelessness."

Abramovich is also critical of the complaints process within shelters. “Youth are not being made aware of this process when they enter the shelter, during intake, and most of the youth I spoke to didn’t even know there was a complaint process. Even when told about it, many said they wouldn’t use it because it’s not accessible to them.”

The fewest complaints to the city about the shelter system come from the youth sector, he says.

“There were no reported complaints about homophobia and transphobia dating back to 2009, even though my study confirms frequent incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system, some that have occurred very recently,” he says. “So these incidents are just not being reported. The city doesn’t know, and if the city doesn’t know, it didn’t happen.

“After a youth has been beaten in a shelter due to an anti-LGBT hate crime, they aren’t going to phone or fax the city. That’s the last thing they will do.”

Abramovich says a Toronto shelter exclusively for LGBT youth is long overdue. “We have been talking about this for years, and still they won’t address these issues. LGBTQ youth should not have to spend another cold winter living in a park.”
Dire Gaps in Services for LGBTQ Homeless Youth

Research shows that Toronto needs to become more accessible, supportive, and safe for LGBTQ youth.

By Jess Davison

Photo by Jeff Caines from the Torontoist Flickr Pool

Toronto has long been known as something of a haven for the LGBTQ community. It’s become a destination for same-sex marriage ceremonies and celebrations, for Pride parties people talk about until the next one, and as a new home for many seeking a vibrant and welcoming place to live. But for homeless LGBTQ youth, it’s something of a different story.

“Due to Toronto’s LGBTQ-friendly reputation, LGBTQ youth frequently migrate to Toronto expecting to find support and safety, which unfortunately is not always the case,” says I. Alex Abramovich, a doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education whose research focuses on LGBTQ youth homelessness.

In Toronto—which, says Abramovich, is the homeless capital of Canada—the incidence of LGBTQ youth homelessness is on the rise, and agencies serving homeless youth have reported challenges in providing support to this population. Approximately 25 to 40 per cent of homeless youth are LGBTQ, compared to the approximately five to 10 per cent of the general population who identifies as such. Yet the City of Toronto does not operate a single shelter specifically for LGBTQ youth.

“We also know that many LGBTQ homeless youth feel safer on the streets than in shelters due to homophobic and transphobic violence in the shelter system,” says Abramovich. “Despite these findings, there are few specialized support services, and no specialized shelters or transitional housing for LGBTQ street involved youth in Canada.”

Abramovich recently completed a study that found a dire need for specialized services that create safe spaces for LGBTQ homeless youth, for stricter policies in the shelter system against homophobia and transphobia, and for more discussions.
about inclusion and acceptance among shelter providers and workers. The results of this study (which will make up Abramovich's dissertation) will also appear in a free ebook published by the Homeless Hub this spring that will focus on applications for the research findings.

Safety is a real concern for homeless LGBTQ youth, who face significantly higher rates of criminal victimization and daily incidents of homophobia and transphobia. LGBTQ homeless youth are also at greater risk for substance use, risky sexual behaviour, and mental health difficulties, and these risk factors are amplified by the lack of available support.

Abramovich's research also reveals that we don't properly understand the consequences of this state of affairs. For example, we do not know enough about how the lack of specialized services impacts this population's health, well-being, and length of time on the street; nor do we fully understand how experiencing intersecting or multiple oppressions—racism and homophobia, for instance—both on the streets and in the shelter system, impacts LGBTQ street involved youth.

“Professionals working with homeless youth, as well as the general public, need a solid understanding of the impacts of homophobia and transphobia on LGBTQ people's lives, and of the ways in which the LGBTQ community has been and still is marginalized and oppressed,” Abramovich says.

For all that we perceive our city as that safe haven, we actually do not have a thorough understanding of the connection between homophobia and homelessness, nor of the challenges of coming out and the struggles some face in forming gender and sexual identity.

While the City of Toronto does not have any shelters for LGBTQ youth, other cities have invested in these resources, something that Abramovich says we should learn from. Until then, our lack of specialized programs and a supportive atmosphere may have critical consequences.
Out in the cold

BY LEE MARSHALL
Published Wed, Dec 5, 2012 7:00 pm EST

Experts say government cuts have created a ‘crisis’ for homeless queer youth

Drastic budget cuts in Ontario will make life more dangerous for homeless queer youth this winter, experts say.

The province’s Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit will end in January 2013. The $114 million benefit supports 200,000 individuals a year, including youth living in unhealthy or abusive home environments. Ontario will give $62.6 million to municipalities so they can address emergency housing at a local level — but this is only half of what the province currently allocates for the benefit.

The cut coincides with an exploding need for housing assistance in
Toronto. Evergreen Yonge Street Mission, a Toronto charity, helped 811 people find housing in 2011, up from 213 people in 2010. Fourteen youth shelters in the city have a total capacity of 525 beds. But a report from Covenant House, a downtown youth shelter, estimates that 1,500 to 2,000 youth are homeless on any given night in Toronto.

Alex Abramovich, one of the only Canadians studying queer youth homelessness, says “cutting this benefit is a very very bad idea.” Approximately 25 to 40 percent of homeless youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans, and “it is a crisis that is definitely on the rise,” Abramovich says. This estimate doesn’t include the “hidden homeless” who avoid shelters or queer youth who are afraid to come out due to violence in the system. An American study from 2011 estimates that as many as one in four lesbian or gay teens are homeless.

A number of day programs provide food, healthcare and support for Toronto’s homeless queer youth, but Abramovich says they still need a specialized shelter. “LGBT youth avoid the shelter system because it is an extremely dangerous place for them...This benefit is helping them maintain some sort of housing or helping them stay away from a system which they have said is dangerous. Cutting this benefit is going to make it even more dangerous for them.”

Teal-Rose Jaques, 23, is a trans woman who left home when she was 18 years old. Jaques was in the shelter system for five years and says that staff at one shelter wouldn’t recognize her chosen name, making it difficult to receive phone calls. They also didn’t let her go to the dining room wearing feminine clothing.

Beyond feeling unwelcome, Jaques didn’t always feel safe. She found that an X had been cut with a knife on the Positive Space sticker on her bedroom door. She was called a “fag” and was verbally threatened by another resident. Staff did not respond to either incident, she says.

Jaques is much happier living in her own apartment. “There is no way that I would have been able to get the apartment that I’m in now without Start Up,” she says.

She also used benefit money to buy a computer so she could attend school. This summer, she graduated from George Brown College.

Evergreen housing worker Victoria Clarke says that cutting the benefit will be “catastrophic” for all street youth. Clarke wants the community to participate in the fight against homelessness. Even as little as $3 for transportation will help. Clarke sees between 12 and 17 clients a day but has only 10 transit tokens to hand out. This means half her clients have no way to get to meetings with potential landlords.
Beyond financial support, Clarke thinks street youth need more compassion because many are victims of severe abuse and simply have nowhere else to go.

The Spectrum Youth Needs Committee launched an initiative to build a shelter for homeless queer youth in 2010, but the project has been on hiatus for a year. Michael Erickson, a former NDP candidate for Etobicoke-Lakeshore who led the initiative, says he hopes to revisit it in the new year.

Meanwhile, this summer, Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti, who leads Toronto’s Homelessness Task Force, announced plans to shut down the shelter system and force homeless people off the streets and into transitional housing. “When it comes to talks about opening up a specialized shelter, I think people are really reluctant to be open to these ideas – because of these plans,” Abramovich says.

Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam (Ward 27) says the cuts are “very problematic” and a “grave concern.” But she says the city will champion specialized transitional housing over a specialized shelter.

Wong-Tam says transitional housing is more economical and has a more lasting effect on the community. She is “very, very supportive” of working with the community to provide specialized transitional housing once the real estate and operating funds have been secured.

But this winter, queer youth will be out in the cold.

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opinion & features

A dangerous life

October, 2012 | Peter Carlyle-Gordge

The precarious existence of Toronto’s homeless LGBT youth

Being homeless in a big city is not a pleasant prospect. Being homeless and gay, lesbian or trans is even worse. Toronto, which is often a magnet for LGBTQ youth from across Canada and the world, does have youth shelters. But now their future is in question as city council ponders closing some of them.

Alex (Ilona) Abramovich of the University of Toronto got involved in studying youth homelessness as a result of a personal difficult coming-out experience. Abramovich says the current homelessness support system does not meet the needs of LGBTQ youth, who often face targeted violence and rejection within the shelter system.

According to Abramovich, an estimated 25 to 40 per cent of homeless youth in Toronto may be LGBTQ and their needs are just not being met. There are about 1,500 to 2,000 homeless youth aged 16 to 29 in Toronto and about 55,000 across Canada.

Homophobia and transphobia are serious problems and Abramovich would like to see a youth shelter specifically designated for LGBTQ youth so that their needs can be better met. Better staff training at shelters to make them more sensitive to the obstacles and threats LGBTQ youth may face is also necessary. So far, Abramovich’s study has found a lack of political will to offer more focused services to LGBTQ youth, despite the great numbers of queer youth who end up in shelters after coming out of the closet and being kicked out by parents or guardians.

And now, even without adapted supports, Toronto’s LGBTQ homeless population may face additional barriers. The City of Toronto directly operates nine of the 57 local shelters. Coun. Giorgio Mammoliti, chair of the city’s Homelessness Action Task Force, recently proposed moving homeless people off the streets and into transitional housing, by force if necessary. He also wants to close Toronto’s shelters and replace them with transitional housing, a suggestion that infuriates Abramovich, who says it will just make the situation worse for LGBTQ youth.

The LGBTQ youth may be homeless because their families have rejected them when they first came out. But being out in a homeless shelter can also be dangerous and stressful, since homophobia and transphobia are quite common. Abramovich’s research and that of others has shown a high proportion of queer homeless youth report feeling safer on the streets than in shelters due to the homophobic and transphobic violence that occurs in the shelter system. Preliminary data from Abramovich’s study indicates that the issue of homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system is much greater than most people think.

Several key themes that emerged from Abramovich’s research include the need for shelter staff to receive anti-homophobia training, as well as LGBTQ terminology training. “The system needs to evolve because youth needs are
complex," Abramovich says. "Besides needing support to counteract homophobia there is need for training and support on many other issues, including HIV, harm reduction, legal issues and much more. The present system assumes that one size fits all and it simply does not."

"Some staff thought such training would be helpful, though some also thought they had no need of it," Abramovich says. "Another key issue is the complaint mechanism if someone is threatened, bullied or assaulted. A lot of the youth don’t even know they can make a formal complaint and some won’t complain anyway because it may cause them trouble. They have a sense of pride and want to fit in and appear to be tough."

Abramovich says street life is stressful enough and it shouldn’t be exacerbated by having LGBTQ youth feeling unsafe in the shelter system, whether through bullying or outright violence from homophobic shelter residents. "A shelter may have specific beds set aside for trans youth, but they may not use them because they’re afraid of being so obviously identified in a shelter where transphobia could be an issue."

The first stage of Abramovich’s research examined the adults who work in the shelter system and focused on the training they have received, their levels of preparedness in dealing with situations of homophobia and transphobia, and how the shelters operate. The second stage identified the problems faced by LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto and explored how the shelter system has let them down and examined their everyday experiences within the system.

Despite many hurdles, Abramovich is still hopeful that change will occur. "Although there is a huge lack of support for LGBTQ homeless youth in Toronto, there are a few drop-in programs that are LGBTQ-positive for homeless youth," Abramovich says. "So, while there are no specialized shelters for this population of youth, there are a few meal and arts programs. And while there are numerous staff members who claim that homophobia and transphobia are not issues in the shelter system, there are also staff who very clearly see these issues and support the idea of specialized programming."

You can find out more about Abramovich’s research at: http://www.ilonas.com/press.php (http://www.ilonas.com/press.php)

– Peter Carlyle-Gorde is a Winnipeg-based freelance writer
Toronto offers little support for LGBT homeless youth

BY JOHN BONNAR | SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

I recently interviewed J. Alex Abramovich for rabble.ca about the lack of support for LGBT homeless youth in Toronto.

J. Alex Abramovich is a Doctoral Candidate in the Adult Education and Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education-University of Toronto.

Alex’s research focuses on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ) youth homelessness in Toronto.

Alex is currently investigating the changes that need to be implemented in the Toronto’s shelter system in order for it to become safer, more accessible, and more supportive for LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

John Bonnar: Why are so many LGBT youth still rejected and kicked out the house when they reveal their identity to their parents?

J. Alex Abramovich: As a society we are encouraging youth to be who they are and come-out, consequently, youth are coming out at younger ages than ever. Nonetheless, homophobia and transphobe are still significant problems in society, schools, and people’s
Toronto offers little support for LGBT homeless youth | rabble.ca

homes. Family conflict resulting from a youth coming-out as LGBTQ is a major contributing factor to youth homelessness. Oftentimes, when youth come-out to their families they are faced with abuse and neglect, and the streets become a safer place than home.

The high prevalence of LGBTQ youth homelessness tells us that it is quite easy to become homeless, especially when you are young and coming-out to an unsupportive family, which is often the case. Not enough people understand the complexities of coming-out and forming one’s gender and sexual identity, and how often homophobia and transphobia is what ‘kicks’ youth out and/or forces them to leave their homes to the streets.

JB: With anywhere between 25 per cent and 40 per cent of homeless youth identifying as LGBT, why are there virtually no LGBT-specific youth services in Toronto?

IAA: Sadly, I have been asking this question for a very long time.

Firstly, in recent years, there has been extensive research in the area of youth homelessness both in Canada and internationally; however, little is known about LGBTQ youth homelessness.

Secondly, the City of Toronto has a complaints procedure in place for shelter residents and staff to file complaints. However, youth residents file the least amount of complaints and very rarely file complaints related to homophobic or transphobic violence, even though they have reported homophobic and transphobic occurrences as daily in the shelter system.

The lack of specific services for LGBTQ homeless youth may be due to minimal research in the area of LGBTQ youth homelessness, and because people may not necessarily understand the severity of the LGBTQ youth homelessness crisis in Toronto.

JB: Talk of creating an LGBTQ specific shelter has surfaced many times, yet nothing ever comes of it. Why not?

IAA: I would say this has much to do with a lack of funding and essentially a lack of interest from those in positions to make much-needed changes.

I encourage people to raise awareness to these issues by sharing knowledge, organizing campaigns, rallies, events, and encouraging others to do the same.

JB: What kinds of specialized services do we need in Toronto?

IAA: My research has revealed the need for a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth in Toronto. The youth I have spoken to and interviewed have discussed the need for spaces they can feel safe being themselves in and not have to worry about homophobic or transphobic residents and staff. These spaces should include: a place to sleep, hot meals, showers, gender neutral washrooms, clean clothes, subway tokens, and access to health resources.

JB: In sharp contrast to Toronto, New York City has shelters, transitional homes and, now, the state’s first permanent housing facility solely for LGBT youth. Why is a “queer friendly” city like Toronto so far behind New York?

IAA: Not a lot of energy has been put towards LGBTQ youth homelessness in Toronto, on
the contrary, a lot of effort and energy has been put towards issues like same-sex marriage. I think perhaps people tend to put their money and time towards issues that directly affect them; often forgetting the most marginalized ones in our communities and not realizing that issues like LGBTQ youth homelessness affect us all.

Moving forward, the City of Toronto could use the New York City LGBTQ shelters as a blueprint for creating a broader action plan to develop services and meet the needs of queer youth in Toronto.

JB: In a 2009 Toronto Star article you said, "There are programs for queer youth and programs for homeless youth. But there is very little geared to the specific needs of queer youth who are homeless. And that has to change." Has anything changed? If so, how? If not, why?

IAA: Very little has changed in the past 3 years. The current climate in Toronto around homelessness is not exactly supportive of opening new programs. The mayor's homelessness task force plans to get rid of the City's shelter system, meaning that the City of Toronto is in shelter shutdown mode, which would imply that there is little interest in opening new shelters. Unfortunately, I do not think that services for LGBTQ homeless youth are a priority for the City of Toronto.

Ultimately, we need to continue raising awareness to these issues so that more people are informed, and interested in providing support and making the necessary changes.

JB: In the same article you said that shelter workers told you they had little or no training in queer culture and often didn't feel equipped to deal with the complex issues these youth face. Why is that the case?

IAA: The shelter workers I spoke to had not received any anti-homophobia or anti-transphobia training, which would indicate that training is not always being monitored. Some shelter staff discussed taking an anti-oppression training workshop 10 years ago, when they first started working in the shelter system. The need for staff training to be ongoing was discussed and agreed upon by shelter workers. As well as the need for mandatory and ongoing anti-homophobia and anti-transphobic training for all staff in the shelter system.

JB: What kind of training is needed for staff in the shelter system in order to be well equipped to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia?

IAA: This is one of the questions that my PhD research will answer. In order for shelter staff to be equipped to deal with situations of homophobia and transphobia, the type of training that is needed includes: Anti-Homophobia - Anti-Transphobia LGBTQ Terminology and LGBTQ culture.

There should also be stronger guidelines for mandatory and ongoing training, in order to meet the changing needs and challenges faced by youth.

JB: Toronto's shelter, support and housing division funds 14 youth shelters with 525 beds. But you also advocate for a specialized shelter. What's the difference between the two?

IAA: I believe we need to hold the whole shelter system accountable and that all shelters should be safe for all youth, regardless of their sexual or gender identities. However, I also advocate for a specialized shelter for LGBTQ youth, which would, first and foremost be a safe space for LGBTQ youth to sleep and not worry about dealing with homophobic or transphobic violence. It would also include programs and resources that would meet the specific needs of LGBTQ youth.

It is important that we listen to the voices and needs of LGBTQ youth themselves and they have stated the need for a specialized LGBTQ youth shelter.

JB: Why are you interested in LGBTQ youth homelessness?

IAA: I have been interested in the issues of homelessness for as long as I can remember. Having been a young and queer person who dealt with a lot of homophobia, I quickly understood how easy it is to become homeless when you do not have a strong support network. Once I discovered the minimal support available to LGBTQ homeless youth in...
Toronto offers little support for LGBTQ homeless youth | rabble.ca

Canada, I knew I had to do whatever I could to change that.

I hope my research fills some of the gaps in knowledge around LGBTQ youth homelessness. I also hope that all levels of government, policy workers, shelter workers and directors, youth, and the general public will be inspired, educated and made aware of these issues by my work, and that we will become a more accepting and supportive city for all youth, regardless of their sexual or gender identities.
Appendix K. Youthline Float Photos

1/3 of homeless youth are LGBT

There are no emergency shelters for LGBT youth in Canada

Appendix L. Ethics Approval 1

UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 25688

December 14, 2011

Dr. Bonnie Burstaw
DEPT OF ADULT EDUC., COMMUN. DEV &
COUNS. PSY
OSIE/UT

Ilona Abramovich
DEPT OF ADULT EDUC., COMMUN. DEV &
COUNS. PSY
OSIE/UT

Dear Dr. Burstaw and Ilona Abramovich,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: January 21, 2011
Expiry Date: January 20, 2013
Continuing Review Level: 3
Renewal: 1 of 4

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research protocol through the Research Ethics Board (REB) full board review process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your protocol. Note that annual renewals for protocols cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible. If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Margaret Schneider, Ph.D.,
G.Psych
REB Chair

Dean Sharpe
REB Manager

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS
McMurrich Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 3H8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3773 • Fax: +1 416 946-3763 • ethics.review@utoronto.ca • http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administration/ethics/
Appendix L. Ethics Approval 2

Dr. Bonnie Burstow
OISE/UT: LEADERSHIP, HIGHER AND ADULT EDUCATION
OISE/UT

Ilona Abramovich
OISE/UT: LEADERSHIP, HIGHER AND ADULT EDUCATION
OISE/UT

Dear Dr. Burstow and Ilona Abramovich,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "No Fixed Address: Young, Queer and the Restless"

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Renewal: 2 of 4

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Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Dean Sharpe
REB Manager
Appendix M. Percentages of youth that became homeless as a result of their gender or sexual identify

Gender and Sexual identity leading to homelessness

* 60% (n=6), 20% (n=2), 10% (n=1)

Did becoming homeless have anything to do with your gender or sexual identity?

![Pie chart showing percentages of youth that became homeless as a result of their gender or sexual identity.]

Figure 3 Percentages of youth that became homeless as a result of their gender or sexual identify
Appendix N. List of organizations that participated

1. Blue Door Shelter
2. Youth Haven Shelter
3. Turning Point Shelter
4. Queen West Community Health Centre (Sketch and SHOUT Clinic)
5. The 519 Church Street Community Centre
6. Supporting Our Youth (SOY)
7. City of Toronto
8. Toronto Hostels Training Centre
Appendix O. Web visits graph from 2009 - 2013 (Google Analytics)

Spikes indicate conference presentations and media coverage

Figure 6 Web visits graph 2009 – 2013 (Google Analytics)
Copyright Acknowledgements
Endnotes

{i} The term ‘cisgender’ refers to people whose biological sex (male or female) matches their lived gender identity.

{ii} Numerous studies have clumped transgender people under the label sexual minority. While, gender identity and sexuality overlap, they are not the same. Gender identity refers to how one identifies one’s gender (male, female, genderqueer, etc.) and sexual identity refers to how one identifies whom they are sexually attracted to (lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, etc.).

{iii} Cisnormative can be described as the assumption that everyone assigned female at birth will identify as female throughout their lives and everyone assigned male at birth will identify as male throughout their lives (Bauer et al., 2009).

{iv} Eleven youth were originally interviewed for this study; however, one of the youth did not meet the study criteria, which was only discovered halfway through the interview. Therefore, her interview was eliminated from the study.

{v} A disjuncture can be described as people having different experiences of the same event, and a disconnect between what is actually happening versus what is supposed to be happening (Campbell & Gregory, 2008).
I would like to point out that it was not clear to me what this youth meant when she stated that she identifies as 2-Spirit, as she also identified herself as a white person. The 2-Spirit identity is culturally specific to First Nations people who identify as either having the spirit of both female and male, or LGBTQ (Urban Native Youth Association, 2004). First Nations people can either choose to identify as 2-Spirit or it is an identity that may be given by an Elder (Saewyc et al., 2008). Two-Spirit people have distinct needs from white LGBTQ people, for example, they may need to connect with 2-Spirit Elders, and have a greater need for programs that could reconnect them with their Aboriginal cultural traditions (Saewyc et al., 2008).