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Overrepresented, Underserved:
The Experiences of LGBTQ Youth in Girls Detention Facilities in New York State

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ABSTRACT

Among LGBTQ youth, queer women, transgender and gender non-conforming youth have been particularly marginalized in social science research, social service settings, and in the community, where they are especially vulnerable to violence and significantly more likely to become involved with law enforcement. This is particularly the case for queer young women, transgender and gender non-conforming youth of color and/or youth who are low-income. For my dissertation research, I conducted an oral ethnography with young adults, ages 18-25, who have been incarcerated in girls detention facilities in the juvenile justice system in New York State. The study design used the principles of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and was facilitated by a Community Advisory Board composed of practitioners, legal advocates, researchers, activists, and young people. Life History Interviewing was used to gain insight into participants' pathways prior to, and following their involvement with the juvenile justice system, in order to identify life choices, systemic barriers, experiences of violence and harassment in detention and elsewhere, and childhood and family history and events. Moreover, Life History Interviews allowed participants to delve richly into questions of how they negotiate their sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and race in relation to various contexts, relationships, and systems, over time. Interviews were analyzed using Carol Gilligan's *Listening Guide*. Findings from the study revealed themes related to *identity processes, the role of family acceptance and rejection in systems involvement, pipelines and revolving doors between and amidst child welfare, educational, and juvenile justice systems, the prevalence of interpersonal and state sanctioned violence in participants lives, and participants' tremendous capacity for resiliency and creative modes of collective and community based healing*. Findings suggest the profound importance of hearing LGBTQ young adults' own stories about their lives and experiences in the juvenile justice system. Findings also point towards the need to decriminalize young people's survival strategies, and to challenge the use of detention facilities and the rampant abuse of

power by law enforcement towards LGBTQ young people. This dissertation research draws upon my direct practice experience with LGBTQ youth in the child welfare system and as a queer activist.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
Chapter 3: Methodology	29
Chapter 4: Pathways and Identities.....	46
Chapter 5: Surviving Within, Surviving.....	82
Chapter 6: Implications	105
References.....	118
Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Guide	127
Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer	132
Appendix C: Final Interview Analysis	133

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I am indebted to the participants I spoke with for their generosity and openness in sharing their stories with me, a stranger, and for their trust in developing the intimacy and connection from which embodied narratives come into being. My hope is to justly and lovingly hold and convey their stories, and our co-created narratives, as a collective advocacy tool to illuminate the structural circumstances, systems of oppression, and oppressive systems within which lives and choices unfold and to which participants' personal agency and resilience speaks back. So much research into the experiences of both LGBTQ and juvenile justice involved youth has focused exclusively on individual behavior to the exclusion of contextual factors. A strengths based approach is particularly important, as research has simultaneously overemphasized individual deficiency and the impact of forms of oppression upon individuals without attention to the ways in which individuals are connected to communities and thriving. For this reason, I hope that I have succeeded in centering the thriving and vibrant community resources and corresponding wellness that young people spoke to as they shared their stories. This dissertation represents one piece of a larger collective of narratives that I hope will speak back to pathologizing and criminalizing stereotypes, and be part of a process of restoring dignity in the face of systemic and historical abuse and trauma.

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Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh and the greatness which does not bow before children.

—Khalil Gibran

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background, Statement of Problem, Purpose of Study

This dissertation project uses ethnographic research to explore the experiences of LGBTQ young adults who have previously been incarcerated in girls' detention facilities in the juvenile justice system in New York. Specifically, I have conducted life history interviews to explore young adults' pathways into and out of the juvenile justice system in New York and the tri-state area. The interviews also illuminate the intersections of these pathways with child welfare and educational systems, community policing practices, social service providers, peer and social support networks, family and kinship networks, youth organizing, and venues and spaces where participants experience community.

Within the already sparse body of research on LGBTQ youth's experiences in the juvenile justice system, the lives and experiences of queer or same sex practicing women and transgender people (hereafter referred to as trans) occupy a particularly marginalized place. Making these experiences visible necessitates engaging with people's own stories. A small number of mostly quantitative research studies have begun to explore the relationship between juvenile justice involvement, court processes, and same-sex attraction, gender non-conformity, and gender identity among young people who are placed in facilities designated as being "for girls."

In the last two years, three articles have been published that explore the relationship between school based victimization and life outcomes and pathways, paying unprecedented attention to the mediating roles of gender and gender identity. In the article "We've Had Three of Them," Angela Irvine (2010) discusses the findings from 2,100 surveys administered in six jurisdictions around the country, which indicate that 15% of youth in those juvenile justice systems identify as LGBT, are questioning their sexual orientation, and/or express their gender in nonconforming ways, despite the still prevalently held belief that few LGBTQ youth enter the

juvenile justice system. She found that 27% of self identified girls surveyed reported that they were LGBTQ, compared to only 8% of self identified boys, and came to the conclusion that lesbian, bisexual, questioning and gender non-conforming girls remain more invisible in these systems than gay, bisexual, questioning and gender nonconforming boys. She additionally confirms that these youth are more likely than heterosexual and/or gender normative peers to have entered the juvenile justice system because they ran away from home or because of status offenses such as school truancy. Finally, she notes youth's fear of reprisal from corrections staff, peers, and judges is one of many reasons why they may not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity.

In another study, Kathryn Himmelstein and Hannah Bruckner (2011), utilized the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a nationally representative, population-based sample, to demonstrate that nonheterosexual adolescents, particularly girls, are disproportionately sanctioned by schools and criminal justice authorities, despite the fact that they are not engaging in more law-breaking or transgressive behavior than their heterosexual peers. Noting the paucity of research in this area, Himmelstein and Bruckner argue that understanding and addressing these disparities is essential to ameliorating the social and health consequences associated with excessive school expulsions, arrests, and incarceration.

Finally, Caitlyn Ryan (2010) explored data from the Family Acceptance Project's National Survey of gender nonconforming young adults (21-25), and found that previous school based victimization due to actual or perceived LGBTQ status fully mediates psychosocial adjustment (i.e., life satisfaction and depression). These findings share in common their identification of schools as multifaceted sites of hostility towards LGBTQ youth in ways that make them more susceptible to poorer life outcomes, including juvenile justice involvement. Although useful in informing this research, it should be noted that these studies use a different framework than the one used for this dissertation research in their conceptualization of the intersections of sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and race.

Although these studies are important from a social epidemiological standpoint, they have not addressed the perspectives of the young people themselves. Moreover, no study has looked specifically at the experiences of queer and trans young people who have been in detention in girls' detention facilities. This study seeks to build upon and expand these findings by using qualitative research to cast light upon the nuances of identity and lived experiences for this specific group of individuals through their own words.

The central questions posed by my dissertation research are:

1) How do LGBTQ young adults who have been incarcerated in girls detention facilities in New York define, understand, and negotiate the contours of their gender identity and sexual orientation in relation to age, race and ethnicity and other aspects of identity; and, relatedly, how do they narrate identity “turning points?” Specifically, how do participants narrate intersecting aspects of their identity in relation to familial and institutional systems, contexts, and circumstances? What are the key life “turning points” or “significant moments” participants narrate as important to their understanding of their identities, particularly in relationship to juvenile justice involvement? And were there pivotal moments or survival needs that were associated with shifts in identity, orientation or expression?

2) What are the pathways into and out of the juvenile justice system for participants and how do these pathways intersect with other social service systems such as child welfare services? What role does family involvement and acceptance or lack thereof play in adolescent life courses and pathways into the juvenile justice system for young people? What have their experiences with law enforcement and others in the community been, and what were the legal processes and procedures preceding their placement within juvenile detention and the nature of the criminal charges brought against them? Were there key turning points on the pathways into and out of juvenile justice system?

3) How do participants understand and narrate their experiences within detention facilities in the juvenile justice system? What do they do see as appropriate solutions in terms of systemic change, changes in policing practices, in community practices, and in social service provision? From participants' perspectives, how are families, friends and other LGBTQ young adults affected by juvenile justice involvement?

This work draws on my direct practice experience with LGBTQ youth in the child welfare system and my relationships within LGBTQ activist communities. Throughout the research, I used life history interviewing to elucidate the nature and impact of systemic violence upon the lives and choices of participants as well as those aspects of community life and personal resiliency that facilitate their survival and enrich their lives. Interview transcripts were analyzed using the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al., 2003). Conceptualized through Carol Gilligan's early work on identity and moral development, the *Listening Guide* is a relational method that takes into consideration the multiplicity of voice and experience when analyzing and interpreting qualitative interview data. Grounded in psychoanalytic theory, the *Listening Guide* "draws on voice, resonance, and relationship as ports of entry into the human psyche," and consists of a series of steps that are intended to systematically interpret the many layers of voice contained within a person's expressed experience.

The larger systemic context of the research is the shifting responsibilities and arrangements between state and city agencies and their competing and contrasting agendas with regard to the mechanisms by which youth who interface with juvenile justice systems will be best serviced, housed, or rehabilitated. This discourse is shaped by organizational and community advocacy groups whose own perspectives on what systemic accountability would look like and what entities are best equipped and trusted to provide services to LGBTQ youth are varied and, at times, asynchronous. Underlying these discourses are the funding mechanisms – public and private – that ensure organizational survival and growth as well as state and city budgets and the vast ideological and political web in which they exist (Correctional Association,

2010). It is against this backdrop that many LGBTQ youth become entangled and ensnared in systems that narrate and dictate how they will live their young adult lives.

Financial crises and increased external pressure for accountability by and within juvenile justice systems in New York have resulted in multiple waves of reforms to streamline state and systems and the services provided. In 2007, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services began the first of dozens of youth prison downsizing and closures. In New York City, in 2010, the Mayor's office merged the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the city body that governs the child welfare system with the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), the city body that operated the city's secure and non-secure youth detention facilities. Under this new organizational arrangement DJJ became a subdivision of ACS, known as the Department For Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ).

In March of 2012, Governor Cuomo and the state legislature enacted the *Close to Home Initiative* through the New York State budget. As its name suggests, the initiative proposed a continued decline in use of upstate facilities for NYC youth, and use of either New York City run youth prison facilities, community -based alternatives to detention, and juvenile probation as an alternative to sending youth to state run facilities hours north, where it was difficult for family members to visit, and where mounting reports (federal, state, and individual) regarding excessive use of force in facilities were raising critical questions regarding whether placing youth in settings that put them at increased exposure to violence and trauma was in fact helpful to anyone (Correctional Association, 2012). This question is particularly relevant given all we know about the extent to which the lives of juvenile justice involved youth have likely been characterized by previous trauma and violence and massive, often multiple, forms of discrimination (Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009). As results of this study will reveal, participants' lives were commonly characterized by child welfare involvement, school based harassment, family rejection, and other features of the school to prison, and cradle to prison pipelines, experienced in unique ways by LGBTQ youth.

In their book, *Queer (In)Justice*, Joey Mogul, Andrea Ritchie, and Kay Whitlock argue that criminalizing tropes about queer and transgender people have become solidified within legal discourses, where they are repeatedly used to classify queer and trans folks within criminal cases. These tropes of criminality and deviance undergird juvenile correctional systems, policing, court-based processes, and social service provision, and have been tacked on to the bodies and lived experiences of LGBTQ young people. These tropes are also raced, classed, gendered, nationalized, and embedded in historical narratives about the place and worth of lives within the colonial project that has been the basis of U.S. nation building pursuits, and a continually unfolding national identity. Unfortunately, they remain the lens through which policy is shaped and articulated, social service systems are structured and funded, legal processes are carried out, and prison expansion is justified.

It is important to note that concurrent to the changing discourse around systems in New York within the last five years, a national discourse was emerging around increased attention to LGBTQ youth suicide and bullying. In the wake of this unprecedented media attention, organized LGBTQ youth expressed their own perspectives on their experiences. Dan Savage's *It Gets Better Campaign* caught fire and was simultaneously lauded and contested, both in its own right and for the incredibly widespread network of public service messaging it elicited from young people, LGBTQ adults, and an enormous number of celebrities and politicians (<http://www.itgetsbetter.org>). Many – young and old – have critiqued the *It Gets Better* campaign, for centering white, gay men's experiences across the lifespan. In the realm of youth activism, the *Make it Better* campaign emerged as a youth driven initiative that shifted focus to the need to *actively* make things better, rather than assuming that they do.

Insofar as scholarship is concerned, geographer and cultural critic Jasbir Puar (2012) responded with a series of speaking engagements and "Coda: The Cost of Getting Better," in which she argues that the discourses around queer youth suicide represented by the campaign are neoliberal and reproduce problematic assumptions not only about race, class, and gender,

but also about bodily health, debility, and capacity. She interrogates, for example, the framing of gay youth suicide as exceptional and of greater importance than Lauren Berlant's (2007) notion of slow death, "the debilitating ongoingness of structural inequality and suffering."

Notably, she argues:

For instance, how do queer girls commit suicide? What of the slow deaths of teenage girls through anorexia, bulimia, and numerous sexual assaults they endure as punishment for the transgressing of proper femininity and alas, even for conforming to it? What is the political and cultural fallout of recentering the white gay male as ur-queer subject?" (157)

In fact, participants' narratives speak to the urgency of expanding discourses about the experiences of LGBTQ youth in order to both center youth's own articulation of their experiences and assertion of their strengths without reproducing adultist assumptions. Additionally, consistent with Puar's analysis, participants' narratives underscore the need for more nuanced analysis to circumvent the hierarchization of experience and reproduction of other axes of privilege within queer and transgender youth's experiences; most notably, race, class, and gender.

Counterdiscourse

Decisions regarding the fate of juvenile detention facilities in New York have also been unfolding against the backdrop of increased recognition and organized resistance towards the mass incarceration of people of color, which has multiplied in the last several decades, largely due to the *War on Drugs* and increased use of *Broken Windows* policing (Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlock, 2011). The publication of Michelle Alexander's (2010) *The New Jim Crow*, in which she argues that the criminal justice system, while claiming to be colorblind, functions as a system of racial control that has left the majority of black men in urban centers under some form of correctional control and/or with criminal records that will follow them throughout their lifetime and bar access to basic civil and human rights, including the right to vote, to sit on juries,

and to be protected from discrimination in housing, employment, access to education, and public benefits. Embraced by scholars and community organizers, the text quickly became a fulcrum for discourse around the neocolonial features and functions of the modern carceral state.

The year 2011 saw the publication of three texts centering the ways in which mass incarceration uniquely affects low income queer and transgender people and queer and transgender people of color. *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex* (Stanley & Smith, 2011), *Queer (In)Justice*, (Mogul, Ritchie, & Whitlock, 2011) and *Normal Life* (Spade, 2011) are part of an activist scholarship trifecta that have galvanized robust dialogue and activism among queer and transgender activists and allies. A recently published piece, “Queering Prison Abolition, Now?”, placed the authors of these texts in conversation with one another (Stanley, Spade, *Queer(In)Justice*, 2012), where they addressed the national discourse around school bullying and queer and trans youth suicide that had recently emerged when the piece was published. Within the piece, anti-bullying measures were likened to “hate crime enhancements,” and recognized as drawing attention away from the ways in which violence is institutionally condoned and perpetuated and, instead, function through an “individual punishing” lens. Moreover, as with the relationship between hate crime legislation and the Prison Industrial Complex, anti-bullying measures may serve the function of expanding disciplinary mechanisms that primarily punish and limit educational opportunities for low income youth and youth of color, who already face the most policing and disciplinary action and expulsions, though afforded the fewest opportunities. Excerpted below is one conversant’s response to the moderator’s question “In the wake of the more recently reported queer and trans youth suicides anti-bullying legislation has gained much traction. While acknowledging the daily violence many youth face, how might a queer abolition analysis press on this conversation?”

Queer (In)Justice: What have we learned from hate crimes legislation? Are we safer? Is the violence diminishing? No. Anti-queer violence—

especially for queers of color (including immigrants and Indigenous people); queers who are poor, homeless, and low income; and transgender and gender nonconforming people—remains a depressingly consistent, though seriously underreported, feature of the political and social landscape and of efforts to place our safety in the hands of the very criminal legal system that is a major perpetrator of anti-LGBTQ violence. Law enforcement officials charged with enforcing these laws remain among the top categories of perpetrators of homophobic and transphobic violence, according to data collected by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs—including the ever-increasing number of armed police officers flooding our schools, particularly in communities of color, in the name of preventing violence, including violence against queer and trans youth. Standing with queer and trans youth requires us to push ourselves to imagine responses to homophobic and transphobic violence that place individual incidents within the broader contexts that inform them and that actually produce increased safety rather than increased punishment in our names.

My hope is that this research will join with other work to generate a more expansive and transformative lens that includes youth and young adult experience within juvenile justice systems and its many buttressing apparatuses, in the new politics of queer and transgender anti-prison work. Additionally, I hope that it will be of use to both community organizations that work or are operated by queer and trans youth and to social service providers and youth advocates, who infrequently encounter material related to working with LGBTQ youth, despite the fact that they are overrepresented in nearly every social service setting.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Queer and transgender youth, based on their legal age and status, are more vulnerable and often more easily silenced than many LGBTQ adults. In the introduction to *Queer Kids: A Comprehensive Annotated Legal Bibliography*, Sarah Valentine (2008) argues that queer youth “can face every sort of legal or non-legal problem that a queer adult may face while operating under the distinct handicap of their age” particularly with respect to dealing with verbal harassment and physical or sexual assault. In 2010 a cluster of suicides by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth and the surrounding media attention illuminated what academic research, community testimony, and other anecdotal evidence had collectively asserted since the mid-1990s: school bullying and harassment remain chronic and pervasive problems for LGBTQ youth, and the public health implications are dire (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Wright, 2008; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Wyss, 2004; D’Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberg, 2002).

The suicide of Rutgers University student, Tyler Clementi, in September 2010, after being cyberbullied by his roommate drew a media storm of attention to the issue of LGBTQ youth bullying and suicide, and ignited national discourse. Largely absent from this conversation was the recognition that increased risk for suicide is but one of many poor outcomes of relentless and uninterrupted bullying towards queer and transgender young people. Other issues include increased risk for substance abuse and HIV/STD infection (Garofalo et al., 1998); Hanlon, 2004; Saewyc et al., 2006) as well as school truancy and poor academic outcomes (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; O’Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Ryan & Rivers, 2003; Savin-Williams, 1994). These findings of heightened risk for LGBTQ youth exists in academic literature as a piecemeal collection of findings, and structural analyses of the systems of oppression that create the conditions for homophobic and transphobic bullying are lacking.

Recent research reveals that queer and trans youth are disproportionately represented among homeless youth populations (Cochran et al., 2002; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006) as well as in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Wilber, Reyes, & Marksemer, 2006; Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009). Although the pathways onto the streets and into the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are complex, it is clear that a lack of queer- and trans-affirming social services as well as a multitude of rejections by hostile family environments and peer networks substantially influence the entry of LGBTQ youth into these systems.

Moreover, the conflation of queerness and gender nonconformity with social deviance is a contributing factor to the institutional criminalization and community-level profiling of LGBTQ youth—particularly LGBTQ youth of color—that results in their disproportionate representation in the very institutions and child “protective” systems that are the most dangerous and hostile towards them (Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009; Mogul et al., 2011). In navigating their environments, state-involved LGBTQ youth face the daily dialectic of being shut out or unsafe within the context of family life, social and spiritual enclaves, and educational settings (Ragg, Dennis, & Ziefert, 2006; Mallon, 1998) even as the capacity of youth to survive and to actualize their voices and identities in these systems is a testament to their fortitude (Gwadz et al., 2006; Lankenau et al., 2005).

Despite these dire conditions, this chapter will indicate the possibilities for change through an examination of the extant literature, an identification of shared systemic biases between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and an assessment of policy options. Specifically, I argue that efforts toward change should always include supporting the considerable local and national organizing efforts of LGBTQ youths themselves (e.g., FIERCE at www.fiercenyc.org and Queer Youth Space at www.queeryouthspace.com) and honoring the fire behind the voices they sustain (Johnson, 2007). I also contend that, on a systemic level, services need to be revamped in order to accommodate the unique risk and resiliency factors of LGBTQ youth and their families, creating programs to identify and train LGBTQ-affirming foster

parents and refining the ability of social workers and attorneys to engage families of origin around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. Additionally, institutional responses should tailor programming to promote family reunification when appropriate and honor a vast array of family and kinship configurations. Finally, developing culturally responsive interventions demands that we identify and utilize research methodologies that honor listening and striving to level the power imbalances that characterize research processes, simultaneously we should honor LGBTQ youth and their families and support networks as experts in their own rights (Harper et al. 2007; Clatts et al. 2005).

Part I: LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care

LGBTQ adolescents face tremendous obstacles in the child welfare system. Older children in foster care, such as many queer adolescents, face barriers like decreased likelihood of being placed in a permanent setting or with a family; the stigma of child welfare involvement; and the increased risk for substance abuse and mental health issues that are connected to long-term out-of-home placement (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006). LGBTQ youth in care cope with additional discrimination and safety issues in and out of care, including disruption of foster family placements and increased distancing or conflict with families of origin related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as well as harassment and violence within congregate care facilities (Mallon 1998; Mallon, Aledort, & Ferrera, 2002).

Service providers, moreover, frequently lack sensitivity to the unique needs and aspirations of LGBTQ youth, making collaboration within and across systems challenging. This insensitivity also diminishes their capability in providing safe mental health, medical, and educational services. LGBTQ youth in care face multiple layers of discrimination and stigmatization, the psychosocial stress from which may place them at increased risk for substance use, sex work, and other activities related to daily survival (Ragg et al., 2006).

Underlying Bias and Barriers in the Child Welfare System

Safety, Visibility, and Stigma

Gerald Mallon (1998) describes three categories of child welfare–involved LGBTQ youth: (1) youth who are forced from their homes because of family of origin issues related to the discovery or disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity and who consequently enter the foster care system; (2) youth who leave, or are rejected or removed from, the homes of their family of origin for reasons that appear unrelated to their sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., sexual abuse, educational neglect, etc.) and that may or may not reveal themselves to be a by-product of sexual orientation or gender identity; and (3) youth who come of age and become aware of their sexual orientation or gender identity while in the foster care system.

Heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia pervade child welfare service provision and policy, resulting in a consequent invisibility of LGBTQ youth and, not uncommonly, a lack of acknowledgement by agencies and workers that there are, in fact, LGBTQ youth in their care (Mallon, 1998). Visibility, however, often results in outright hostility and discrimination by both workers and other youth (Berberet, 2006). The disproportionate rates at which LGBTQ youth in care are subjected to verbal and physical harassment as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity have been well-documented (Mallon 1998; Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006; Saewyc et al., 2006). Significant attention has also been afforded to the many ways in which child welfare settings are structurally unsupportive or poorly equipped to work with LGBTQ young people (Wilber et al. 2006; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). By virtue of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Mallon 1998), LGBTQ youth in foster care experience stigma on many different levels, including because they are youth in care (Hochman, Anndee, & Miller, n.d.); because they are frequently survivors of trauma (Ragg et al., 2006); and because their lives are commonly shaped by interlocking forms of oppression and multiple marginalized identities (Estrada & Marksamer 2006; Mallon & Woronoff 2006; Mallon et al., 2002). Mark Ragg, Dennis Patrick, and Marjorie Ziefert (2006) note that for LGBTQ youth in foster care,

navigating multiple layers of stigma within the already complicated task of identity formation is a process that is shaped by interactions with workers, other youth in care, foster parents, members of their families of origin, and the juvenile justice system. (Ragg et al., 2006).

Heteronormativity of the Child Welfare System

Existing literature documents that LGBTQ populations have been acknowledged to a greater extent by social services directed toward runaway and homeless youth than within child welfare settings (Mallon & Woronoff, 2006). Many youth who receive services within the spectrum of care of providers who work with the homeless have child welfare histories, and many are living on the street because they deem the streets to be a safer environment than child welfare settings where they have been subjected to verbal or physical harassment and a general atmosphere of insensitivity (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006; Woronoff & Estrada, 2006).

Child welfare systems have an extensive history of regulating the lives of families and communities, particularly those that are marginalized within the United States by virtue of race, class, citizenship, and family structure. In a society in which the male-headed, heterosexually grounded nuclear family is held as the gold standard, child welfare environments stand out among social services as sites where the enforcement and reproduction of heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, and the hegemonic system of gender binaries lead to LGBTQ invisibility and negative outcomes for LGBTQ youth. In Mallon's sample of child welfare workers, for example, the majority of those interviewed insisted that they had no LGBTQ youth in their care (Mallon, 1998).

Similarly, while multiple studies document negative foster parent attitudes and their impact upon LGBTQ youth placement options, permanency, and well-being, only one study has had the explicit goal of unpacking and exploring these attitudes (e.g., Clements & Rosenwald, 2007). By analyzing focus group data from twenty-five foster parents at a private foster care agency, Jennifer Clements and Mitchell Rosenwald (2007) identified the following four central

themes: (1) misconceptions about LGBTQ youth; (2) fears of gay children molesting the parents' own children; (3) large perception differences regarding lesbian or bisexual children in comparison to gay children; and (4) religious beliefs that neither accept nor tolerate nonheterosexual identities or gender nonconformities. For example, misconceptions included beliefs that a youth's sexual orientation could be "cured" through social worker activity; beliefs conflating gender identity and/or gender nonconformity with sexual orientation; and the belief that children are gay or transgender because they have been sexually abused. Seven of the twenty-five foster parents had had a gay child placed in their home. Six of these requested that the child be removed from their home upon learning of their sexual orientation. The study also notes the linkage between implicit case worker bias and foster parent bias; it reveals that social workers placed LGBTQ youth in the homes of foster parents whose bias was known beforehand, essentially placing them with parents known to be homophobic and transphobic, which indicates either bias or apathy on the part of case workers. Such a practice all but ensures failed placement (Clements & Rosenwald, 2007).

Creating and providing safer services requires understanding and changing not only the attitudes of workers and others who interact with the individuals and families that the child welfare system services, but also the mechanisms by which social attitudes and systems of oppression become institutionalized and are reproduced via social welfare policy and its accompanying systems.

Family connection and support, when achievable, can be protective against many health risk behaviors and may help combat some of the consequences of psychosocial stress experienced by LGBTQ youth. Engagement with families of LGBTQ youth—families of origin, foster and adoptive families, and extended family kinship networks—should be meaningfully offered at every stage and level of care and in every social service setting. Youths' own perceptions of their safety need to be centered and to guide this process. The model based upon the results of the Family Acceptance Project (FAP), a mixed methods participatory research

project, is a strong example of family engagement that takes into consideration family attitudes toward youth sexual orientation and gender identity across cultures (Ryan, 2010). Conducted in both Spanish and English and using a design that included families, youths, pediatricians, nurses, social workers, teachers, and community advocates across multiple geographies and from an array of experiences, FAP's research and counseling model focuses on family adaptation, risks, strengths, and resiliency. It synthesized family responses and behaviors, classified them as either accepting or rejecting, and then explored their correlation with measures of adolescent well-being (Ryan, 2010). Based on these findings, interventions were developed to facilitate family support and child well-being among ethnically, religiously, and socially diverse families. With its proven impact on significantly enhancing LGBTQ youth well-being, these services need to be implemented in every setting that services LGBTQ youth and their families, including the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Lack of Permanency Resources

While child welfare policy in the last decade has emphasized creating permanency for youth in the foster care system and enhancing services to LGBTQ youth in care, these currents have enjoyed few points of confluence (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006). The passage of the U.S. Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997 established stricter mandates for states to assure permanency and safety for all youth in the foster care system, but LGBTQ youth have largely been left out of initiatives for identifying permanency resources for older youth in care, and the issue of permanency has not been central within agendas established to improve services for LGBTQ youth in care (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006). The combined factors of being queer or transgender and being adolescent, decreases LGBTQ youths likelihood of being placed with a foster or adoptive family. This decreased likelihood of having a stable placement is compounded by the fact that attempted foster family placements are more likely to be interrupted because of foster parent and caregiver attitudes towards LGBTQ youth. Child welfare agencies' commonly

negative attitudes towards LGBTQ prospective foster and adoptive parents, kinship providers, and LGBTQ identified or affirming mentors, further diminishes the pool of strong permanency resources for LGBTQ youth. Leaving the foster care system without having established trusting and sustainable relationships with family or other systems of support puts youth at increased risk for poverty, homelessness, and victimization. As Jill Jacobs and Madelyn Freundlich (2006) have noted, “for LGBTQ youth, the failure to achieve permanence also heightens the risk of social isolation, loneliness, discriminatory treatment and harassment, and physical and sexual abuse” (p. 305)

Attempts to Address Problems for LGBTQ Youth in Child Welfare Systems

Queer Congregate Care

While researchers and advocates have begun to explore the merits of broad shifts in the culture of agencies versus specialized services for LGBTQ youth residing in out-of-home care (Wilber et al., 2006), since 2000 specialized services have been created in a handful of metropolises. Youth accounts indicate that they feel safer and more affirmed after moving into these environments following harassment or violence enacted against them in previous settings as a result of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Mallon et al., 2002). The facilities, however, are all congregate settings, which are among the most restrictive, least family-like environments and have been associated with the lowest levels of contact with family of origin and higher levels of homelessness for youth who come of age within them (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

LGBTQ youth are frequently placed within these settings despite an accepted child welfare practice that youth be placed in the least restrictive environment possible, which raises questions about what barriers may exist in the process of placing LGBTQ youth with foster families (Wilber et al., 2006; Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006). Moreover, there is a large-scale “outing” to service providers, schools, peers, and families that occurs for youth who reside in

these settings, which may have an impact upon youths' safety within the community and at school (Jacobs & Freundlich, 2006). Finally, it remains unclear whether the presence of these facilities results in a paradigm shift within the agencies that house them or create a perhaps safer, but separate, enclave for LGBTQ youth while leaving interpersonal and systemic agency bias unchallenged.

Extant literature explores alternatives to current practices, that hold the potential to enhance permanency outcomes for child welfare-involved LGBTQ youth. Jacobs and Freundlich (2006), for example, highlight efforts for reunification with families of origin that are specific to LGBTQ youth, as well as culturally specific practices relevant in connecting youth to extended family members as viable permanency resources. Current efforts also target unique issues that arise for LGBTQ youth as they transition to adulthood or independent living, such as LGBTQ adult mentors or affirmative allies, noting that LGBTQ youth in care are also older youth, requiring specific sensitivities to facilitate permanency.

Queer Parent Foster Care, Adoption, and Mentorship

In their review of the Model Standards Project, Shannan Wilber, Carolyn Reyes, and Jody Marksamer (2006) make recommendations for remedying LGBTQ youths' fragile placement context, including enlarging the pool of potential staff, caregivers, and providers by increasing the number and retention of both LGBTQ-identified and LGBTQ-affirming, competent caregivers. The authors additionally recommend providing ongoing support and training regarding the unique needs, contributions, and care of this community of young people and emphasize prompt and constructive response to problems that arise within placements through a dispute resolution process. This can only be achieved, they argue, through the implementation and enforcement of nondiscrimination policies, including sanctioning and/or providing follow-up training, supervision, and technical assistance to staff members who violate the policies. Finally, they note that ensuring placement staff awareness and provision of the least

restrictive, most family-like range of placement options, including LGBTQ-affirming foster families, is of paramount importance in determining positive outcomes for LGBTQ youth.

“Goodness of Fit”: Unstable Housing and Homelessness

Multiple Placements

LGBTQ youth are particularly vulnerable to repeated movement and unstable placements within child welfare and juvenile justice systems that are overutilized, under-resourced, and suffer from a chronic shortage of competent staff, caregivers, and service providers to care for the more than 500,000 young people in the United States who are residing outside of the homes of their birth families (Wilber et al., 2006). In a sample of forty-five LGBTQ youth, Gerald Mallon, Nina Aledort, and Michael Ferrera (2002) found that the average number of placements for LGBTQ youth was 6.35, a result the researchers associate with nonaffirming placements that either passively encourage LGBTQ youth to leave their placements by neglecting their needs or actively discriminate against them, resulting in premature ejection or departure. Addressing their heightened risk for multiple, unstable placements, Mallon, Aledort, and Ferrera attribute the frequent moves for LGBTQ youth to four factors: (1) staff members not accepting or not affirming youths’ sexual orientation; (2) youths feeling unsafe because of their sexual orientation; (3) youths’ sexual orientation being seen as a “management problem”; and (4) youths not being accepted by peers because of their sexual orientation (2002).

LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

Research indicates that 52 percent of homeless youth have had some involvement with the foster care system at some point in their lives (Byrne, Grant, & Shapiro, 2005). Multiple studies have also found that LGBTQ youth are disproportionately represented among homeless youth populations and face additional risks as a result of individual and institutional homophobia (Ray, 2006; Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). Les B. Whitbeck et al. (2004) estimate that

LGBTQ youth make up approximately 20 percent on average of homeless youth in urban areas, with slightly lower representation in non-urban areas. In another eight-city public health survey of homeless youth, 22.4 percent of 670 youth participants identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006).

Public health risks associated with homelessness are exacerbated for LGBTQ youth (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). In a sample of homeless youth, 58 percent of LGBTQ youth reported having been sexually assaulted compared to 33 percent of heterosexual homeless youth (Whitbeck et al., 2004). In another study, 44 percent of LGBTQ youth reported being asked by someone on the street to exchange sex for money, food, drugs, shelter, or clothing as compared to 26 percent of straight homeless youth (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006).

LGBTQ youth also have a higher likelihood of having attempted suicide, having at one time been enrolled in a substance abuse program, and having been in the child welfare system, as well as being significantly more likely to have been tested for HIV and hepatitis C than do straight youth. (Van Leeuwen et al., 2006). Research regarding LGBTQ youth homelessness additionally supports earlier claims that LGBTQ youth move frequently between their families of origin, child welfare placements, the street, residential treatment programs, shelters, and other informal living arrangements as they seek out a good support system and living situation among persistently hostile social service systems that fail to understand their experiences and are ill-equipped to meet their needs.

Part II: The Revolving Door Onto the Streets and Into the Juvenile Justice Systems

Strong parallels between the child welfare system and the juvenile justice system indicate that many of the stereotypes, biases, discriminatory practices, and structural barriers that shape the lives and experiences of LGBTQ youth are shared across both systems, with projections

indicating the likelihood that LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in both (Estrada & Marksamer, 2006; Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009; Sullivan, Sommer, & Moff, 2001).

Juvenile Justice Systems and LGBTQ Youth

Specific manifestations of the criminalization of LGBTQ youth within the juvenile justice system include the increased likelihood that youth will be detained prior to sentencing and a pathologizing of their sexuality that at times results in inappropriate “sex offense” (e.g., lewd conduct) charges. These charges then impact not only hearings and sentencing but also eventual disproportionate placement of LGBTQ youth in juvenile justice systems (Estrada & Marksamer, 2006; Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009; Sullivan et al., 2001; Laver & Khoury, 2008).

The Equity Project (Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009) has conducted 414 surveys as well as sixty-five interviews with juvenile justice professionals and fifty-five LGBTQ youth currently or previously involved in the juvenile justice system. LGBTQ youth were found to have been overcharged with sex offenses related to age-of-consent laws when compared to their heterosexual counterparts, an occurrence that paves the way for further potential systemic abuses, including unnecessary sex offender treatment. Consequences sometimes include court-ordered reparative or, in more extreme cases, conversion therapy, which has been condemned by every major health and mental health organization, including the American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Jenkins & Johnston, 2004; Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009). Additionally, findings from research conducted by both Amnesty International (2005) and the Equity Project (Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009) indicate large-scale profiling of LGBTQ youth, particularly youth of color, who are disproportionately targeted and apprehended for “quality of life” offenses (e.g., loitering, littering, public drunkenness) when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Institutional mistreatment and abuse within the systems are reflected in the findings that nearly 70 percent of Equity Project survey respondents – representing youth,

service providers, legal advocates, and court personnel - indicated that police mistreatment was a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem for LGBTQ youth (Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009).

These findings illustrate the conflation of queerness and gender nonconformity with deviance, which is a contributing factor to the criminalization of LGBTQ youth, as is school bullying, family rejection, lack of social services, the hostility of the child welfare system, and LGBTQ youths’ disproportionate representation and increased vulnerability among homeless youth populations. All of these challenges land LGBTQ youth in public spaces where they are likely to be targeted by police and ensnared in a juvenile justice system whose structural and explicit homophobia and discrimination based upon gender identity subject LGBTQ youth to further violence and victimization while mitigating access to opportunity and creating pathways with poor outcomes (Estrada & Marksamer, 2006; Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009; Hanhardt, 2008; Agathangelou, Bassichis, & Spira, 2008). Essentially, as with the mental health institutions of the 1970s, juvenile detention facilities have become spaces where LGBTQ youth, undervalued as they are by society, are warehoused out of sight of the public eye and to the benefit of an increasingly privatized youth and adult prison system (Sabol, West, & Cooper 2009).

Scholarly attention has recently been given to the overrepresentation of lesbian and bisexual girls within the juvenile justice system (Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2011). Seeking to shed light on this phenomenon, Kathryn Himmelstein and Hannah Bruckner utilized the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a nationally representative, population-based sample, to demonstrate that nonheterosexual adolescents, particularly girls, are disproportionately sanctioned by schools and criminal justice authorities, despite the fact that they are not engaging in more lawbreaking or transgressive behavior than their heterosexual peers. Noting the paucity of research in this area, Himmelstein and Bruckner argue that

understanding and addressing these disparities is essential to ameliorating the social and health consequences associated with excessive school expulsions, arrests, and incarceration.

Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth and Juvenile Justice Systems

As with many school settings and the child welfare system, juvenile justice systems are sites of particular hostility and vulnerability for transgender and gender nonconforming youth (Marksamer, 2008; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Jody Marksamer (2008) highlights the criminalizing and abusive pathways for transgender youth who come to the attention of the law, noting that their reasons for involvement in juvenile justice systems frequently have to do with petty crimes related to efforts to live out their felt gender (e.g., shoplifting women's clothing, engaging in survival sex in order to afford street hormones) or are a result of the discrimination and abuse that they experience within their families, schools, foster care facilities, homeless shelters, and places of employment.

Once involved in the juvenile justice system, transgender youth and gender nonconforming youth are commonly housed in sex-segregated facilities where their gender identity is policed or placed in isolation (Marksamer, 2008). Placement of these youth in sex segregated facilities based on birth assigned gender can subject trans youth to harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of violence. Moreover, trans youth often do not receive adequate legal representation and advocacy because of attorney bias and lack of understanding of gender and sexuality (Majd, Marksemer, & Reyes, 2009; Marksamer, 2008). The lack of trans-affirming social services and treatment programs also results in the exclusion of trans youth from "rehabilitative" alternatives to incarceration that may be available to other youth.

The combination of these factors, in conjunction with a frequent lack of support from family members, results in disproportionately poor outcomes for transgender youth involved in the juvenile justice system (Marksamer, 2008; Puritz & Majd, 2007). Specifically, Patricia Puritz and Katayoon Majd (2007) document these outcomes, including "vulnerability to assault, lack of

socialization and programming, loss of community and connection with family, and an increased likelihood that he or she will be pulled even deeper into the system.” Thus, for LGBTQ youth in general, and gender nonconforming youth in particular, profound discrepancies exist between the stated “rehabilitative” promise of the juvenile justice system and the “healthful” family environments of the child welfare system on the one hand and the reality of institutional responses that are at least highly stressful and in extreme cases potentially lethal on the other hand. This portrait of large-scale systemic and institutional bias illustrates a system of revolving doors, where LGBTQ youth are all too commonly in constant flux, denied access to opportunity structures, experiencing a deprivation of opportunities, and exposed to violence and other conditions that contribute to shortened lifespans.

LGBTQ youth’s identities and identity formation processes are essential in understanding the ways in which they move through, become ensnared in, leave and resist these systems. Moreover, it is precisely because the role of these systems is to reproduce hegemonic developmental norms, that they are hostile towards the lives of LGBTQ youth.

Part III: Normative Youth Development Models and Identity Processes

Historicizing Identity Development

In her seminal essay “The Evidence of Experience,” Joan Scott (1991) critiques the essentializing of identity experiences and the claim to normative knowledge that becomes “unassailable.” Specifically, she argues for an emphasis upon the processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive natures of *experience*, and on the politics of its construction. Her work suggests then, that normative adolescent identity models cannot be separated from the era, the politics, or the social construction and power differential embedded in social realities in which these identities are constructed and reified in disciplines.

Referencing Gayatri Spivak’s (1989) work on Subaltern Studies historians, Scott asserts that this necessitates making visible the assignment of subject-positions:

not in the sense of capturing the reality of the objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced, and which processes themselves are unremarked and indeed achieve their effect because they are not noticed. To do this a change of object seems to be required, one that takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation. (p. 792)

In “Denaturalizing Adolescence: The Politics of Contemporary Representations,” Nancy Lesko (1996) critiques taken for granted assumptions about the intrinsic nature of adolescence, revisiting the socio-historical moment in which adolescence was concretely conceptualized within Western culture, constructed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, Lesko illuminates various facets of Eurocentric processes that serve to maintain social and political hierarchies and were clearly manifest in the fields of anthropology, psychology, and child study, whose objects of study were focused on “women, natives, and youth,” These three historically constructed categories of people were thought to share an “otherness” from middle class white men characterized by emotionality, weakness, and failure to be disciplined individuals. Endeavoring to “denaturalize” conceptions of adolescence Lesko interrogates three “confident characterizations” of adolescents (Trinh, 1989): namely that they are “coming of age,” controlled by hormones, and peer oriented. Through rhetorical, historical, and feminist readings of particular knowledge production, she elucidates the ways in which social anxieties regarding national expansion, and related nativist and eugenicist attitudes towards immigration and population control, manifested in scientific assumptions about adolescence that have become widely accepted contemporary truths. Lesko deploys Foucauldian theory to point to the reproduction of a Eurocentric national body politic vis a vis connections between scientific research findings that “participate in constructing and maintaining the boundaries for what may count as normal and deviant teenagers” and socially regulative practices that construct and reinforce those boundaries. Unsurprisingly, this national body politic centered presumed characteristics of adult, middle class white men - virility, strength, dominance, and autonomy - as universally desirable outcomes. Lesko also notes that, the confident characteristic of “coming

of age,” “carried norms for behavior which provide standards by which deviance can be identified” and that “age became a major factor in the normalizing of populations” (p. 148). In Derridean terms, scientific knowledge thus allowed for the construction of an age dualism that created discrete categories of adolescent and adult, in order to create the hierarchical conditions for adult control of the adolescent body to ensure an end product of the transition to adulthood “as unified self-reflective people with coherent identities and emotional control.” The normal developmental outcomes within the construction of adolescence were gendered, raced, and classed, while masquerading as universal and neutral.

Lesko’s analysis is useful for understanding the socio-historical context in which normative models of identity development emerged and the function that they have served in measuring and regulating young people’s development in the name of reinforcing social norms. Her analysis also highlights the ways in which anxieties regarding youth sexuality are inextricably linked to anxieties regarding nation building and national identity. Her analysis is relevant to this study for its ability to help us understand the ways in which these gendered, raced, and classed assumptions about normative adolescence were built into the foundational structures of child welfare and juvenile justice systems and the roles that they currently serve in regulating youth development. Her analysis is also relevant in understanding participants’ experiences in these systems, and why and how queer and transgender youth of color, more generally, come to be overrepresented within them.

In “Constructions of LGBTQ Youth: Opening Up Subject Positions,” Susan Talburt (2004) questions the forms of knowledge adults create to understand queer and transgender youth which tend to fall into negative and positive categories of “LGBTQ youth at risk” and “adolescents who adopt a secure gay identity.” She argues that categories of “LGBTQ youth at risk” are commonly deployed by adults to garner sympathy in order to advocate for expanded services, rights, and protections for LGBTQ youth through deficit based understandings of their lives and desires. She also asserts that the conceptualization of a normally developing gay

adolescent is equally problematic, and challenges the use of gay identity development models and subcultural theories which, when used unreflectively, may exclude youth and ignore their creativity. Referencing Lesko's work of historicizing scientific knowledge creation regarding adolescence, Talburt critiques two influential models of LGBTQ identity development put forth by Cass (1984) and Troiden (1989) that posit four stages through which youth progress 1) childhood sensitization (feelings of difference from same-sex peers, particularly in terms of gender norms); 2) adolescent identity confusion (feelings of shame, anxiety, and denial, exacerbated by stigma and inaccurate knowledge about "homosexual" people; 3) identity assumption (coming to define the self as "homosexual" and identifying as such to other "homosexual" people; and 4) commitment (adopting "homosexuality" as a way of life, marked by self-acceptance of "homosexual" identity and role). While problematizing the model's intended outcome of creating fixed, or essential, experiences, feelings, solutions, and eventual commitment to an identity and role, Talburt also notes that, despite the need for images of queer and transgender youth to counter discourses of being "at risk"; "a shift to positive development is no small intervention within a history of pathology and deviance" (p. 118). Importantly, she notes the role that adultism plays in making assumptions about whose representations are the right or accurate ones, and challenges educators to rethink their relations with young people in order to avoid imposing essentialist ideas regarding who is really gay and who is not. She substantiates this claim with case examples of programmatic structures and leadership in which the White male-dominated gay and lesbian movement's failure to see gender and race is reproduced rendering some youth incomprehensible.

In "Narratives of Hybridity and the Challenge to Multicultural Education," educational theorist Linda Scholl (2001) notes that dominant identity paradigms in multicultural education have tended to rely on essentialism and categoricism. She explicates the ways in which categories of identity "both shape us and fail to contain our life experiences" and notes the transformative potential *narratives of hybridity* hold for multicultural educational practice in

which axes of identity such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality continue to be discussed in isolation of one another. She attributes this ongoing practice to the fact that we lack language to explore the ways in which facets of identity overlap, mix, and exist in tension with each other because of our ongoing weddedness to either/or binarisms such as Self/Other, Black/White, male/female, native/alien, or gay/straight. She argues, instead, for a shift to processes that highlight the heterogeneity, multiplicity, and fluidity of identity and highlight the borderland areas between such binarisms. It is in these spaces that identity construction is increasingly being understood as a multifaceted process of production and transformation, rather than a fixed essence that statically exists outside of history and power. Scholl concludes that “one of the most important ways multicultural educators could work within paradox is by attending seriously to the multiple and dynamic nature of identities and argues “whenever we deal with identity simply as a parade of singular categories without looking at their intersections with other vectors of identity, we are ignoring the diversity within domains of difference that allows us to listen for the tensions and dissonances. “ I would argue that this is critical in truly hearing the narratives of queer and transgender youth’s identity processes which, as data will demonstrate, speak to the generativity and creativity of their ways of surviving and existing in the world and offer ways of exploding and transforming our current models and understandings of youth development.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

CBPR and Critical Ethnography

My dissertation research seeks to enhance our collective understanding of the reasons for the disproportionate representation of LGBTQ youth within girls detention facilities in the juvenile justice system in New York, and to shed light upon the experiences they have within them. I drew upon critical ethnographic and CBPR methods in order to address the large-scale injustices and violations experienced by these young people. These methods were particularly appropriate because of their embeddedness in critical social justice, postcolonial and feminist theories, and for their utility in exploratory research that aims to uncover subjugated knowledge and illuminate relatively unexplored phenomena.

D. Soyini Madison (2005) argues that critical ethnography “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain,” in which the critical ethnographer resists domestication and “takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” in an effort to move “from ‘what is’ to ‘what could be’” (p. 5). She goes on to argue that an indispensable component of what some have termed the “new” or postcritical ethnography is a mapping of the explicitly political aims of critical ethnography onto researcher reflexivity so that researchers’ reflection upon their own positionality aims to “reflect upon its own power, position, choices, and effects...thereby making it accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation” and in so doing “inviting an ethics of accountability by taking the chance of being proven wrong” (p. 8). Reflecting a turn from ethnography’s historical presumption that researchers, regardless of methodological orientation, work from an objective, or value neutral place of observing the other, the call of the a new critical ethnography is for naming and

engaging with the politics of one's social location in relation to the communities with whom they are engaging.

CBPR Methods and Situating Myself within the Research

Based on their work within indigenous communities, Walters and Simoni (2009) have identified eight core principles that should guide CBPR: *reflection, respect, relevance, resilience, reciprocity, responsibility, retraditionalization, and revolution*. They also advocate for a stance of what Wallerstein and Duran (2006) have termed *cultural humility* to facilitate partnership building and reformat power dynamics. In contrast to *cultural competence*, *cultural humility* refers to “a life-long commitment to critical self-evaluation regarding multiple, complex, and simultaneous positions of unearned privilege (e.g., being white and male) to redress power imbalances and nurture deeply respectful partnerships with communities” (p. 152). While I have not engaged in research specifically within indigenous communities, to every extent possible, I have sought to integrate these principles into my own research process.

I came to this work after having been a social worker in the child welfare system in New York City in a program with congregate care foster homes for LGBTQ youth. I left my work in direct practice in New York and moved to Seattle to begin my PhD in 2006. Having witnessed unspeakable atrocities against LGBTQ youth as a social worker lent a sense of urgency to my feelings towards the necessity of the research I wanted to do. In retrospect, I can see how this first act of bearing witness, as a social worker, informed choices I made and the ways I related to my socialization as a graduate student. While I was in school, I maintained close relationships with both my former colleagues and some of the young people, some of whom I continue to mentor. While completing my course work as a graduate student, I was a research assistant for a mixed-methods research project with LGBTQ youth in Washington State. I also taught Masters and Bachelors level Social Work courses, and created a Skills Lab for Masters level child welfare practitioners about the experiences of systems involved LGBTQ youth. This allowed for an

incredible exchange of information. Teaching the Skills Lab both afforded me the opportunity to share insights gained from working in the child welfare system in New York City, where there are LGBTQ group homes, and expanded my knowledge of the workings of the child welfare system in Seattle, where there are not. I was able to return to New York frequently, as this is where I grew up and where my family lives, as well as where I experience community. In meeting up with my previous clinical supervisor, I communicated that I was interested in doing applied research or *praxis*; research that has a strong social justice action component. In this sense, I wanted to be responsive to what providers, advocates, and the youth themselves, saw as most needed. It was from these conversations with my former supervisor, as well as ongoing communication with a former foster youth and members of the youth advocacy community, that my dissertation research materialized and took shape.

When I returned to New York City to begin the research, I started sitting on an LGBTQ youth working group sponsored by the Correctional Association of New York. The LGBTQ youth working group of the Juvenile Justice Coalition (JJC) is coordinated by the Juvenile Justice Project (JJP) of the Correctional Association of New York. It was formed in 2003 in response to reports from youth and advocates in New York of abuse, unsafe conditions, and high levels of harassment of youth in state custody. Concurrent with the group's formation there was increased national recognition of both disproportionate representation of LGBTQ youth in the JJ system and youth's experiences of violence within detention facilities. The group is composed of people who represent child advocacy groups, legal service providers, social service programs working with systems involved youth, and community based organizations (Yu, 2012). Over the course of my two years of fieldwork, I have participated in activities with the working group that have ranged from things like meeting with state senators in Albany, writing sections of anti-discrimination policies, observing other people's trainings, authoring the materials for and running focus groups with youth who have had experience with probation, and meeting with representatives from ACS, OCFS, DYFJ, and the Department of Probation. While youth

feedback is sometimes solicited to inform advocacy efforts, unfortunately, there are no youth who actually sit on the working group. Nevertheless, participating in the workgroup's activity has played a big role in informing my dissertation research and bringing my understanding of state and city systems and political currents up to date.

I also bring my experiences of activism within the community, including as an adult ally to queer and trans youth directed groups and as a social work educator with an anti-oppression social justice orientation. I consider all of this activist work and I see it as related to the research insofar as they are all activities that seek to dismantle the structural systems of oppression that contribute to economic, racial, gender and other forms of disparities.

These multiple roles – as activist, scholar, and practitioner - have ranged from beautifully harmonious at times, to somewhat discordant at others, as agency and organizational politics and their more institutionalized agendas do not always align with the goals and cultures of community based activism, and vice-a-versa. Moreover, there are numerous features of academia and its structures and operations that stand in direct contrast to the cultures of both social service organizations and community based activism so that the work has entailed ongoing multidirectional translation. It has, at times, felt like being engaged in a highly complicated dance that I am performing while in the process of learning it. There are, for example, very different incentives and rewards systems for professional advocates, social service providers, community organizers and academics. Amanda Swarr and Richa Nagar (2010) have written about the dynamics of partnerships between community based organizations and feminist academics in *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis*. Although my work is not transnational, much of their analysis resonates with my own experiences as someone whose work and roles straddle the worlds of academia, social services, activism, and professional advocacy. In reference to the celebrity culture of individual meritocracy that characterizes so many aspects of academic culture, they argue:

all academic production is necessarily collaborative, notwithstanding the individualized manner in which authorship is claimed and assigned and celebrity granted to academics as isolated knowledge producers. Undergraduate classrooms, graduate seminars, workshops, conferences, academic peer reviews, and fieldwork-based knowledge production are all examples of everyday collaborative spaces and tools through which academics create knowledges and learn to speak to various communities inside and outside of academia. These spaces are also excellent reminders of an inherent contradiction that exists in the U.S. academic establishment: the system relies on the rhetoric and vitality of intellectual communities, while at the same time privileging a structure of *individual* merits and rewards that is premised on a denial and dismissal of the collaborative basis of all intellectual work produced within the institution. (pp. 1-2)

Indeed, my desire to maintain high levels of accountability in my research – for all that this entails, materially, in terms of time and energy, and space for dialogue, has sometimes felt to be in conflict with the demands to produce, meet deadlines, disseminate, and jump through hoops, and graduate. Moreover, there is an additional tension between my tendency to want to move through the world with authenticity and humility, flexibility and openness - aspects of my being that allow me to engage in trusting relationships with community partners and cultivate the space for story sharing with integrity -and the academic demands for self-promotion and personal advancement that sometimes feel painfully inextinguishable.

In everything I do, I try to be attuned to the dynamic roles that my identities and positionalities play in informing my movement through the world. I approached this research with a spirit of *cultural humility*, or an understanding that there is an no endpoint one arrives at in becoming a more conscious person, but rather that it is lifelong work that one commits to. I am insider-outsider to this research as a gender normative queer white adult woman. I was myself a queer youth and – though never having been systems involved - will have to be mindful of not imposing my own experiences and ideas about being young and queer upon research participants narratives. Additionally, I have had the somewhat rare experience of being in a family in which the only two children, both daughters, are queer. This has made the “how?” and

“why?” questions that are often directed at LGBTQ individuals particularly pronounced in my own life.

In many ways, this research has been a meditation on both the importance and fluidity of identity categories. In this spirit, I want to emphasize the role that I feel my race, gender, and sexuality played in the interviews. Given the extent to which whiteness continues to be centered in queer and trans communities, I was particularly aware of my symbolic presence as a white researcher interviewing participants who identified predominantly as people of color (Cohen, 1997; Kumashiro, 2001). Cognizant of research legacies within communities of color, as the fact that we continue to live in a white supremacist culture, I utilized dialogical interviewing. To this end, I tried early on in the interviews to name the historical legacies and contemporary context in which our relationship and conversation was taking place, and the ways in which this might inform our interpersonal dynamics. I recognized the possibility that my whiteness could be triggering for participants, particularly given that I was specifically asking questions about racial identity and experiences of racism. My hope was that this would signal that I was comfortable talking about race and racism, and that I was open to being “called out” if operating from a place of unchecked privilege at any point in the interview. Inevitably, I had blind spots around my racial privilege, and there were silences to which I was not attuned. However, my perception was that most participants responded well to this explicit naming of positionality, and most participants spoke very openly about racial identity and racism, both structural and personal.

I held less of an expectation that being a cisgender¹ queer woman would factor so significantly into the interviews. Many participants shared stories of homophobic, transphobic, and sexist violence and discrimination that I suspect they might not have had I not been out as queer. This was crucial both in that important information was shared about the nature of participants’ experiences, and in that it was jolting to be reminded of the extent to which

¹ The term *cisgender* is often used to refer to someone who identifies with the gender/sex they were assigned at birth.

homophobic and transphobic violence continue to be so pervasive and uniquely shaped by sex, gender, and gender identity. I was also moved by the fact that many participants were in possession of a really nuanced feminist consciousness. This was particularly true of participants who were involved in queer and trans youth and young adult organizing. Finally, the considerable class and education privilege I carried with me into the interviews, and continue to carry as I represent participants' stories within various venues demands ongoing critical self-reflection. I feel an immense sense of responsibility to the data and lived experiences of community members and ethical practices of disseminating their words and the power and privilege of leveraging my dissertation research to do so.

While I remain attuned to points of convergence and divergence along the various axes of identity and personal experience, including race, class, gender presentation, age, ability, and other axes of power and privilege, I have at times found that they elude being nailed down or described in discrete and inflexible ways. Rather they are shifting and fluid both across and even at times, within single interviews. Indeed, across the work, different aspects of who I am in relationship to who the participant is, had more or less salience, and created different dynamics. In his writing about the study of queer communities within social work research, Fairn herising (2005) argues for queer flexibilities and ex-centricity as possible stances and positions that may serve as a means of engaging in ongoing dialogue about the nuanced relationship between researcher and researched communities. herising notes:

I have argued against formulaic (re)presentation of positionality that present researcher subjectivity in Cartesian terms by constructing the researcher in fixed and stable terms, where the Self is all knowable. Instead, reflexivity of positionalities need to be an ongoing critical practice that refuses to accept compulsory and fixed identities, and that challenges the notion that researchers are situated outside of life processes. Integral to such considerations is whether we (re) produce epistemic or colonialist violence in our process of entry or participation in and with marginal communities. (p. 147)

Data Collection

Overview

My dissertation research used ethnographic methods in order to convey the fullest picture of what has happened, and is happening in the lives participants and in an effort to move towards the equalization of power amidst research legacies and processes characterized by striking *imbalances* of power. In their own effort to discover innovative and effective methodologies for addressing what's been termed "the missing discourse of desire," among research with adolescent girls, McClelland and Fine (2008) note the critical necessity of generating methodological "release points" for the articulation of experiences that have been "wrapped in a kind of collective discursive cellophane" by anxieties surrounding and grand narratives superimposed on young women's sexualities. Specifically, they note the importance of dissolving larger sociocultural narratives in which young women's desire is read alternately as vulnerable (especially for elite young white women), confused (lesbian, bi, or queer young women), or dangerous (young women of color). Arguing that young women's sexuality is hypersurveilled, and therefore difficult to excavate the nature of, they note:

we see layers of cellophane being produced by: a market economy that rushes to commodify young female bodies; sociopolitical, moral and heteronormative panics that obsess over young women's sexualities; racist imagery and institutional practices that vilify the sexualities of women of color, and by schools increasingly kidnapped by the politics of teaching abstinence-only-until-marriage curricula in place of serious sexuality education. (p. 233)

Life History Interviewing

I engaged in *Life History Interviews* with a community based sample of gay/trans/queer/same-sex practicing young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 who have had experiences of incarceration in girls' detention facilities. Notably, participants use a spectrum of language, identities, and conceptualizations of gender to talk about themselves, their peers, and their experiences. Life History interviewing, a central element in the subfield of the narrative

study of lives, has been popularized through its interdisciplinary use and its transformative potential for both narrator and listener (Atkinson, 2001). Life History interviewing involves dialogical interactive connections being made between people as the interviewer and storyteller collaborate and produce the story together (Ghorashi, 2008). Ethnographic interviewing in general, and Life History Interviewing in particular, is the most appropriate methodological tool for gaining insight into participants' experiences in relation to the research questions asked in that it provides a narrated panorama of young people's lives that can elucidate pathways prior to and following their involvement with the Juvenile Justice system in order to identify life choices, systemic barriers, experiences of violence and harassment in detention and elsewhere, and childhood and family history and events. Moreover, Life History Interviews allowed participants to delve richly into questions of how they negotiate their sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and race in relation to various contexts, relationships, and systems, over time. Noting its methodological utility in relation to Social Work specifically, Patel (2005) argues that Life History Interviewing "allows the narrator to hear how the narrator is interpreting and negotiating their social life experiences," thereby allowing narrators to "self reflect in a distinctively deeper way." Life History interviewing has a significant history of use in research with both queer and transgender young people and currently and formerly incarcerated women (Ross, 1998; Welle, 1998).

The Listening Guide

In noting the embodied nature of both storytelling and story receiving, Janesick (2010) likens the work of researchers who employ oral history to that of choreographers arranging a dance piece in that both are creative acts that require use of the critical elements *order, design, tension, balance and composition*, and *harmony* to tell a story. She notes:

The researcher is the research instrument in oral history as in qualitative research approaches in general. Just as the dancer stretches to sharpen technique, the oral historian sharpens and stretches the research

instrument, too. Sharpening listening skills to hear the data is one part of the equation. Then sharpening the eyes to observe and really see the context of the narrator/interviewee is another. Practicing narrative writing and sharpening and exercising the fingers as one writes in coordination with the brain is yet another. When one is aware that the body is the research instrument in this type of work, the eventual narrative product is more focused, sharper, and nuanced. (p. 6)

The highly embodied nature of the research endeavor at hand demands a nonlinear, relational approach to reading gendered and cultured experiences that seek expression in voice, but ultimately reside in the body. Congruent with this orientation of bringing the body into research, interview data was analyzed using the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan et al., 2003). Conceptualized through Carol Gilligan's early work on identity and moral development, the *Listening Guide* is a relational method that takes into consideration the multiplicity of voice when analyzing and interpreting qualitative interview data. Grounded in psychoanalytic theory, the *Listening Guide* "draws on voice, resonance, and relationship as ports of entry into the human psyche," and consists of a series of steps that are intended to systematically interpret the many layers of voice contained within a person's expressed experience. I found this to be a particularly appropriate method for use in this project which sought to explore identity processes and multiple facets of self within different contexts.

The *Listening Guide* is designed to create intimacy, through a series of sequential listenings, between the researcher and various aspects of the narrator's voice by situating her/his narration of experience within a particular relational context. None of the three interdependent steps, or listenings - referred to as such because they require active participation on the part of the listener - is intended to stand alone; the rationale for a series of listenings is the assumption that the voice, like the psyche, is contrapuntal. In other words, many voices are occurring at once and it is the charge of the researcher to weave them into synchronicity in order to make meaning of the narrators' experience. The first listening is comprised of two parts: (a) listening for the plots and (b) the listener's response to the interview. Reading through the interview text, the researcher identifies what stories are being told and the contexts in which

they are embedded, paying attention to recurrent images and metaphors as well as to exclusions, or what is not being said. During this plot listening, the researcher brings their own subjectivity into the interpretive process by noting their own social location in relation to the narrator and their emotional responses to the listening, as well as by “identifying, exploring, and making explicit our own thoughts and feelings about, and associations with, the narrative being analyzed” to facilitate the exploration the various connections, resonances, and interpretations one brings to the analytical process. During the second listening, the researcher hones in on the voice of the “I” in the narration by creating an “I Poem.” The objective of this second stage is twofold and is intended to both introduce the researcher to the distinctive cadences and rhythms of the narrator’s first person voice and to hear how this person speaks about her- or himself. As with the other two stages, the objective is to bring the researcher into relationship with the narrator, in this case, to facilitate the researcher’s knowledge of how the narrator knows themselves as rendered through the poetic free fall of association. In the third listening, the analysis is brought back into relationship with the research questions as the researcher listens for contrapuntal voices. Derived from the musical form counterpoint, or the combination of two or melodic lines, the arcs and bends of separate storylines converge and are explored in relation to one another, as with the melodic lines of music played simultaneously, moving in relation to one another. In this final listening, the researcher identifies voices that are distinct from the “I” voice and color codes them within the interview transcript in order to create a visual display of these voices movement in relation to one another amidst the landscape of the fuller story. As with musical counterpoint, these voices may move in harmony or dissonance with one another; regardless, the relationship generated in the movement between the voices is the focus of analysis. Much like more traditional practices of coding qualitative data, such as those of grounded theory, theorizing and understanding the voices contained within the interview transcript is an iterative process in which the voices - which may be defined and understood over the course of several interviews - are analogous to the themes generated through axial

coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the fourth and final listening, an analysis of the narrator in relation to the research question is composed based upon the previous listenings and a written narrative of woven voices is constructed.

Researcher field notes, reflexivity, and somatic processes

To the extent that it has been possible, following each interview, I took time to write down thoughts and questions that have emerged for me during the interview process. Self-observation and reflection have included highlighting places of connection and disconnection from participants based on identity and experience consistent with the methodology of the Listening Guide, outlined above. Because of the highly visceral and sometimes emotionally difficult nature of taking testimony involving physical, sexual, and emotional violence, I tried to be diligent in noting my own physical and emotional responses to interviews either by journaling, or discussing responses with CAB members, my committee members, or friends. For example, after one particularly long interview involving a participant's story of repeated and chronic exposure to multiple forms of homophobic, sexual, and physical violence, I woke up the following day and felt physically nearly unable to move. In her text *Emotionally Involved: The Impact of Researching Rape*, Rebecca Campbell (2002) explores the impact of qualitative interviewing of rape survivors upon her team of graduate student researchers. Her analysis of researcher testimony reveals that – contrary to most social science training and dominant educational paradigms –repeatedly hearing survivors' testimonies of traumatic events fundamentally alters the emotional landscape and world view of the listener in powerful ways, both positive and negative. She further asserts that, rather than dismissing this emotional byproduct – or claiming that it is the result of “bad science” – it can and should be used as one more lens through which to understand survivors' experiences. My training as a clinician and activist training have both honed my attention to the interpretive potential of both emotional and embodied responses to supplement verbal narration, as well as to the features and

characteristics of vicarious traumatization, all of which I endeavored to put to use as interpretive tools. Participants sometimes noted their own physical responses to interviews; most commonly they described their response as a “release,” a phenomenon that I found striking in light of McClelland and Fine’s (2008) call for the creation of “methodological release points.” At other times, however, recalling physically and emotionally traumatic events caused participants to have flashbacks both within and between the interviews. In addition to the community resource guide each participant received, I extended myself for check-ins as needed for more difficult interviews. Some participants did want to check in between or after interviews and others did not. I integrated any documented material about participants’ and my own emotional and somatic processes into the final write up of the interview(s) for each participant consistent with the steps of the interview guide as outlined above (see Appendix C for an example of a final interview analysis).

Community Advisory Board

Consistent with principles of Community Based Participatory Research, a Community Advisory Board (CAB) was assembled with the clear intention that their role was strongly collaborative (Israel et al., 1998 as cited in Pinto, Spector, & Valera, 2011). Rogerio Pinto (2011) has noted that Community Advisory Boards have their origins in LGBTQ community activism and arose from queer activists’ response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the face of the profound and immoral negligence of scientific and public health establishments to respond to a medical crisis that was brutally killing massive numbers of queer and transgender people, groups like ACT UP mobilized community to demand the allocation of resources for research to understand the nature and course of the epidemic.

The community advisory board was created specifically for this study and is composed of activists, advocates, social service practitioners, a researcher, and two previously systems involved young queer or transgender identified adults. Five members were initially recruited

through a purposive sample based on my own relationships within practice and activist communities in New York City. Two additional members were recruited based upon initial members' recommendations. The CAB met on a bimonthly basis during the preliminary stages of designing and planning for the research and on a monthly basis while the research was being carried out.

In scholarship about their own community partnership work in research surrounding HIV treatment and prevention, Pinto et al. (2011) suggested that optimal relational alchemy is best achieved through balance and coordination of scientific and experiential knowledge so that researchers and community partners can best match a diverse range of skill sets with research tasks. Grounded in a truly collaborative and participatory spirit amongst all members, the CAB has engaged in more traditional functions of informing study design and materials, facilitating participant recruitment, and facilitating the application and dissemination of findings, as well as more non-traditional roles in research such as aiding in the interpretation of interview findings. Additionally, the CAB was helpful in less formal ways like locating meeting space and suggesting other potential avenues for mobilizing support for the project as well as concrete resources.

Development of the Interview Guide

Key guiding qualitative questions were drafted and revised based upon feedback from CAB members and additional community members. Broad questions were developed to illicit themes about participants' experiences, including previous child welfare involvement, community and peer based experiences of strength and harm, points of interface with law enforcement and the JJ system, experiences of family and kin, and concepts of identity and expression. Consistent with the iterative nature of qualitative research, the interview guide was revised to integrate data that emerged in the process of gathering testimony from participants.

The goal was to conduct life history interviews, so I intended to illicit meaning questions about the essence of participants' everyday experience (a phenomenological strategy);

descriptions of values, beliefs, and cultural practices associated with their lives and identities (an ethnographic strategy); and process questions to identify cultural protective processes and processes of identity development. Moreover, I wanted to have the opportunity to learn about themes, ideas, experiences, strategies, psycho-social health needs, discriminatory experiences and was interested in the narrative life experience of these individuals, the cycles and stages of development they traversed across the different moments of their lives, and identification of what promotes wellness (i.e., what is protective for them?). I used narrative theory (e.g., listening method) to organize testimony from the qualitative inquiry since it allows for the construction of theoretical paradigms and generation of hypotheses upon which future services could be created.

Using CBPR methods and principles described above, I developed key guiding qualitative questions with the assistance of input from CAB members. Broad questions were developed to illicit themes about their lives, experiences, and related experiences (e.g., “Talk to me about what it means to be a gender non-conforming youth, lesbian, or transgender youth in juvenile justice system”). Each individual interviewed was asked a standard set eleven questions based on the aims noted earlier and was encouraged to tell their stories with as little interruption as possible, but also to take time and care when emotionally difficult topics or stories arose. Interviews ran about 1.5 -2 hours per interview. Most participants opted to engage in a second interview. With consent, interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Consistent with the *Listening Guide Method*, coding occurred simultaneously with the interview process as well as following completion of the interviews. As soon as the first three interviews were completed and transcribed, they were immediately coded. Codes in accordance with the “listening” approach were identified and a code sheet was constructed that contains information about the codes (listening), behaviors under which the behaviors occur/do not occur and related codes. Examples were drawn and noted from the interviews. At about every three to five interviews, probes were added to address newly emerging themes (see Appendix A).

Sample and Recruitment

Recruitment of participants was facilitated by the Community Advisory Board and took place through flyers and word-of-mouth at various LGBTQ youth serving social service agencies and community based organizations that perform advocacy with and on behalf of LGBTQ youth in New York City, activist groups organized by and for young queer and transgender people, LGBTQ campus centers at New York City based colleges and universities, other community based research and oral history projects, and internet based list serves. Once the interviews began, some participants referred peers to the study. A recruitment flyer was generated with the assistance of a community based artist who volunteered her time and talent to the project. The flyer text and imagery was generated with input from CAB members (see Appendix B).

I conducted interviews with 12 young adults who identify as gay, queer, or same sex practicing, transgender, or a spectrum of related identities, and who had been incarcerated within a girls detention facility in the juvenile justice system in New York State prior to the age of 18; and, was able to use 10 of the completed interviews for data analytic purposes for the dissertation. In the course of the interviews it became clear that – although two participants were currently receiving services and residing in New York City, they had actually been charged and incarcerated in adjacent states, thus making them inappropriate for analytic purposes of the dissertation. These interviews were completed, however participants were informed that – while the data would be used to advocate in other jurisdictions where possible – the materials would not be part of the overall analysis of interviews for the current project.

Member Checks and Peer Debriefing

In this project, all interviewees were offered the opportunity to review their transcripts after the interview to ensure that they were comfortable with what was communicated, though I am unable to compensate them for this time. About half of interview participants have elected to review their transcripts. They also had the opportunity to also delete or modify portions of their

interview if necessary. In addition to this review process, I checked in with participants to ensure that they felt that their perspectives have been communicated in a way that adequately represents their story in the way that they want it shared. In addition, I offered to share findings in a community forum where participants will be invited, though they will not be identified as participants – providing them with an opportunity to give feedback and hear feedback from community members, some of whom may or may not have participated in the project.

Throughout the data collection and subsequent analyses, I debriefed regularly with committee members to discuss interviews, observations, and emergent ideas in regard to the interviews and observations. In addition, I consulted and collaborated with members of the Community Advisory Board for feedback regarding interpretation of portions of interview transcripts from which any potentially identifying information had been removed.

CHAPTER 4: PATHWAYS AND IDENTITIES

Overview

Chapter 4 begins with a general overview of the demographic features of the participants interviewed for this study. Additionally, utilizing pseudonyms, I will provide a brief overview of five study participants' life histories as narrated in the interviews. This in-depth mini-biographical presentation of the lives of participants is an approach consistent with the life narrative method to set the context in which the narratives are analyzed. Additionally, these five study participants' experiences and narratives were selected because they exemplify some of the cross-cutting identities, gender representations, as well as key themes that emerged in exploring pathways into the juvenile justice system across all ten participants. Also included within these narrative biological sketches are participants' "I Poems," – the prose formed based on the use of I-Poem methodology in the *Listening Guide* approach as detailed in the previous chapter. Finally, included are narrative findings from the interviews that speak to identity construction processes, experiences within school, with families of origin and within the child welfare system. These specific areas are explored in greater depth because they emerged as distinct themes, in a constellation of factors contributing to the youth's juvenile justice involvement and experiences of systemic violence. The chapter concludes with a broader analysis of the dynamic processes of identity formation as narrated by participants, and the ways in which identities are understood, narrated, and negotiated in relation to the systems with which youth interfaced. The three themes that emerged and from the qualitative analysis of transcripts were (1) *intersecting processes of identity construction and the destabilization of binaries* (2) *Family rejection and acceptance as a key factor in negotiating systems involvement* and (3) *the child welfare system and schools as pipelines to the juvenile justice system.*

Demographic Overview of Participants

Ten participants were interviewed for the current study. Six of the ten participants were interviewed on two occasions, and four were interviewed just once. Participants who were interviewed only once covered all areas of the interview guide within the first interview. All of the participants had, at some point, been detained in a girls detention facility in New York State and identified somewhere along the LGBTQ/queer and transgender spectrum. Identities fell along a spectrum and were commonly fluid, with some participants using multiple terms of identities to describe their sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual orientation and gender identity were sometimes distinct and other times co-constructed and included: AG, stud, transgender, lesbian, butch lesbian, femme aggressive, bisexual, woman, and female. Four of the participants identified as black, three identified as Latino(a) (Dominican, Puerto Rican, or both), and three identified as multiracial or mixed race (Native American, Irish, German, Latino, Black, African American, West Indian, White, Dominican, and Puerto Rican, and unknown). Participants ranged in age from 18-25. Seven of the ten participants had been in foster care and/or kinship care at some point in their lives; two participants were raised by grandparents for most of their lives before age 18, and five participants were in a combination of foster families, group homes, kinship care, detention facilities, RTF's, shelters, and other informal living or sleeping arrangements (friend's houses, sleeping on trains and in cars, etc.) throughout their lives. Two participants had completed high school, four had received their GED, three were enrolled in GED programs at the time of the interview, and one participant had received some GED preparation in the past, and was hoping to take the exam in the future. One participant was currently enrolled in college and two participants had taken some college courses. Two participants were homeless at the time of the interview, two were living in apartments with romantic partners, one was living alone in her own apartment, and three lived with family members. Two participants were pregnant at the time of the interview. Nine of the participants

were living in one of the five boroughs of New York City, and one was living in Dutchess County, two hours north of the city.

The Five Selected Narrative Biographies

Nashan: “I think I’m the epitome of man and female, I’m in the middle”

Nashan’s “I Poem”

I believe I’m two-spirited (there’s times where)
 I feel like I’m not a woman (and there’s times where)
 I feel like I am a man
 I tend to use any one supporting that particular situation
 I’m in a particular area
 I know
 I feel an energy or something that seems like it’s homophobic
 I’ll use female pronouns
 I won’t even say
 I’m open: he, she, them or they
 I’ll come out
 I present myself
 I tend to be open with that, except for a homophobic situation
 I’m female in that
 I do use both bathrooms
 I am
 I’m feeling today
 I’m feeling like I woke up a man today
 I’m using the men’s bathroom
 I would sit here and say that I’m separate
 I sit here and don’t compile it together, it’s for another person
 I do compile it together, it’s because it’s me
 I know I’m both
 I think I’m the epitome of man and female
 I’m in the middle

 I understand it for exactly what it is
 I know I love women
 I know
 I will never, ever deal with a man
 I was in the gender spectrum for a few years
 I got comfortable with two-spirited
 I think I came out like a year or two ago maybe with that terminology
 I was like
 I can understand who I am now

I met other two-spirited people
 I generalized that this is me and it's okay to accept
 I felt like it was not even okay to be me
 I generally got over that a couple years ago
 I realize that

I'm a mixed breed
 I call myself a mutt
 I don't even say what my nationalities are
 I just say I'm a mixed breed
 I'm German, Native American, Puerto Rican, Black, White
 I'm mixed
 I feel like that qualifies for something

I think of them as separate
 I think
 I was born
 I was born
 I take that
 I am
 I mean

I would have to sit here and say
 I was attracted to women
 I was in elementary school
 I had a serious crush on my first grade teacher
 I knew from there
 I moved to second grade
 I saw my favorite art teacher and she was hot
 I was like "All Right, maybe this is just me liking women"
 I was generally okay with it at a very young age
 I generally came out to my family a bit early
 I generally knew I was attracted to women at a very early age
 I actually can say
 I am
 I was
 I knew
 I liked certain things about female clothes and female particular situations
 I wanted
 I had to have it
 I was going through with the whole
 "I want to dress like a boy"
 "I'm more comfortable"
 "I don't want to wear shoes"
 "I want to wear boots"
 "I don't want to wear girl pants"

“I wear boy pants”
 I would say
 I really, really knew
 I might have been 10 or 11
 I identified with both
 I was related to both genders

I came out around 14
 I just had no other choice
 I kissed a girl that they liked
 I always wanted to be with this one woman from church
 I looked at this other young lady from my church
 I had made a rainbow bracelet
 I just cried, cried, cried
 I read the bible from front to back and could not see anything
 In the Bible that stated that homosexuality was against god’s way.
 I felt that god made you the way you are for a reason
 I got put into a group home
 I got into foster care
 I generally share my story
 I’m with it
 I wasn’t scared
 I told her
 I wasn’t scared
 I knew I was comfortable with who I was
 I just knew she wasn’t comfortable

Identities, Family Acceptance, Child Welfare Involvement, and School

Nashan’s family and personal history were rich with repeated processes and cycles, coincidences, losses and reunions. Hirs² is also a story that really elucidates some of the cracks, mishaps, malpractice, and complexly carried out injustices, and outright abuses experienced by LGBTQ youth at the intersection of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. As ze understands it, Nashan was stolen from hir birthmother by her adoptive mother, who felt justified in taking Nashan into her care because of her mother’s drug addiction. Nashan’s adoptive mother did not formalize the adoption with ACS until she’d had Nashan in her care for at least one year. Nashan’s adoptive mother, who worked in the foster care system, became physically and emotionally abusive towards Nashan when ze was outed by hir brothers at the

² “Hir” and “ze” are gender neutral pronouns, or pronouns that are not associated with any gender.

age of 14. At this point, Nashan's mother filed a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) petition and Nashan was placed in a congregate foster care facility, or group home. While there, Nashan experienced corrective rape perpetrated by the visitor of another resident. Nashan recalls experiencing microaggressions related to hir sexual orientation during the rape, which resulted in a pregnancy.

Following the assault, Nashan was moved to a Residential Treatment Center (RTC). Shortly after arriving at the RTC, ze experienced a homophobic assault carried out by a group of youth after encouragement by staff at an RTC who feared Nashan's sexuality was "contagious." This assault resulted in hir miscarrying the baby and left hir with a cracked skull and a lifelong condition – epilepsy – that was repeatedly triggered by the constant restraints ze experienced later, while in detention. Nashan reports having shoplifted as a means of survival after hir own clothes were burned at the RTC following the assault. This story – perhaps more than any other I have heard – appears to be one of large scale, chronic, and ongoing criminalization of a gay/two spirit/gender variant young person of color. Ze spent the next several years of hir life cycling between foster care, RTC's, and the JJ system:

That kept OCFS as a revolving door in my life...It's serious though. Like if you go through one door, next thing you know if you're not detained, then you're in a residential treatment center that's sort of kind of like a detention center. Or then you go to a diagnostic residential treatment center for like 90 days. So basically you have no phone calls, no nothing, no outside. So it's like you're jailed in different spectrums of being detained. And like that was a problem for me. So I went to a non-secure, then I went to secure, then I went to the Brooklyn center upon again out of OCFS. They made me age out of OCFS when I was 18 because they could not keep me until I was 21 because I wasn't committing any crimes. So they had to let me go at 18. (Nashan)

Nashan identifies as two spirit and was 23-years-old at the time of the interview. Raised by an adoptive mother from the age of 5 months, Nashan describes being "outed" by hir brothers at the age of 14, and the physical and emotional abuse that ensued prior to hir mother filing a PINS petition that resulted in hir placement in foster care:

I came out around 14, and it wasn't done with me wanting to do it, actually. I just had no other choice. My brothers stole my diary and gave it to my mom because I kissed a girl that they liked or whatever have you. The jealousy thing. So that's how my story, me coming out actually happened, but that was just part one of it. So maybe a year or so after that particular situation and my mother started realizing certain things, like I always wanted to be with this one woman from church or I looked at this other young lady from my church a different way, or certain situations like that. And being in a Pentecostal home, that tended to get my mother really riled the fuck up. So she just basically asked me one day, "Are you gay? Because I know what those beads mean," because I had made a rainbow bracelet. And she copped it, she took it. It was my first rainbow bracelet. It's a horrible coming out story. She took my rainbow bracelet and I just cried, cried, cried. And she was like, "I know what that means. Are you a lesbian? Da da da. You can't serve—" What did she say? "We can't serve two masters. You can't have one foot in the door of heaven, one foot in the door of hell." But me being the type of kid that I was read the Bible from front to back and I could not see anything in the Bible that stated that homosexuality was against god's way. And I felt that god made you the way you are for a reason, so we got into a big altercation and then I got put into the group home. So that's how I got into foster care.

Nashan, now a dedicated community organizer and activist, experienced so many residential movements throughout hir life that ze didn't have an account of experiences within educational settings. Ze describes studying psychology and law extensively while in detention after being given a textbook by hir therapist, who also encouraged Nashan to apply for an original copy of hir birth certificate and to consider searching for hir birth mother. Nashan did meet hir birth mother at the age of 21, at which point ze learned the identity of hir birthfather and that ze had siblings who had also been raised in foster care. At this point, Nashan also learned that hir own mother had had a very similar history of growing up in and between the foster care and the juvenile justice systems.

Justice: "Come on, you letting her get away with it because she plays the part of what a girl is supposed to act like, but I don't get away with it because I'm gay"

Justice's "I Poem"

I started living with my girlfriend
 I've been unemployed
 I just started working with Streetwise and Safe

I just started working at this other organization named SCAN Mullaly. It's an internship program.

I am a gay female. Been gay all my life.
 I respond to he/she, her/him, them. It doesn't really matter as long as it's Respectful.
 I am black. I would say that I am a Christian.
 I am a U.S. citizen. I was born in New York. Jamaica, Queens.
 I have three strikes against me.
 I'm gay and Christian and black.
 I don't care what anybody else says or thinks.

I've been black all my life.
 I knew that.
 I guess I was raised with my grandmother and she was a Christian
 I just, you know, mimicked what I'd seen
 I don't see a problem with it
 I go to church.
 I've been gay since I can remember
 I had a girlfriend in kindergarten.
 I don't think I'm going to change ever.
 I would want kids.
 I don't ever see myself carrying kids.
 I don't know.

I, actually, at one point
 I did want to go through the process of taking hormones, taking T.
 I was probably about 18 when I really wanted to change.
 I had to see
 I went to a little bit of counseling
 I just said, "you know what, I don't want to do this."
 I'm content with how I am."
 I did want to.
 I'm alright with it.

I hate my name. It's too girly.
 I would like to change it.
 I'm a full person.
 I'm 100% me
 I don't front for no one.
 I did have to, you know, keep it a secret. You know, from my grandmother.
 I don't know how she would react
 I had very, very long hair.
 I cut all my hair off
 I would never tell her
 I really used to sag my pants and she hated it

I would never tell her because she was real old school
I didn't know how she would react
I didn't want to disappoint her or anything
I was three months old when my grandmother got me
I was what you call a crack baby
I wasn't able to leave the hospital until I was about three months old.
I had to go through recovery or detox or whatever.
I don't know. This is the story from my grandmother.
I used to come with my girlfriend.
I'm like "Grandma, forget about it. It's not happening.
I told her without telling her.

I am

I am

I really never had for nobody or hop for anybody.
I didn't care what anybody said
I didn't have anyone
I didn't care what anyone else thought.
I have two sisters from my mother's side.
I'm very close to my older sister.

I need her.

I was raised by my father's mother.

I lover her to death, but that household is not safe at all

I lived in a household

I wouldn't call him my uncle, my aunt's husband

I got out because I'm not staying there if somebody's fondling with me

I'm telling you all and you're not believing me.

I was the only light-skinned one in the house. So they used to throw me
mad shade.

I was only 13.

I didn't know.

I didn't know everything and all the steps to go about, you know, getting
something to be done.

I left.

I slept on trains, slept in cars.

I would stay anywhere.

I just used to tell her

I don't want to be here no more

I'm like, "Grams, it's not you. I just don't want to be here.

I'm getting a little emotional when I think about it.

I started smoking drugs.

I'm good.

I talk about my grandmother

I put her through a lot

I just wish we had a better open relationship

I could've come and told her about certain things
I guess I needed that probably.

I was still 13.

"I just need some clothes. I just want to wash up" or whatever. And she
called the police on me.

I was running away

I wasn't going to school

I went in front of the judge with my grandmother there, and they asked me
did

I want to be in the household and I said no.

I was 13.

I went to

I remember the address

I don't know how

I just started wilding out.

I just was getting in trouble all the time

I think one of them got tried as an adult because they was like 16

I think it was robbery

I think maybe it was assault and robbery

I think we got charged with probably assault and battery

I've been little all my life.

I really can't remember

I really don't remember

I really don't remember the experience with the police.

I just remember being scared, like having guns pointed to you

I'm freaking 13.

I mean, I did commit a crime, but like damn, that was scary.

I don't remember the things that they was saying.

I just don't remember it.

I was in Manhattan Courthouse.

I don't remember none of that.

I wish I had the rap sheet because if

I see it on paper

I probably would remember that experience

I got locked up so many times.

I just know that they sent me

I got locked up and I think they sent me to Spofford

I don't remember how long the sentence was

I don't

I really don't. It's so blurry.

I keep saying, it was so many.

I'm going to try my best to get this rap sheet.

I'll should be able to tell you specifically where I was at.

I've been to over seven DJJ facilities.

Identities, Family Acceptance, Child Welfare Involvement, and School

Justice, 23-years-old at the time of the interview, identifies as a butch lesbian. Justice was placed in kinship care with her maternal grandmother at birth because of parental drug addiction. Her cousins, aunt, and her aunt's husband lived in her grandmother's house as well. After being sexually abused by her aunt's husband, and disclosing the abuse to her aunt, who was unwilling to acknowledge that the abuse was happening, Justice elected to leave the house:

I slept on the trains, slept in cars. Slept at a friend's house when they could sneak me in, but you know, they're my age, so they not having that. "Let me speak to your family before you could stay over." So I would stay anywhere. It didn't matter. It didn't matter. Then when my grandmother realized that I wasn't coming home, she would—actually, I never really told my grandmother that this guy was messing with me. I just used to tell her like I didn't want—you know, I don't want to be here no more, and she always thought it was her. And I'm like, "Grams, it's not you. I just don't want to be here." But she didn't understand and I didn't like want to break her heart, you know. So I'm getting a little emotional when I think about it, yeah. So yeah. So my grandma would call, you know, the cops and put out a PINS warrant on me because at this point I wasn't going to school.

Justice acquired her first charges for robbery and assault, with a group of other youth from the group home, shortly after being placed in the child welfare system. She spent the next five years cycling in and out of group homes and detention centers. As with the incest, she rarely told her grandmother when she was placed in detention. A few years after initially leaving her home, Justice's grandmother was hospitalized with terminal illness; Justice described pain around all of the things that she was not able to discuss with her grandma, including her sexual orientation.

The fact that many things went unspoken between Justice and her grandmother complicates the effort to understand the distinct role that sexual orientation and gender nonconformity may have played in contributing to the events that resulted in her juvenile justice placement. Being able to tell her grandmother about the sexual abuse that she was experiencing in her home may have prevented Justice from running away, her grandmother's decision to file a PINS petition the resulted in her child welfare placement, and her accrual of charges that led

to her juvenile justice involvement. It may also have helped create the intimacy and safety needed for Justice to eventually tell her grandmother that she was attracted to other women. The absence of resources to explore the many layers of their relationship and what was happening in the household led to Justice's reliving, rather than healing from the trauma.

Justice describes her experience of being bullied, beaten up, and excessively punished in elementary school for being gender nonconforming, and the impact it had on her relationship with her sixty year old grandmother, her primary caregiver:

This goes back to elementary school, man. Yo, it was like—it was tough, like I was—I'm being raised by a 60 year old woman, old school lady, I don't have the up-to-date clothes. On top of that, I'm gay. I used to get baggy pants, I'm still wearing baggy pants. Like my grandma would put me on a dress, I would make sure I would pack my book bag. If I got to change on that street corner before I get in that school, I'm changing. I don't give a damn. I'm not wearing no dress. So I'd wear baggy, big baggy pants, Payless sneakers that light up, you know, shit like that. Yo, I used to get teased a lot, like teachers ain't like me. Peers ain't like me. Nobody liked me, and they used to tease me. Mind you, my best friend to this day, to this day, I got like two. One is my good friend, we should be best friends, but we're not. And then one of whom my best friend. Those was my elementary school friends, and we still stick together. But besides them, I used to get beat up. (Interviewer: Were you bullied?) Hell yeah, I was bullied all the time, all the time, all the time. Beat up by boys. Boys. Like you know, it was so embarrassing. Aw man, one day I got beat up so bad. You know, because I thought I was a little boy. You couldn't tell me I wasn't a little boy back then. I got beat up so bad, I had like [inaudible] on my eye like for the longest time. Yo, this kid like really showed me like, "Yo, I'm going to teach you how to—you want to be a boy? I'm going to show you what a boy can do." Like he fucked me up. And not only that, even in elementary—like any school I went to, I dealt a lot with—whether it be teachers or kids, like school was tough. School was really tough.

I asked Justice if she ever felt like she was being punished in school for her gender presentation? She responded:

All the time, all the time. She would always get phone calls home for me. And I'd tell her like, "Yo, I didn't do it. I didn't do it." Sometimes I didn't do it, sometimes I did do it. But sometimes it would be so petty that I really didn't need a phone call home, like, "Come on, you letting her get away with it because she plays the part of what a girl is supposed to act like, but I

don't get away with it because I'm gay?" Like yeah, just like school was crazy. Yeah, and I used to get beatings. I used to get a lot of beatings. Every time I got a phone call home, I would get a beating, you know what I'm saying? My grandma didn't understand. To this day, I don't say she was wrong for nothing, I just wish that she was younger.

Justice, who moved between various juvenile justice and foster care placements from ages 13-18, eventually got her GED while in the adult prison system.

Crystal: "This Would Never Have Happened if I hadn't Put You in There"

Crystal's "I Poem"

I knew
 I was gay
 I was smaller
 I finally figured out
 I wanted to be a woman
 I've seen her get dressed up for church
 I remember going into her closet
 I remember
 I'm pretty, I'm pretty, I'm pretty
 I don't know he was like "take that off"
 I kind of felt like
 I felt down
 I always wanted to ask my father why
 I remember, that was around 13
 I was around 8 or 9

I have two stories
 I was in the park with my mom
 I came out
 I was like "okay, I want to be a girl now"
 I was 10
 I would say
 I told my mom
 I was like "oh my gosh mom, he's really cute"
 I went
 I tried
 I was like
 I don't want to tell her at home cause Dad's home
 I was just like "okay, alright, let me try to find a way"
 I'm talking
 I don't know where he's been
 I heard of him once before

I'm on the slide
I'm trying
I went to Mom
I was like "Mom, I like boys"
I was like "No, I like boys"
I was like
I was stuttering
I looked at her
I was like, "like boyfriend and girlfriend"
I was like "I want to be with a boy"
I said that
I can remember
I know what I want
I want what he has

I had to open my mouth
I had to say
I want to be
I want to look like
I had to explain to her
I remember
I said
I was
I don't grow hair here
I don't have, you know, muscular looks
I'm not masculine
I was
I want to be a female wearing
women's leggings
I had to basically play mind games with her
I finally told her
I guess she was more accepting of me dressing like a female
and getting by with it
then me
dressing like a gay person
I believe there's two different ways we dress
I mean
I'm more womanly dressing
I love cardigans
I love tight shirts
I wear bras
I like flats
I'm there
I'm like "okay"

Identities, Family Acceptance, Child Welfare Involvement, and School

Crystal, 21-years-old at the time of the interview, identifies as a transgender woman, and prefers only to use female pronouns. She described her childhood experience of understanding herself first as a gay male, then as transgender and a woman. Noting that she has “two coming out stories” she narrated her physical transition, and the ways in which each of her parents and others rejected and accepted these identities and identity processes over time:

I knew I was gay when I was smaller, but when I finally figured out I wanted to be a woman, it's when my mom was in church and I've seen her get dressed up. And I wondered to myself, I was like, “Oh, why can't men dress like that? What's wrong with that?” And when my mother left, I remember going into her closet, and taking her little extra Sunday dress out, putting on a pair of pumps that she said was like eight times bigger than my feet. And I remember walking around saying, “I'm pretty, I'm pretty, I'm pretty.” And my dad walked in and he was like, “What are you doing? Take off that (sic).” I don't know, he was like “take that off” and he was like, “you're a boy, you're not supposed to dress like that. You're not supposed to do that.” And I kind of felt like – I felt down because, you know, I always wanted to ask my father why. And if I remember, that was around 13. I wanted to be a transsexual.

Crystal's mother, initially resistant towards Crystal's efforts to expression of her gender identity, became more accepting over time. While Crystal was ultimately discharged to her mom after being placed in detention for shoplifting, she accrued the charges that resulted in her detention while living in a boys group home after her mother filed a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) Petition. The PINS Petition was filed in response to Crystal's increasing efforts to express her gender identity in her mother's home, which her mother read as disobedience. When she was placed in the boys group home, Crystal was presented with boys clothing, was bullied and harassed at school, and was caught shoplifting in an effort to acquire clothing consistent with her gender identity.

Crystal was given a six-month sentence and placed in a secure detention facility. While there, she was tormented by peers and staff and, ultimately, sexually assaulted by another inmate. Five years later, Crystal reflects upon her discharge and the role that family preservation

services and an opportunity for her parents to receive support and education around sexual orientation and gender identity might have played in allowing her to avoid placements in institutional settings from which she continues to carry formidable trauma and a criminal record:

I took a shower. I drank some coffee. I rested in my bed. And I cried because, you know, I felt like I'd been through a journey and I was only, what, 14, 15 years old. I was young. I felt like I did my whole lifetime story in a matter of just a year. From going to the group home and then my mom was crying because she was just like "I'm sorry. This would have never happened if I hadn't put you in there..." My family needed education because if my mother would have understand (sic) that I was transgender, I mean that I was transitioning, maybe my mom felt as if I was being disobedient. You know, she felt like I was going against god, against her, against, you know, everything.

“Jasmine: I was a Femme, I Guess, When I was in 6th grade and My Parents Would Still Dress Me”

Jasmine's "I Poem"

I identify as a lesbian
 I guess on the femme-aggressive spectrum
 I'm not super feminine, but
 I'm not super masculine
 I feel like I'm somewhere in the middle of the two, being really girly and being masculine
 (Sometimes) I want to be more masculine and
 (sometimes) I want to be more feminine

I'm black-caucasian
 I guess you could call my parents working class or middle class
 I believe in god
 I was raised Christian
 I don't go to church every Sunday but
 I would call myself Christian

I mean, some of them kind of clash
 I guess the Bible says a man and a woman
 I'm not like super Christian
 I feel like if I were to out myself to the church community, they really would have a problem
 I feel you can identify as more than one thing, but sometimes they will clash

I just say mixed or black because if somebody looks at me, they're not going to think I'm white, but it depends on what those forms say
 I'll check that off
 I'll check that off
 I am, I just say black and white

I was a femme, I guess, when I was in 6th grade and my parents would still dress me
 I started to acquire my own clothes
 I started to mix it up and dress a little bit more masculine
 I just decided to dress feminine, just still like mixing it up

I mean – it's just being – it's like in the middle of the spectrum, not too girly, not too feminine
 I just kind of do my own thing
 I have other friends who are femme-aggressive

I need an aggressive to be more feminine but still be aggressive in the bedroom
 (or if)
 I want to be in a relationship with a femme to be more aggressive and still be aggressive in the bedroom and just
 (you know what) I mean?

Identities, Family Acceptance, Child Welfare Involvement, and School

Jasmine, a 20-year-old biracial, femme aggressive lesbian identified woman, was raised by her birthparents and had no child welfare involvement, but was in detention on multiple occasions for repeatedly shoplifting, and describes more family support than many other participants during her court processes. She also describes a loss of trust and disappointment from her parents following having criminal charges brought against her, as well as emotional distance created by the fact that her parents are unaware that she identifies as a lesbian. It is hard to extricate, from her story, whether her experiences of court and detention resulted in the creation of a family dynamic in which she was less likely to disclose her sexual orientation or whether she would have had her parents' support throughout her experiences in court had they been aware that she was a lesbian.

Jasmine was badly bullied in school during the 9th grade when her sexual orientation was discovered by her peers. She described a school environment in which LGBTQ students had

little to no support from teachers and administration and no means of recourse when experiencing homophobic harassment. At the end of her freshman year of high school, she was placed in a juvenile detention center after repeatedly being caught shoplifting. When she was discharged from detention and returned to her parents' house, she changed schools in order to "get a fresh start." She describes the powerful difference an affirming school environment can make with regard to self-esteem, a sense of self-efficacy, general well being, and academic success. When I asked her if there were key turning points in her life in terms of how she understood and related to her identities, Jasmine responded:

Probably going to my second school and being able to identify with everybody, including teachers, and that being teachers, guidance counselors, staff members, and they being totally fine with it. And like having other kids slowly come out of the closet and tell me that they were able to come out because I was out to teachers and I didn't care, and I was just so open about it. And I guess that was a big turning point in my life.

Monica: "I always knew since I was younger I found females attractive, I never thought I'd see the day where I see them in a different light, like, 'I like her, that's my girlfriend, that's my wife right there.'"

Monica's "I Poem"

I live alone
 I have my own apartment
 I been trying to get a job and it's real hard
 I had a job
 I had a court case the year before
 I been holding up
 I'm trying to love more and deal more with Monica

I was working
 I liked it
 I like working
 (since) I was younger
 I always liked working
 I love making money
 I love learning new things

I had an interview
 I got the job
 I had open cases that I didn't know about

I get into it
I can't work
I can't find a job
I've been putting applications in everywhere
I been putting' resumes out
I'm just dealing with it

I've had my own apartment for a year now
I feel like
I got my apartment, with all the milestones and things
I've been going
I got my apartment
I feel like it was god's way of just telling me
I need to learn to let certain things go
I have the personality where everything and everybody comes before myself.

I'm always there for everybody and nobody's ever there for me.
I'm trying to learn
I had my own crib
I can go out and spend money
I want
I have my own apartment
I have to pay my utilities, make sure there's food in the fridgerator
I have to make sure I got an air conditioner
I'm doing good
I just made a year
I already have a lot more stuff
I take pride into it because at the end of the day
I'm always alone
I know that I can isolate myself away from everybody and be in my apartment.

I was living with my aunt
I....couldn't really have enough time for myself
I was in a crazy relationship
I was still like, dealing with foster care
I'm still trying to
I messed up a lot
I don't regret anything in my life (but if)
I do regret anything, it's like, not finishing school
I always put money before school
I see I need school more than things

I was living on the Lower East Side
I lived with my aunt four or five years
I got my own apartment

I see my aunt...my aunt...when
I first got my apartment she called me all the time
I was real lonely
I'd call and I'd be crying
I'm in a whole different stage
I'm really by myself
I'm really like the type
I take my freedom to the max because
I was locked down as a child
I didn't really get to do what I want
I mean, any age, anywhere, I ran stuff
I always was a leader
I always did what I want
I've been living in my apartment
I've been living with the struggles of being alone
(making sure) I make the right decisions
(making sure) I do everything right
I'm learning that at the end of the day
I got to really depend on me
I love every minute of it
I go through stuff
I go through these milestones, it's making me stronger as a person
I got my apartment
I learned who's my real friends
I let two friends live with me. They robbed me. Stole my money. Stole my
social security check.
I took care of them for a month
(when) I first got my apartment,,it was like bad thing after bad thing
I just started to think of it as
I'm the kind of person
I hide
I cover up my issues
I hid everything and it's like, I felt like
(when) I got my apartment it pushed everything that
I was always hiding; it like put it in my face.
(when) I first moved in my aunt's house
I was overprotective
I didn't talk to nobody
I was just real mean
I was so angry with everything
I was making people not like me
I was making people be distant
I love to party, I love to party
I learned to just deal with everything by partying now
I just go out and try to enjoy myself

I had done lost people in my life this year
I went to like four funerals.

(My first love, the first guy) I was ever with in my whole entire life, he was
murdered
I still wasn't dealing with everything
I lost my sister two days before my twenty-first birthday...due to um...AIDS
I lost a friend before her
I live by myself
I come home and stuff, there's nobody here with me
I done looked at my peoples' death
I done seen my whole life
I got to deal with this
I would start to bug out
I can't sleep at night
I stay up all night
I just don't want to go to sleep
I try to live as much now, because you really don't know when you're gonna
die
I try to enjoy it
I try not to complain
I try not to be so angry about everything
I try to stress
(if) I didn't take care of myself, I know that nobody would
I look at everything I do as survival, because at the end of the day, if
I'm starving, who's gonna feed me?
I live all the way up here by myself.

I receive social security
I know I'm blessed for that
I'm not blessed
I'm thankful for it
I get my social security for a reason
I grew up
I have disabilities
I suffer from depression, I suffer from Post Traumatic Stress disorder,
Bipolar
I've been going to counseling since I was born
I deal with more

I say I'm bisexual because at the end of the day
I recently been in a relationship with a female
I have a total attraction to her
I love her
I feel comfortable with her
I feel comfortable with myself

I take care of her
 I had girls like you know hit on me and girls like me
 I learned my sexuality through my group homes.
 I don't know.
 I guess living in a house with girls
 I was just the youngest and stuff
 I always knew since I was younger
 I found females attractive
 I never thought I'd see the day where
 I see them in a different light, like:
 "I like her, that's my girlfriend, that's my wife right there."
 I always
 I'm picky, even male or girl
 I'd rather be by myself than be without what I wanted or WHO I wanted
 I've had my heart broken by males

I'm mixed. A lot people look at me as just black.
 I'm mixed with a whole bunch of stuff.
 I cannot be specific because I never met my father
 I know his family is West Indian
 I'm the only dark one out of all my sisters. My grandfather is Native
 American.
 I can't look up my ancestors and stuff because when he got here he changed
 his last name.
 I don't know too much because of growing up in the foster care system.
 I just know what my aunts and them tell me.
 I know my background because at the end of the day they stay alive and
 they know.
 I always asked about my ancestors
 I always asked about my family
 I grew up in the foster care system, my whole entire life, so
 I didn't have any real family til I got to a certain age
 I knew when I was in foster families
 I wasn't related to them.
 I'm the only black one.

I believe in all types of things
 I'm a weirdo
 I believe in God, I guess
 I believe in Jesus
 I believe in Science
 I believe in Science Fiction.
 I'm a Libra
 I'm indecisive
 (so sometimes) I'm a true believer
 (and sometimes) I'm a non-believer

I'm only like that because there's been things that – you know – push me
towards things
I'm very spiritual for anything
I get vibes and I could feel all stuff
I can feel it
I can hear it in your voice
I knew something was going to happen
I feel so strong
I could feel
I felt when I was about to get my apartment
I felt when the boy that I was in love with was cheating on me
I felt when everything was about to go wrong
(when) I got my apartment everything just felt like strange
I don't like too much
I get sick
I get vibes, like even off of people
I can't be around you if I don't like your vibe
I'll stay away from you
I'm never the type to just -you know – like somebody.
I can feel something
I can just be around them
I can just tell, like
I got into a fight two weeks ago
I felt like I was gonna fight
I went and told my cousins:
“I felt the vibe off the girl,
I know I'm gonna end up fighting her.”
I stand places.
I used to do yoga.
I wanted to learn to meditate.
I always try to do things that will bring me into my mind so
I could learn more about myself.
I just be like – damn
I'm real strange
I'm real weird.
I always say that and
I always think that cause even my cousin
I be like “oh my god, how did you do that?”
I think me and her is like the yin and yang fish
I always been like that though: to myself, always more like entwined with
the earth
I'm very sexual. I'm just very sexual.
I always thought females was hot
I love the female body
I think we're the best
I always been picky towards males

I guess, growing up with a whole bunch of girls
 I always had my pick of what's sexy to me
 I'm attracted to it.
 I don't care who's not.
 I've always been that way.
 I was younger I used to be curious about kissing girls and stuff
 I got in my group home
 I was living with them all the time
 I used to chill with AG's and stuff
 I used to be so curious
 I used to hang out with them so much

I just had done something with another girl
 I just was so in love with her breasts
 I just wanted them
 I'm like yo...it's confusing
 I felt like I could go farther with a girl
 I went to the group and we all chilling
 I'm standing there and I'm like:
 "I don't know. I think I'm confused."
 I'm just bisexual
 I like girls and I like boys
 I just started crying because it was like yo
 I was so confused
 I was really, really confused
 I don't know...I think that I really like girls and I really like boys
 I had good friends so they made me feel good about it.

Identities, Family Acceptance, Child Welfare Involvement, and School

Monica identifies as "mixed" or multiracial and as bisexual. She expresses her desire and attraction to both men and women. Monica and her sisters grew up in the foster care system from a very young age following their mother's passing from breast cancer. Monica was two when she entered the foster care system and was part of a sibling group of five sisters who were initially placed together, though separated and reunited and separated again at various points in their lives. Sadly, their fracture, as she narrates it, sometimes had to do with experiences of her, specifically, being abused within foster family placements and disclosing the abuse to outside parties. She was sexually abused in her first foster care placement and then moved to the home of the woman who would eventually adopt she and her sister. However, she was being badly

beaten by her adoptive mother and was taken aside at school and disclosed the abuse to concerned teachers and administrators. This resulted in the temporary removal of she and her siblings (and her longer term removal) from their adoptive mother's house, for which most of her siblings became angry with her and which caused a further rift between she and her adoptive mother. Following disclosure of the physical abuse at school, she and her younger sister are placed with another foster family where she is, again, sexually abused. She and her siblings then return to the home of her adoptive mother who lets it be known that she does not wish for Monica to be a part of the family, at which point they engaged in a physical altercation that is the catalyst for her first hospitalization and eventual placement at a Residential Treatment Center that begins a long period of institutionalization in various settings. She describes the circumstances and incident that eventually lead to the charges that resulted in her placement in juvenile detention:

They didn't want me on the campus no more because....nobody understands...I was on that campus for seven years, I was abandoned on that campus by my adoptive mother for seven years. So, I know how to talk to people. I know how to get what I want. I learned how to get what I want. And I learned how to –you know- from being on the campus I learned...knew how to control the girls. So it was like – you know- they got tired of me cause, they's like, for her to be the youngest and to have this much control over the older people and everybody, it's like – alright, we gotta take her away. I was having my cottage OP every night in groups, cause I was on the campus for a minute, you know, I done watched people get discharged, I done grew relationships with people, you know. I done...lived there. So I was like, alright, “we family.” I would tell the girls in the cottage “we family” and you don't hurt your family. They staff gonna stick together when they want to...they gonna always be together. Why can't we stick together? You know...I always knew how to talk...so it was easy for me to round up groups and start games and stuff...so...I used to have the girls in my cottage run out of program. They'd run out...be out all night. Go to school when we want to...smoking weed on the campus, drink on the campus. And I stopped taking my medication and everything. Then one day I was running, they was chasing me or whatever, they tried to restrain me or whatever. But when they did restrain me it was funny cause they was just disrespecting me like “you a ho,” calling me all types of names and stuff, talking about my mother and stuff. Cause at group homes that's how they get to you, they try to get your weaknesses to get you more upset. I learned

that, I started laughing after a while cause I know that that's what they want.

Monica was charged with wielding a pair of scissors in the midst of this incident by direct care staff who she believes framed her because they wanted to “show me a lesson.” She describes being placed in solitary confinement in the detention center, then again when she returns to the RTC. She is eventually discharged to her aunt's house, where she lives for four years before moving into her own apartment. Having experienced so many different placements throughout her life, Monica struggled to characterize her experience of school.

Thematic Findings: Identities, Families, and Systems

Refusing Binaries in Identity Representation

The ways in which normative social scripts are imprinted or externally imposed upon young people via systemic engagement is revealed in participants' collective narratives. However, I would argue that the ways they narrate their identities and processes of identity construction may be interpreted as a form of resistance, and of literally speaking back to these institutionally imposed scripts and the function of binary categories of identity in their lives. Moreover, their articulations of unfolding moments of identification along a spectrum of identities speaks to the need to reconceptualize processes of identity without discrete ending points and outcomes, and speaks to Talburt's (2004) assertion of the need to open up subject positions in processes of knowledge creation with queer and transgender young people and Kumashiro's (2001) call for problematizing the ways we already examine intersections and complicating how we already make sense of oppression and identity.

In addition to being contrary to most models of LGBTQ identity formation participants' descriptions of processes of identity construction lend visibility to what Judith Butler (1990) has described as “the heterosexual matrix,” through which one's subject position is rendered coherent if it consists of “a stable sex expressed through a stable gender...that is oppositionally

and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality” (p.206). Within the hegemonic equation of the heterosexual matrix, roles and identities are proscribed, gender and sexuality are inextricably linked, and those whose expression and desire fall outside of hetero- and gender normative standards are perceived as a threat to the natural social order. Butler calls for the troubling of gender categories through performance as an antidote to the “policing of the matrix.” This troubling is repeatedly demonstrated as youth identify themselves and their community members in ways that resist a singular, unified self within a fixed context.

In *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality*, Kevin Kumashiro (2001) argues for the need to problematize the ways we already examine intersections, complicate how we already make sense of oppression and identity, and rethink our strategies for change. He also notes the inherently paradoxical nature of the endeavor of challenging both racism and heterosexism, because of the ways in which political identities are complicit with other forms of oppression, and therefore hold the capacity to be both empowering and regulatory. Challenging resistance to difference, (and an insistence on maintaining certain categories of privilege), he revisits Joan Scott’s (1991) question *why are certain voices silenced in the first place?* In response, Kumashiro poses six ways in which this silencing of certain voices occurs: 1) the color of queer 2) the shortcomings of parallelism 3) the “impossibility” of duality 4) the queering of racism 5) the role of spirituality and 6) the management of difference. *The color of queer* refers to the tendency of queer communities, individuals, and identities to center white queer norms, including models of queer sexuality identity development. Kumashiro notes that this happens when whiteness is held as universal, with failure to recognize how “gender and sexuality, be they normal or deviant, are always and already understood through race lenses (and other lenses as well)(pp. 11).” The *shortcoming of parallelism* refers to the tendency to see racism and heterosexism (and, I would add, transphobia), as social problems that can be addressed separately and additively, rather than as they are: mutually constituted and intersecting. The *impossibility of duality* suggests the tendency for many cultural narratives of what it means to

“be” one thing, contradict narratives of what it means to “be” another, making the simultaneity of identities impossible. The impossibility of duality is present in the narratives as the participant’s experiences reflect a consistent encroachment by parents or systems for them to be “straight” and therefore to be “good” or well-behaving. For example, Alethia describes her mother’s reaction to learning of her sexual orientation from a family friend to whom Alethia had disclosed her sexual orientation:

Her very first reaction, she yelled at me. Like she scolded me. She was like, “You don’t know what you want! You’re confused!” And I was just looking at her, and I’m like, “What do you talking about?” Because I know – I knew what she was talking about, I just wanted to play it off like I didn’t. And I’m just looking at her, she’s like “Yeah, (family friend) told me,” which was one of my brother’s ex-girlfriends. And I’m like, “Told you what?” That you like girls!” What’s wrong with you? That’s nasty. That’s against god.”

Being well behaved and queer are an impossible duality according to the lived narratives.

The *queering of racism* suggests that racisms are not based exclusively on race, but often have gendered and queered subtexts; for example, colonialism and its corresponding mechanisms are commonly embedded in masculinist national aspirations that must cast the *other* as emasculate and subordinate. *The role of spirituality* refers to recognition of the ways in which homophobia and transphobia were commonly colonial imposed and a byproduct of the spread of Christianity and Western colonialism, obscuring how various cultures used to and continue to view sexuality differently, and in some cases, as inextricably bound with spirituality. To explain *the management of difference*, Kumashiro cites the example of the horror often expressed in response to African clitorrectomy within the context of silence around the medicalized practices of the industrialized west, for example, the “corrective” surgeries performed on healthy intersexed babies. He notes the normalized view of the self that facilitates these forms of othering. In the case of these narratives, the management of difference is evident in the familial management of identity through institutional mechanisms such as accessing PINS to manage gender or sexual orientation.

Finally, *the crisis of self* happens when confronting ambiguity amidst the tendency to construct all identity categories in relation to binaries defined in terms of opposition to an outside third party. Kumashiro notes that this tendency resides at heart of identity politics and that the desire for the binary to remain intact (and hierarchical), reflects a general wish for individuals senses of self to remain secure, and resistance towards that which would complicate distinctions between oppressor and oppressed, mainstream and margin. The crisis of self and the desire to resist binaries is evident through many of the narratives.

Summary

In summary, Kumashiro's analysis is particularly pertinent in interpreting participants' narratives and self-constructed sexual orientation, racial, and gender identities, many of which are interstitial and/or fluid. A few salient features emerged from the combined narratives with regard to identity: first, many participants' identities did not conform to dichotomous or binary understandings of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity. On the contrary – with some exceptions - the collective orientation was one of fluidity and complex, hybrid understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity; some participants used multiple gender pronouns, and described themselves as possessing masculine and feminine feelings and attributes that coexisted, and others spoke to more fixed identities that developed in nonlinear ways. Moreover, participants spoke to the creation of culturally and geographically specific language to talk about sexual orientation and gender identity. These findings are consistent with other research into the identity processes of urban LGBTQ youth and destabilize essentialist notions of identity and linear models of identity development (Bailey, 2009; Higa et al., 2012; Kumashiro 2001; Welle 2006.) Olivia's described her experience as an "AG," or aggressive lesbian:

I mean, certain, --yeah, a lot of people feel like, "Oh, you're AG, so you're trying to be a boy." No. I just – it's comfortable, so people who might think, "Oh, yes, since you're an AG, you have to be a boy. You have to act like a boy. Like you're just a man." But, no, it's not like that, like it's just like some people's comfortable the way they dress. Some people don't like to wear

tight clothes. What can you do? So people do get that kind of mixed up like...I'm still a female at the end of the day.

Racial identity, while more static by contrast, was not without fluidity and complexity; many, though not all, participants identified as multiracial, or mixed race, and referred to differently constructed racial and ethnic identities at different points in the interview, as well as different “ways of being read.” Many participants also spoke to the intersection of race, gender, and gender identity or sexual orientation as key to the ways they understood their identities and movement through the world. Crystal explained her experience in the community as a trans woman of color:

Well, you know it's one thing to be a white gay person because, you know, they just look at you like, “Okay, well, he's gay.” But then there's another thing to be a person of color and you know, you're quickly looked down upon because, you know, you're either Black, Hispanic, let's just say Indian. Whatever you are...a different race. And you know, that's one strike against you. And then if you're gay, oh, and then I feel like sometimes, you know, when you're Hispanic, that's one strike. When you're gay it's one strike. But then when you become a trans person, a person with transgender experience, it's like I feel like the world just looks at you like, “Why would you do that? Why would you change what god created?”

For some participants, spirituality was also central to their understanding of other identities. Moreover, these different aspects of self sometimes shifted in relation to one another and in relation to context, so that context at times informed one's interpretation or rendering of self, whose facets were mutually constituted. These nuances of identity are particularly pronounced in participants' “I poems,” where narrative is distilled down to the ways in which participants actively think and speak about themselves over time, a unique feature of the combined use of Life History interviewing as a method of inquiry and *the Listening Guide* as a means of analysis.

PATHWAYS: Families and Systems as Pipelines or Revolving Doors?

I have written elsewhere about the ways in which child welfare and other social services systems, educational settings, and peer and family rejection may converge to create a system of

“revolving doors” in which queer and transgender youth cycle in and out of systems where they are criminalized and exposed to various forms of systemic and actual violence (Mountz, 2011). I would argue that participants’ testimony largely supported this theory, and that their narratives described experiences of not only being funneled into various systems, but ping-ponged between, and systematically abused within them. The five participants’ stories outlined above were characteristic of most of the youth I spoke with in that significant periods of their lives were spent moving circulating between families – of origin, foster, adopted, and by choice; institutional residences – congregate foster care facilities, residential treatment centers, homeless shelters, and juvenile and, in some cases, adult detention; and on the street or in temporary, informal living situations. Family fracture of varying types and degrees, very often ran throughout participants’ narratives of constant movement.

Family Rejection and Acceptance

Research findings from the *Family Acceptance Project* have demonstrated the degree to which family acceptance predicts greater self esteem, social support, and general health status and protect against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Ryan, 2010). Familial responses presented as key features in shaping participants’ pathways, and incidents of family rejection and acceptance of participants’ sexual orientations and gender identities emerged as key turning points that signaled major shifts or changes in direction within participants’ lives, often resulting in systems involvement. This frequently happened through voluntary placement in the foster care system through the filing of a PINS (Person in Need of Supervision) petition or less directly through youth homelessness that contributed to the likelihood that youth would eventually experience juvenile justice involvement. In fact a number of families utilized PINS in the present study. This is evidenced in Nashan’s story of having a PINS filed by her adoptive mother after her

brothers read her diary and disclosed her sexual orientation. Justice, too, entered the child welfare, and eventually juvenile justice system, because her grandmother filed a PINS when she stopped going to school and ran away from home after being sexually abused by a family member. Finally, Crystal's mother filed a PINS petition in response to Crystal's efforts to dress in female clothing, consistent with her gender identity. Among participants whose parents or caregivers hadn't filed PINS petitions, some described having LGBTQ identified friends or romantic partners whose parents had. The role of PINS petitions in participants' lives is an example of what Kumashiro (2001) refers to as *the management of difference* by individuals or communities – in this case parents and caregivers in conjunction with the State – to “not only denigrate the sexually different, but also to compel them to conform to social norms.” Filing a PINS as a means of managing difference is evident in Nashan's description of hir falling out with hir adoptive mother:

She filed a PINS. That was the first thing. And because I was adopted, I was adopted as a kid, so she was my adoptive mother. This wasn't even my real mom. Like I told you my story is seriously deep. So I was adopted at five months, so basically I consider her my mother because that was my mom. That's all the mother I knew. So she didn't take it very well, you know? So she put the PINS petition on me. The PINS petition didn't hold up too long because they started to put a neglect and child abuse case on her from the PINS petition. Like it backfired on her. And the only way that the neglect and child abuse charges would be dropped is if she gave me back to ACS care because I was somewhat stolen.

Whether participants shared their sexual orientation and gender identities or they were revealed by or to family members, very few participants shared that their families – of origin, though adoption, kinship, or foster care – were completely unaware. Because of the very layered nature of family relationships for young LGBTQ people, particularly those who

are involved with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, it is challenging to fully surmise the impact of not disclosing to their primary caregivers; however, the two participants who had consistent parents or caregivers who were unaware that they were queer or transgender described a distance, and in some cases, longing for their parents or caregivers to know. For example, Jasmine who, at the time of the interview, had not explicitly discussed her sexual orientation with her parents, although she had discussed it with extended family members:

I mean, everybody in my life knows *except* for my parents. Other family members know, but my parents don't know. I'm not ready to tell them yet, but I feel like one day I'll be ready to tell them. I feel like they know, they're just trying to pretend like they don't see it. But one day I'll be ready to tell them.

Justice, raised for much of her life by her grandmother, describes the experience of knowing without naming, or a conveying without explicitly stating, when her grandmother was near death:

I would never tell her because she was real old school and I didn't know how she would react. And I didn't want to disappoint her or anything. But then she started getting sick, and she was like, "All right, girl." I was three months old when my grandmother got me. My mother and my father never had custody of me. My grandmother got me from the hospital. I was what you call a crack baby. So I wasn't able to leave the hospital until I was about three months old because I guess I had to go through recovery or detox or whatever, I don't know. This is the story from my grandmother. So she had me ever since, and she was like 60 when she first got me. So you know, she started getting sick at about 80 and then she – when she was in the hospital, I used to come with my girlfriend and stuff like that. And she would be like, "Well you don't ever bring a boy. Where's the man at?" And I'm like "Grandma, forget about it. It's not happening." So when she was, you know, in her final stages, I told her without telling her, you know, to just let her have some type of peace.

In both cases, participants self identified as lesbians and described a dynamic in which they intuited that their sexual orientation was known, but not explicitly named or discussed.

Funneling Systems in JJ: Child Welfare Systems and Schools

Participants' narratives revealed the multitude of ways in which both schools and the child welfare systems act as pipelines facilitating the funneling of youth into the juvenile justice system; they also illuminate the ways in which schools continue to be sites of hostility and violence for LGBTQ youth and how youth in foster care commonly have inadequate support in negotiating what are often new school placements. The intersection of these circumstances – in combination with juvenile justice placements that removed participants from the public school system for extended periods of time - made for a notably high rate of dropout. Monica, who moved from between foster homes and various forms of institutional residences for most of her life noted:

I went to so many schools, like, to be honest, I don't ever really remember just being in one school. And in the school I finally remember just being in, I was at an age where school wasn't my interest. Money more was, so, then I too young smoking bud and stuff so I didn't wanna go to school. The school in my campus, I felt like as a child and um and like special ed and stuff, we get less. They don't wanna teach us. They already think we have issues. They already think we have problems. So they don't really want to sit down and teach us the way they should. And in special ed, I was never really interested in going to class and stuff because the teachers were so boring...I started at a program called The Door. I love the Door. Everytime I get closer and about to take the test, I get scared and I lose faith in myself. So I dropped out of the program or whatever.

Himmelstein and Bruckner (2010) have demonstrated that nonheterosexual youth – particularly nonheterosexual girls – suffer disproportionate educational and criminal justice punishments that are explained by greater participation in illegal or “transgressive” behavior. Indeed participants' narratives revealed instances in which gender non-conforming behavior or

appearance resulted in their being either unfairly targeted for disciplinary action by school officials; oftentimes this took the form of educators and administrators turning a blind eye to chronic and persistent bullying, and subsequently misinterpreting responsive acts of self defense. Another form this took was truancy resulting from daily harassment.

It is important to note the well-established facts of racial disproportionately (Evans-Campbell & Walters 2006; Garcia 2012; Hill 2006; Hines, Brook, & Conway, 2004; Roberts 2002) and the overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth within both child welfare and juvenile justice systems (Irvine 2010; Mountz 2011). While rarely looked at together, these are both statistical realities in which participants' narratives are embedded. The majority of participants had had some child welfare involvement in the past, and a few had spent the larger portion of their lives shuttling back and forth between foster care and juvenile justice placements. Entry into the foster care system frequently coincided with changing schools and/or worsening experiences in schools and a general lack of support. This was the case for Crystal, a trans woman whose placement in a boys group home in the foster care system coincided with a school transfer. She described the interaction of factors that contributed to her truancy from school and eventual incarceration:

I wouldn't be in the place that I was in if I hadn't been left being in the men's facility, being pushed to wear men's clothes and not given an option. I would have understood if they said, "Okay would you like us to buy you female clothes or would you like us to buy male clothes?" No, like they were just like, "Here's your size, here's your shoes, here's your shirt. Go to school." When you have – I was a little skinnier, don't get me wrong. I was a little lighter. When you have breasts like a woman, but a flat stomach and, you know, you look a little womanish but you still have manly features and you wear boy clothes, come on. The jokes start as soon as you walk through the door, as soon as you walk through the door. I actually had someone spit on me in school before. Yeah, the person got suspended, but I actually had someone spit on me and call me a disgrace. Called me – told me I was going to burn in hell. That's the reason why I started cutting school. After that, because the first few days there was – you know, there were jokes and laughter, but after I got spit on, I was just like "I can't do this no more."

Youth's foster care placements, as with their experiences in detention facilities – explored in Chapter 5 – were commonly places where they experienced trauma and violence. Though the pathways were varied and complex. It is also clear from their stories that foster care placements were commonly a slick path for juvenile justice involvement.

CHAPTER 5: SURVIVING WITHIN, SURVIVING OUTSIDE

Overview

The first half of Chapter 5 explores participants' narration of their experiences within girls detention facilities in the juvenile justice system in New York, as well as community based interactions with law enforcement themes. Two themes emerged and are explored within part one: 1) *untangling the complex relationship between trauma, detention, and sexual orientation and gender identity*; and 2) *state sanctioned injustices: community level profiling and excessive use of force in girls detention facilities*. The second half of Chapter 5 addresses factors contributing to participants' personal and collective resiliency and healing, including 1) *strategic use of identities*; 2) *healing environments and communities*; 3) *the role of mentorship*; and *spirituality*.

“That’s a Sad Stereotype:” Untangling the Complicated Relationship Between Trauma, Detention, and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Pasko (2010) writes about the subtle and explicit ways that sexuality is regulated within juvenile detention centers designated as being for girls based upon 55 interviews with current juvenile justice professionals from seven detention facilities in the Western United States. Her sample includes directors of residential facilities, correctional therapists, counselors/line staff, correctional social workers/case managers, and probation officers. Over three-fourths of the interviewees identified LBQ sexuality as being connected to sexual abuse, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and “unhealthy” boundaries. Several interviewees advocated for “treating” sexual behavior through behavioral modification therapy and medication. Within the current study, the vast majority of the participants identified their sexual orientation or gender identity as being causally *unrelated* to experiences of childhood sexual abuse. Notably, some indicated that they felt that it was a commonly held misperception in general, and among staff within

correctional facilities and RTC's, in particular, that queer, transgender, and gender nonconforming young people's sexual orientation and gender identity *result from* experiences of childhood sexual abuse. Following multiple experiences of having been assaulted, harassed, and targeted within group homes and Residential Treatment Centers *because* she was a more masculine presenting lesbian, Nashan describes feeling like both her sexual orientation and sexual abuse history were pathologized by correctional facility staff who assumed that her attraction to women, lesbian identity, and gender presentation must be the result of having been sexually abused by men:

They need a serious support system for LGBTQ identified young folks. And I think that they need to make a special curriculum for the staff to take to deal with LGBTQ identified folks, especially if they are LGBTQ identified and they have a history of abuse, chronic abuse, because it's not even a point. You may not be the person that's hurting them or hurt them in the past or something of that nature, but because you don't know, you don't know how to deal or say certain things, like certain things are triggers, you know? My whole thing was when I was younger [inaudible]. Or it's because you were raped that you're gay. That was a serious trigger. That's a sad stereotype. I was not raped the first time I touched a girl. I was raped after that.

I made the comment "*the way you put it, it was because you were (a lesbian), right? Not the other way around.*"

Interviewee: Not the other way around. And then they feel like aggressive women, a lot of the staff up there I realized when I was there, they feel like a lot of the aggressive identified women were the ones that were raped. So now we have to be this boi because a man stripped them of all their purity, all their womanhood. The stuff that I be hearing is hilarious. And I'd be like, "That is not the case. How do you know that we wasn't just born this way?"

Nashan, also described the ways in which the structure and daily operations of juvenile detention facilities in fact *triggered* memories related to previously experienced child sexual abuse. In the excerpt below, she details the ways in which she attempted to negotiate showering while in detention after having survived a previous experience of corrective rape within a group home in the child welfare system:

Well, being a rape victim at that time, it was like very hard for me to acknowledge the fact that I couldn't do things on my own or leave out with free will and all of those particular things. And due to the fact that you're being locked up, it's predominantly male, so I had trust issues with that. Like their whole shower arrangement was a problem for me. Us showering all together, at that time I never wanted anybody to see my body. You know, that particular thing. And then it was like a staff had to be right next to the bathroom. Either it had been a male or female, it still bothered me, you know. And that was in Bridges, but when I got upstate, it was different. Like you had to prepare for your shower in your room. You couldn't bring too many clothes in the bathroom, so you had to bring your robe and your shower equipment, and you had to walk around in your robe and your slippers. That bothered me because even though the robes were long and everything like that, it still felt like it was fitting to my body, and I was nervous because I'm not sure if these male staff are actually paying attention to the way I walk, the way I, you know—is it appealing to them that I'm actually in my bra and underwear, preparing for the shower due to the fact of me feeling unsafe all the time during that period? I've spoken to a counselor before about that, you know, up there or whatever. And then like they started doing certain things for me once they realized how touchy the situation was. Only on certain shifts, only when certain people was there did they allow me to shower by myself while everybody else was in their rooms, locked away for the night. And then I started to get a little uncomfortable with that because then it's like there's no witnesses if something happens. So then I just let the whole like little favoritism just wash away because I felt like it seemed like it was more unsafe for me to do it that way than to do it while all the girls is up and then just wait to shower last. So I ended up working it out after a few trial runs. I worked it out to where I would just shower last after all the girls had showered. And I would stay in my room while all the girls were showering, and then I would go in fully clothed and not come out—and come out fully clothed again and get dressed in my room. It was like a hassle to even get that approved.

**“I Do Not Consent to This Search!”: COMMUNITY LEVEL PROFILING—
CRIMINALIZATION AND SURVIVAL
AT THE INTERSECTION OF IDENTITIES**

Bourdieu conceptualized symbolic power while striving to understand the role played by social status in maintaining hierarchy within capitalist systems. Symbolic violence, which he characterized as “soft violence” is enacted when holders of symbolic power exploit their role or status within a social hierarchy. Unlike physical violence, it is not explicit, and not necessarily conscious though it may be embedded in physical forms of violence. Bourdieu further asserted

that symbolic violence is often overlooked in social theory and misrecognized in everyday life. This misrecognition allows symbolic violence to seep into dominant discourses as they are spoken, and other forms of violence, as they are enacted on bodies. The body becomes the site of this violence.

The themes of bodily surveillance and bodily freedom were recurrent throughout the interviews, and came up in a variety of ways and across contexts and environment, both within detention and outside. This did not come as a surprise given the historical role that the juvenile justice system has played in regulating and policing girls' sexuality (Pasko, 2010). In *Queer (In)Justice*, Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock (2011) highlight the ways in which the criminal legal system polices gender presentation, while failing to acknowledge the ways in which gender nonconforming queer people – particularly those who are low income or of color – are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement and as targets of violent crimes:

Law enforcement officers have fairly consistently and explicitly policed the borders of the gender binary. Historically and up until the 1980's, such policing took the form of enforcement of sumptuary laws, which required individuals to wear at least three articles of clothing conventionally associated with the gender they were assigned at birth, and subjected people to arrest for impersonating another gender. They contributed to the development of archetypes of gender transgressive people as inherently criminal, and continue to act as unwritten rules, which, when violated, signal disorder and fraud to law enforcement. (pp. 64-65)

Echoes of sumptuary laws presented themselves in the testimonies of several participants who recall their experiences of targeted provocation and violence both within the community via "Stop and Frisk" and within detention facilities themselves. Given the continuous strand of state sanctioned violence represented in both "Stop and Frisk" policies and via the permission of youth restraint within the juvenile justice system, it is not surprising that they both emerged as mechanisms of surveillance and violence by which gender and sexuality are regulated. For example, in describing hir community based experiences of being stopped by the police, one participant describes in explicit detail intersecting features of hir identities and

their intersection with space and place that she feels resulted in her being stopped in the West Village, near Christopher Street while doing outreach to queer and transgender youth:

I did not consent to this search. My pants is right here, so he's putting his hands right here. You're all in my f-ing crotch area and we're on Christopher Street next to Papaya's, and you're sitting here doing this for no apparent reason, just because I'm black, I'm a dyke, and it's Thursday night. It's TNT. Like I don't have time for your quotas. It was like the beginning of the month, so like his quota for last month was low, so he just told his partner to get some. I don't know, twice, twice within a three block difference. One next to Papaya's and then one next to the jewelry store there right by the karaoke bar, right there. What are you doing there? What are you stopping me for?

Toni, who identifies her sexual orientation as *AG*, or *aggressive lesbian*, and *stud* and her gender identity as *female*, also described experiences in which she felt she was being profiled by law enforcement for her combined sexual orientation, gender presentation, and race. When asked the questions “What do your identities mean together? What does it mean to be black and a stud and a female?” Toni responded “It means that if I got a doo rag on and some Tims and a hoodie, I'll get searched if I walk around New York City and I'm walking in the wrong area – which is not a crime. I've gotten *Stopped and Frisked* they think I'm a guy.” Toni also describes her combined sexual orientation and gender presentation as protective with regard to sexual harassment in the community. When I asked her what *stud* meant to her she responded:

Ok, yeah. I'm a girl whatever – but I guess I dress like a guy so guys don't come at me. I got a body – like it's kind of feminine like –you know – if I was to wear like a tight shirt, it would be right on my body. I'm not nervous, but I don't want to be walking down the street like “yo ma.” Oh no no. Like chill n-. Who wants to be saying “no, no, no” like all day.

Alethia is a 19-year-old woman who identifies primarily as AG. She described the almost daily experience of street harassment when out in public with her girlfriend, both of whom were commonly hit on or harassed in a way that Alethia feels they would not have been had they been a heterosexual couple. Alethia described a shift in the tone of the harassment on occasions when she chose to assert the fact that she and her girlfriend were, in fact, a couple. At this point, she

explained, the tone commonly became more aggressively homophobic and sexist, and she and her girlfriend experienced more explicit microaggressions. Alethia also described experiences of harassment and homophobia when she was alone in public and asserted her sexual orientation and disinterest:

Yeah, a lot of times. To this day, it still happens with different people. Like I'll be walking in a street and like a guy will find me attractive and he'll say something nice, like, "Oh, you're beautiful," and I'll say, "Thank you," because regardless of what, it's like, you know, a compliment. Fine. And he'll be like, "Oh, do you have a boyfriend?" And I'll be like, "No, you know, I'm taken, but I have a woman." And then it's just like, "Oh, but why you like girls? And what made you get into that? And why you dress like that?" And it's just like, you know, I could sit there and, you know, explain it to certain people, but certain people are just kind of like ignorant, and they would never really get it, the full understanding of where I'm trying to come from because they just want to see their point of view, and that's it. So I never really bother to stay there and give them information. I just walk away... Yeah, and then when—some of them like the disrespectful ones, "Dyke bitch," or, "Oh, you butch," or, "Oh, like I hope you're raped." Or some crazy things, they're just like, "Wow."

On some occasions, the street harassment Alethia and her girlfriend experienced became physical, and Alethia would move to physically defend herself and her girlfriend. On one such occasion, Alethia was arrested after pulling a knife on a man who physically groped her girlfriend while they were walking down the street. The reality of young same sex practicing and gender nonconforming women being identified as perpetrators when acting in self-defense is a phenomenon whose commonness has gained some attention among queer, transgender, and allied activist communities in the last decade. Alethia describes this incident that led to her arrest:

And I was telling you about the time when I was walking with my girlfriend, after the guy had, you know, touched her behind or whatever, I got upset, and I pulled out a knife on him. Now he ran into the building, into some building, and it had double doors. So one you can open to walk into the building, but the other one, you need like a key, like you live there. So I couldn't get in, so I walked her to the train station. When I came back, it was like two blocks away, the train station. When I walked back, I seen like

31 cops. And I was just like, [inaudible] don't walk back into the building. Me, being the way I am, I wanted to look to see who was in the building, to see if they caught him. I thought they had grabbed him because some lady that asked me what happened, but she seen the knife in my hand. Comes to find out, she was the one who called the cops and reported me instead of reporting him...Some lady that came out when she heard the commotion with me because I was yelling at him. And he was gone, and the cops, she pointed me out, and I got arrested. The first charge was attempted murder, but I didn't touch him or nothing. So they dropped it down to possession of a weapon. I stayed in the bookings. That was worse. That was the first time ever I ever got arrested.

Equally disturbingly, the dynamics present in the harassment that resulted in Alethia's efforts to defend she and girlfriend were replicated in her interactions with law enforcement when she attempted to explain that she had been acting in self-defense. Ultimately, then, not only was she the target of violent harassment, but she was then falsely accused of perpetrating violence, and subjected to further abuse when apprehended by law enforcement:

Yeah, but even the cop, the cop who arrest me, he was real nasty too. Yeah, because he was like, "Oh, why would you try to stab him? You know, even if he made a funny comment," I was like, "Yeah, but he touched my girlfriend." He's like, "Yeah, but can you pick him out?" I'm like, "He's not even around." And he was like, "You shouldn't even be dressing like that." And I was like—and his partner, which was a girl, was telling him like, you know, "Stop with the comments," because, I mean, I guess to a lot to—cops, a lot of people, they don't—probably don't know their rights, but I know some rights. I don't know everything, but he was like, "Yeah, I even—," he was like, he was like, "You want to act like a man and dress like a man? I'll teach you what it means to be with a man." And that's when his partner was like, you know, "Seriously," I forgot what was his last name, but she called him by his last name, she was like, "Stop."

Alethia's experience with law enforcement was a different, though no less egregious injustice than other participants' experiences of having been targeted under policies of Stop and Frisk. A Catch-22, or "no-win" situation, acting in self-defense when faced with gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation based street harassment appeared to place some participants at increased risk for interfacing with law enforcement; interfacing with law enforcement commonly led to gross abuses of power and implicit and explicit bias by authority figures. This multi-tiered

reality of these interpersonal interactions are a reflection of their embeddedness in a larger systemic context characterized by gross imbalances of power.

Similar dynamics were replicated within detention facilities. Participants' descriptions of life inside, and relations between residents and staff within girls detention facilities, painted a portrait that was far from the rehabilitative environment that was initially intended to distinguish the juvenile justice system from adult incarceration. While many participants noted that there were caring people who worked in the facilities and who had their best interests in mind, they were described as being exceptional. The theme of guards' excessive use of force within correctional facilities was alarmingly present across interviews, and many participants gave graphic and detailed accounts of either their own experiences of being physically restrained, or of witnessing the restraint of others. Most participants who'd experienced or witnessed the restraints shared a similar analysis of the abusive power dynamics, both institutionally and interpersonally, that characterized this method of violent discipline. This analysis centered the combined gender, age, and size differential between the mostly male adult guards and the youth inmates:

There was just some kids up there that just did not belong up there at all, like confused as to why they was even up there. You know what I'm saying? And I felt like New York State turned that into a way of revenue and they abused its power like seriously. I mean, I done seen girls go through the hospital over a restraint. I went to a hospital for a few restraints, talking about where they had to get a stitch or something. Like that's just ridiculous. You should not be throwing young women like that on the floor like that (Tasha).

Some participants also spoke to youth health and medical issues that arose and/or were ignored or made worse by the violent restraints. Nashan suffers from epilepsy resulting from a homophobic assault by peers at a Residential Treatment Center. She describes the drawn out process of recovering from being physically restrained while in detention:

Sometimes I was being restrained and I'd catch a seizure. Or sometimes they'd restrain me and they'd throw me inside the isolation room, and I'd

fall down and have a seizure. But somebody would always be there because they knew that if they restrained me and I got too excited, that would follow right after. So it wasn't like they weren't prepared for this shit, but they knew what they were doing at the same time, they just didn't care. Like that's when it came to my health when it came to that particular shit. [inaudible] at OCFS. I learned my lesson at OCFS in my health. So it would be this way because my IV always went in my right. So I would be sitting here, shackle on the bed. And the reason why I say it was uncomfortable is because after having a fucking epileptic episode, like come on. That shit hurts. And it's like certain pills I couldn't take because certain pills didn't mix with the medication. It was like some of the pain would go away, some of it wouldn't. And it's like now I have to be stuck in this one position where I can't move my back, I can't move my body. Not only the pain from my seizure, but pain from the restraint. When they take you down, they take you down. Some of these men that take you down is 200+, 6 foot, mad stocky, built. And they're throwing all their weight on you, like boom. And you're, man, little. Like you're young. You got to think that some of these kids aren't even 5'2. Like you got this 6'5 man just throwing his whole weight on your body. It used to be so bad that every time I used to get a restraint, I would pop blood vessels in my face because that's how heavy they were leaning on your top part. And you're screaming like, "Get off of me." They used to call them the red freckle of death because it wasn't just me, it was a few of us. Like that's how you knew a person was restrained really good. They're screaming at them, "Get off of me, get off of me," that blood vessels pop all over the face and it looks like you got red freckles. They just didn't—they had disregard to people's health sometimes period. Like not just mine.

Several participants spoke to retaliation by correctional staff towards queer or same sex practicing youth in girls detention facilities as being informed by gender identity and presentation. Notably, it was reported by participants across gender spectrums, that AG (aggressive), butch, stud, and other young people whose identities and presentation represented masculine femininities, were subject to increased violence, aggression, microaggressions, mostly through the permitted practice of restraining inmates, but also via verbal shaming and abuse. More feminine presenting lesbians and bisexual women, according to participants, were likely to get hit on by guards. Nashan, one of the participants who spent several years in various detention facilities, describes both of these phenomena:

“Oh, you want to be like a man? You want to be a man? Eat this. Eat it.” Boom and every time they’d throw me on the floor, I’d eat that. “Keep going, you’re not hurting me.” “I don’t care” Every female breaks.” And I used to tell them “I’m not like every other female. I’m not going to break. There’s nothing you going to sit here and do to make me break to make you feel that I am more of a woman just to satisfy your fucking ego.” That used to be my problem with them up there. I don’t give a fuck how many times you throw me on the floor, how rough you throw me on the floor, it doesn’t matter. I’m never going to break and sit here and tell you just so you can feel better. Like you getting off on this? This is my whole thing. Like get off of me. And no females ever restrained me, only males.

Later in the interview, Nashan described hir observation of the ways that more feminine presenting queer women were treated by guards:

The femmes, the female identified as lesbians were the ones that got hit on the most, though...Because they felt that—the men felt that they could turn them straight. Upstate, it was like the aggressive women they felt like they had to verbally abuse us to try to get us to go straight. And with the femme women, the lipstick lesbians, it was, “I’ll dick you down to turn you straight.” It was just ridiculous. Or if you was caught in between or if they felt you was mad pretty, it was—and I got both, but more, “I can’t stand your fucking guts. You’re a fucking lesbian.” I got that.

Tasha witnessed her girlfriend, a masculine presenting lesbian, being beaten in a room across from her own cell. After being hospitalized as a result of the restraint, her girlfriend filed a lawsuit and won. Tasha describes witnessing the assault:

My girlfriend, she got restrained the first night. Tried to kill her. Sat on top of her face. I watched. My room was right across from her. She was AG. She was my girlfriend. When she was going to sleep, the lights were out, and the guards—well, the staff brought her into the room and restrained her. No reason. Because she was acting up all day. She was butt naked, three males in her room, restrained her.

Three male guards restrained her. One sat on her face. [inaudible]. She was hurt.

I asked whether she could tell if they were saying things to her?

Something about being a dyke. It was a lot. Like it was really a lot. It was a painful night. And I watched her scream her lungs away. And she had to go to a hospital because of all the pain they put on her body. Two fat guys.

I asked if anyone tried to report it:

She reported it and she got a lawsuit and she won. She won the lawsuit and she was released. And I had one more year left.

Tasha also describes having bones broken and needing to be hospitalized during some of her many experiences of being restrained:

And when they restrained me, they always restrained me hard. I had a broken arm, a broken leg. (Interviewer: You had to go to the hospital? And did the people at the hospital say, “What’s going on?”) They asked what happened and I told them I got restrained. They said, “What type of restraints have these people been doing to have you girls come in here like this?” I said, “This is how they restrain us. They take our arms, they swing them this way. They swing them back that way [inaudible] and throw in the air. And they put their knee in our back and their hand, their free hand, on our heads. So we’re on the concrete and they’re moving their hand, we’re getting scratched up and hurt. And we’re being handled as if we were men.

I asked Tasha if she knew if anyone at the hospital had ever tried to report the number of restraint related injuries they saw at the hospital, and she responded “If they report it, what’s really going to happen? Why try to do something? They had a conference about girls’ facilities, and a couple of them got shut down. But the ones with the most problems never got shut down.”

Other participants conveyed that they had developed a sense of hopelessness that things could change while they were inside. Many shared stories about the consequences for challenging policy or reporting abuses, which commonly took the form of isolation, having time added to your stay, having other inmates turned against you by staff, being known as a “snitch” and various other forms of retaliation. Others discussed the ineffectiveness of formal, institutionalized processes for actually filing a complaint. The metaphor of voice, not having a voice, and there being a collective voice emerged across several interviews. Notably, participants who saw themselves as being “the voice” tended to have experienced the most frequent and most severe restraints, which clearly operated, at times, as a form of retaliation. As Nashan put it: “If you opened your mouth you’re going down.” Now an organizer with LGBTQ youth in the community, Nashan describes the role she played in detention:

I became the voice for others. So if I felt like something was happening in that facility and I felt like they was doing it towards oppressing women or anybody that was lesbian or something. I'd be like "Yo, that's not right." I became the voice for everybody generally. What they used to call me was the gay lawyer because I would know what they wasn't supposed to do, what they was supposed to do, what was right, what wasn't right. And I would sit here and be like, "All right, so now we're going to have a town hall meeting or something because what you're doing is wrong, and I'm going to approach you about it. It doesn't matter if I'm young. Doesn't matter you're older than me. I don't care. You're wrong." That's generally what I got from other people.

Justice, who is also a youth organizer in the community, describes a similar experience of having been an inmate who resisted and spoke out in the face of abuse and was punished for doing so:

I seen so many people get fired throughout DJJ for fondling the girls and messing with the girls. And being there, I was always so liked. Everybody would come to me and be like, "Do you know X, Y, and Z? The X, Y, and Z?" And then we would tell their coworker, thinking that the coworker's going to help us. Or go to the warden, thinking the warden's going to say something. Screw that, they didn't help. We would get punished, we would get sent – we would get locked in our room. We would be on lockdown. It was like we didn't have no voice. Nobody cared. Nobody cared. And so one girl got pregnant by a worker. I was in Tryon, upstate Tryon. And she was pregnant, they fired him. It was a big investigation. Yo, I seen – I witnessed a lot of men fondling the little girls. A lot of men. Luckily, I was never one of them. I wasn't going for that. They already know.

Justice also describes a more complex relationship with correctional staff. She describes one occasion where she was asked by a female staff member to assault another inmate:

She didn't like her, and I guess everybody respected me, so it was like, I was the voice. Like everybody listened to what I said, so she was like, you know, "Well you need to do X, Y, and Z," and I did it. And she promised me I wasn't going to catch no charge, no nothing, and I did. So that's crazy. It's crazy. I've gotten restrained so many times...I used to have rug burns all on this side of my face and everything, like they used to beat me up. Men, not even women, like men, manhandling girls. Like, no...They probably did it because I was acting out. But instead of using force, why wouldn't you let me talk to somebody? You know, why are you roughing me up? Clearly something's wrong. You know, I don't really remember what I did, but I just remember being in that cell like, you know, "You all hurt me. This shit,

it just makes me stronger, you can't do nothing to me." And they didn't like that. They didn't like that because I wouldn't fold. I wouldn't break for nobody. You know, so they were restraining all the time. They always picked on me, you know.

A less pronounced form of bodily surveillance and what Bordieu conceptualized as *symbolic violence*, emerged from participants' testimonies. Emergent in testimonies of young adults' experiences of reentry from detention and other institutional settings is their experience of readapting to life "on the outside" after a prolonged period of having been under "institutional gaze." This was particularly pronounced in the narratives of participants who had spent significant periods of their lives cycling through the revolving doors of various institutional settings.

Resilience and Survival

A small but growing body of literature on youth resiliency has identified the internal attributes and external supports that allow youth to survive within the context of various forms of adversity. Participants within this study identified several of these same factors as contributing to personal resilience while additionally identifying others that are specific to New York City and to the communities in which they participate. Specifically, five major themes emerged: 1) managing or performing identity 2) performance and embodied forms of healing 3) spirituality 4) activism and organizing.

"Hmm...Let Me Try Dressing Like a Girl:" Strategic Negotiation of Identities

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval's introduces the metaphor of a "stick shift," used to refer to the topography of consciousness in opposition, "oppositional ideological forms" or "modes" drawn upon, utilized, performed by subordinated people and communities in resistance to domination. Within Sandoval's framework, the fifth gear, "differential consciousness," "permits the driver to select, engage and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power." Functioning in and through social, cultural, and political hierarchies,

locations, and systems of value, the chosen position of the clutch, at any moment is a strategic and tactical decision with regard to access and survival. In the case of many participants, within a larger context of navigating racialized gender roles and restrictions, and of anti-queer and anti-transgender sentiment, interstitial spaces and identities were skillfully navigated, deployed, and performed as a survival strategy. Some participants narrated the ways that they had learned to make strategic use of identity categories in order to create safety and to negotiate the terms of their juvenile justice involvement and their safety in the world more generally. This would not have been an option were there not differential treatment and consequences at various stages of JJ system involvement for youth who presented differently in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. Tasha spent the longest continuous period of time in detention of all the study participants, describes how she eventually learned to “girl it up,” or present more femininely during her court dates in order to avoid being remanded:

All right, it took me a while to figure it out because my judge never really said anything, so I had to learn. See, growing up liking girls, I'd never been around prejudice. Like I could walk down the street with my girlfriend, holding her hand without a problem. But going to lockup, it was a whole different story because they didn't like it and there was nothing anybody could say or do. It was just something that was not liked. It was like—so when I went to court for the first time dressed as a boy, I had my hair braided back. My hair was down to here. It was braided back and that's how I felt that day. I just felt like doing that. And I got remanded. And when I noticed I got remanded four times in a row without him even looking at my case, nor saying anything about it, I was like, “Hmm, let me try dressing like a girl.” So I went and got my hair—I took my hair out of the braids, curled it up, put on my nice little girly outfit, and I didn't get remanded. And he actually talked about my case. So when I did it again, I'm like, “Hmm, I see.”

Strategic use of gender identity and gender presentation for survival and safety extended to situations and circumstances beyond the juvenile justice system. Some participants described strategic gender identification and presentation as a form of resistance and a means of negotiating survival within various neighborhoods and communities. In these cases, gender presentation was a means of deflecting undesired male attention, sexual harassment, and cat

calling on the street. Strategic negotiation of gender identity was also a tool utilized in the course of interactions with law enforcement during instances of profiling. Toni describes her feelings about unsolicited male attention in the neighborhood where she lives and grew up:

Ok, yeah. I'm a girl whatever – but I guess I dress like a guy so guys don't come at me. I got a body – like it's kind of feminine like –you know – if I was to wear like a tight shirt, it would be right on my body. I'm not nervous, but I don't want to be walking down the street like “yo ma.” Oh no no. Like chill n-. Who wants to be saying “no, no, no” like all day.

Nashan, who identifies as two spirit and feels most comfortable using multiple pronouns (he/she/they or they), describes negotiating gender during three experiences of being pulled aside by law enforcement on the street over a one month period:

They're reading me as a man. Each time they're reading me as a man. “Excuse me, sir.” And I'd be ignoring them because they're not talking to me. Because at the end of the day, I know I may identify as a woman, you identify me as a man if you the cop. I'm going to keep walking. He was like “Sir.” I'm like, “I'm not a sir, so obviously you can't be looking for me. Am I free to go?”

Nashan describes using a similar strategy to feel safer in social environments that feel particularly homophobic:

If I'm in a particular area when I know it's, say, homophobic, or if I feel an energy or something that seems like it's homophobic, I'll use female pronouns. I won't even say, you know? And then if it's not, I'm open: he, she, them, or they. That's exactly how I'll come out. Like either one is good for you because as I present myself, you know, some people tend to catch up and be like, “Oh, I'm so sorry.” It's all right. So I tend to be open with that, except for a homophobic situation. I'm female in that.

“When I Vogue...I Feel Comfortable...Accepted” HEALING ENVIRONMENTS AND COMMUNITIES

Participants described many different forms of healing and commitments to their communities. Many were engaged in activism and expressed a desire to create change so that the next generation of LGBTQ youth would not have the same experiences they had with the juvenile justice system, in school, and in foster care. Some were actively engaged with youth

organizing groups whose missions were to end street harassment for LGBTQ youth, and to engage in policy change work. Others were doing internships at LGBTQ youth serving organizations. A small handful of participants were involved in NYC's Ball Scene. Central to all of these forms of personal resiliency is their embeddedness in an ethic of cultural work or *performance*.

Nashan is involved with several activist groups and experiences her activist communities as her family and primary source of support. She describes her activist involvement over time:

I first became involved in activism at 16 years old. This is when (activist attorney) was working with me very close in the Urban Justice Center. And I was doing volunteer work for them in working with youth communications, so that's where my first I would say step towards activism started. Started telling my story to represent and everything like that. And then (she) pulled me and involved me with Each One Teach One, which was an organization that was helping get rights for people in the juvenile justice system. So that was my first boom. So I went to Albany and spoke to the legislators then and everything like, the assemblymen and women and congress and all that stuff. That was a big thing for me. And then got back and forth into OCFS and life was on a whirlwind. And then I got back in with the Urban Justice Center, and (activist attorney) told me about (activist attorneys') project, which was two and a half years ago. So I jumped in on that baby and I've been in activism heavy ever since. FIERCE, ALP, anything when it comes to that. And I'm just growing more and more into the activism culture from the radical beliefs to the radical politics. And I'm just like trying to find my total comfortability of where I want to be in activism now because I know that's my total calling and passion. I just need to figure out where my foundation is because my mind is everywhere. Like I want to help every little thing, and I'm like trying to figure out if I'm going to do it through my writing or am I going to open up my own organization like I planned to since I was 14 years old?

In his ethnographic study of the Ballroom Community in Detroit, Marlon Bailey (2009) explicates the power of collective performance and its utility in a variety of social justice undertakings. Bailey notes that while recognized by some CBOS, performance has not been embraced in earnest by public health, and has scarcely been deployed as a method or object of study within research on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, despite its innovative potential as a generator of transformative spaces and possibilities. Marlon references D. Soyini Madison

and Judith Hamera's (2006) assertion that performance studies has been concerned with how human beings, through performance and performativity "fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world, especially those who have limited or no access to state power."

Scholars in multiple arenas have written about the highly embodied nature of queer and transgender people's identity, oppression, and survival and the ways in which we manage and transform stigmatized identities and less valued lives. Scholars of HIV and AIDS prevention, including Bailey and others, have argued that the Ballroom Community is one of the primary means by which urban Black and Latina/o queer and transgender communities create and engage in HIV prevention strategies. Other functions of the Ballroom Scene include affirming and supporting queer and transgender youth of color's same sex attraction and desire, and providing home, community, and family or kinship networks (Arnold & Bailey, 2009). In an ethnographic study conducted with Ballroom communities in Los Angeles and Detroit, Arnold and Bailey (2009) explored sex-gender and kinship structures within houses; and more specifically, the roles and functions played by house mothers and fathers in the lives of African-American LGBTQ youth with regard to HIV prevention. Participants cited involvement with the Ballroom community as fulfilling many different kinds of needs in their lives.

Crystal a 21-year-old transgender woman explains the importance of her involvement in the ball scene:

Wow, the ball scene has played a big role in my life. My first house was a Miki Moto Revlon, and I actually learned how to be the person I was and not hide who I was. And that always felt good that, you know, you can go to a place and become flamboyant as soon as you walk through the door, or become a superstar or someone who you're not in the real world. It's like an actual world. It's like the stuff you can't do here, you're most definite to do it in the Kiki scene or the real scene, ballroom scene.

I asked Crystal to describe the ways the ball scene has helped her to heal:

When I vogue, I'm in an environment with a whole bunch of people just like me and I feel comfortable, I feel accepted. What's another word? Rejuvenated, knowing that, you know, if something happened, it was because I was the only gay person in the room or, "Oh my gosh, someone just called someone a faggot. And I hope they're not talking about me because I'm a transsexual." You know, stuff like that.

Jasmine, who identifies as a femme aggressive lesbian, and who is not out to her immediate family, describes the ballroom scene as something she does as a hobby because a lot of her close friends are involved in it, and as a place where she can go to have fun with other LGBTQ people. Though she describes it as "not as big in my life as it is in a lot of people's," she also explains that the ballroom scene became somewhere where she could forge kinship and experience family in ways that centered and tended to her experiences as a young lesbian in the world:

I have a gay mother and a gay father, and that's also my family. So in a sense, I have two families. My gay father is 30 and my gay mother is 22, and I met them through ballroom. I asked my gay mother and my gay father asked me. And it was just like we just formed the relationship in the ballroom scene and they were just definitely people who helped me like find identity in the ballroom scene and just figure out what I wanted to do, and just people who I looked up to and could talk to, and we just formed that bond. My gay father is in a completely different house as me, and me and my mother are in the same gay house, which is the house of Ebony.

I asked Jasmine if she also had gay siblings:

Yeah, but most of my gay siblings are just ones that I chose, but it's weird because some people's gay siblings are the gay parents' other kids, and I'm okay with them too, but I have my own gay brothers and sisters that I chose and they chose me, so I have like two sets of gay siblings.

I asked, "and what role—like how do you experience family with them? How is it similar or different from your bio family?"

It's pretty similar. I mean, I can just—I talk to my gay parents about a lot of the same things that I talk about with my real parents, minus the ballroom and the gay stuff. We talk about anything and everything, and it's just like they help me through life and they're older than me, so they've been

through a lot of the things that I'm going through right now. So it's kind of similar.

Consistent with Arnold and Bailey's (2009) findings, house parents were often the people that Jasmine called upon when crises arose that she did not feel she could share with her birth parents. For example, when she was incarcerated again at the age of 19 and placed in an adult facility on Riker's Island, she did not tell her birthparents for fear of reprimand. She did disclose to her house parents who, though upset, visited and supported her through her two week period of incarceration.

**“Everybody needs that. They need somebody in their life that's gonna be like like you alright, “you gonna get through this”:
The Importance of Mentorship**

Having adult mentors emerged as a particularly important aspect of resilience in the face of navigating abusive systems and their aftermath. This was particularly pronounced for participants who did not have supportive family members in their lives. Participants named therapists, caseworkers, legal advocates, sympathetic line staff, gay kin, teachers, community activists, artists, and others, as indispensable people throughout their lives. Mentors served the functions of helping participants to externalize experiences of abuse and oppression, assisting in navigating systemic bureaucracies and apathy, reflecting participants' persistent humanity back to them, connecting participants to community based resources in the absence of adequate reentry services, and with the added burden of negotiating life with “a record.” Mentors also served the important function of being a consistent adult presence to listen, bear witness, guide, and extend care, even when they could not remove obstacles or perform more concrete forms of advocacy.

Nashan, who had been kicked out by her adoptive mother for being gay, and had experienced some of the worst institutional homophobia and violence I heard throughout the interviews, describes her relationship with a therapist in a detention facility:

She's like the main reasons why I totally got involved, actually with the whole Psychology and law situation, like because she realized I needed out from –my counselor, she was a doctor. I cannot remember her name. I can't remember her name for the life of me. But she was there throughout the whole time for my individual – just the one woman we could see once a week. And she realized that this was too much for me, me being locked up was too much for me. I was facing too many different issues at once and too many problems going on with my life at once. For me to have really been in that particular situation, she felt that place wasn't therapeutic for me at all. She felt that it wasn't going to do anything but put me into a more rebellious stage. Like we had a very open-ended relationship when it came to a client and, you know, doctor. And she gave me my first psychology textbook, Psychology 101. And I read that from front to back. It was nice where I felt like they were picking on me or I got restrained or whatever have you to know what kind of reason. I would literally take the psychology book and study and see what triggered that person to decide to restrain me. Because she felt like I always wanted to know the answer behind everything, behind every action. So she felt like the psychology would be great for me to start right there, and that's what made me want to take my GED, go to college. That right there was the first step of me really realizing that everybody up there really wasn't all that bad. Like some staff actually did have my side, you know, sometimes, but sometimes they actually couldn't do it because they would get in trouble by their supervisors.

Monica, who had recently aged out of foster care after being in numerous foster family, Residential Treatment Center (RTC), and kinship care placements from the age of two, is living on her own in an apartment for the first time and looking for work in the midst of a recession and with a record. She notes the importance of not only mentorship, but connectedness more generally, as she struggles with what sometimes feels like insurmountable adversity:

I don't feel like nobody should go through anything alone. So you should always have one person who – you knew – agrees with everything you do, that makes you happy...that's there, that supports you. Everybody needs at least one person in their life to support them. I don't think anybody should go through stuff alone – just have nobody. Nobody. No. I don't see how you can do it. Like me, if I don't have nobody, I at least want one person... In the end, that's what a lot of people need. When you have an adult or older person that – you know – make you feel so good about everything you do, and pushes you, and motivates, there ain't no stopping you. I have it and I had it. So...there been times when I been pure down. I know when I'm down there be people that are like "S., get UP! You gonna be alright. And I be like...I may break down and stuff, but that's what

everybody, EVERYBODY needs that. They need somebody in their life that's gonna be like like you alright, "you gonna get through this."

Justice noted that she wishes she'd had the mentorship she currently has in her life when she was younger. After going through the juvenile justice system and having a brief experience within the adult prison system, she decided to get her GED, began an internship, and became involved in community organizing. She describes how empowering it feels for her to work with queer activist attorneys who are committed to ending police harassment of LGBTQ youth and young adults of color:

They are amazing people. And basically, like I got my little sticker. Well, not these two, but Stop and Frisk. You know, (queer activist attorney) is a lawyer, so she basically is like – we meet every Thursday and it's a small group, probably like eight or nine of us. And she teaches us about the law. She teaches us about our rights with police and how to go about certain situations. Like stuff that people wouldn't know that they should know, like we exercise our right to remain silent and do not consent to searches and, you know, stuff like that. And like she really teaches us about charges, like, okay, if you're being charged with this, they got to have, you know, a certain amount of evidence or they have to prove this. And if you know in your mind that they can't prove it, don't plead to it. You know, just wait it out, go to court as long as you have to go. Like she just gives us skills to prevent – skills that we know our rights. It's just like know your rights training when it comes to police and the court system and stuff like that.

**“This is What’s Going on in 2012, You Know, that Type of Thing. So that’s Why the Church Home is Kind of like Home for me”:
The Role of Spirituality**

Despite noting that there was a clash between many organized religions and LGBTQ lives, the majority of participants identified spirituality as source of strength, resilience, and hope in their lives. Very few participants held feelings of hostility or absolute dismissal towards religion, but rather towards the use of religion to justify intolerance and oppression. Most participants had been raised Christian and many had been moderately to very active in church during their formative years. Participants' were also critical of many Christian Churches' interpretation of the Bible that casts same sex attraction and gender variance as “an abomination,” “going against God,” or “serving the wrong master,” and the pain that it had and – in some case – continues to

cause in their lives, including daily microaggressions and the role that it sometimes played in family rejection or non-acceptance. Despite this, and sometimes at the expense of experiencing a “clash in identity,” a number of the LGBTQ young adults I spoke with identified as Christian, experienced a commitment to Christianity, and/or expressed that they held spiritual beliefs and practices that drew from multiple spiritual traditions.

I asked Jasmine, a 21-year-old, multi-racial Christian queer identified woman, how her identities do or do not fit together:

I mean, some of them kind of like clash, because I guess the Bible says a man and a woman, so a lot of people think it’s weird for somebody to be LGBT and be Christian, but I’m not like super Christian because I feel like if I were to out myself to the church community, they really would have like a problem with that, so I feel like you can identify as more than one thing, but sometimes they will clash.

Justice, a 23-year-old, Black, lesbian identified woman shared a similar response to the question of how her identities do or do not fit together:

They probably don’t fit together because you’re not supposed to be gay – well, like society says you’re not supposed to be and Christian. It’s like I have three strikes against me. I’m gay and Christian and Black. So they don’t fit together, but that’s me and I don’t care what anybody else says or thinks.

I asked if her understanding of her identities stayed the same over time or had changed:

Well, of course, I’ve been Black all my life and I knew that. Being Christian, I guess I was raised with my grandmother and she was a Christian so I just, mimicked what I’d seen and followed her steps and, you know, tried to be everything she wanted me to be. And I don’t see a problem with it. I go to church. It’s cool. And I’ve been gay since I can remember. I had a girlfriend in kindergarten, so always liked girls, so it’s been the same for a long time. I’m kind of like stuck, set in my ways.

Nashan, a 23-year-old who identifies as “mixed breed” (German, Native American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Black and White) and as two spirit, or lesbian, describes how she has

managed, as an adult, to integrate the strong Christian upbringing of her youth with belief systems and spiritual practices from other religious and cultural traditions:

The whole faith thing. So I tend to like generally – I believe more heavily in the Christianity because that's what I grew up around. I embraced it much. Church was my life when I was kid. It still sort of kind of is. I found a church home that generally doesn't –they loosely base it's doctrine on the Bible. Like my pastor, my bishop, will go to a verse and then he'll put the real life everyday and not what the Bible would say, you know? This is what's going on in 2012, you know, that type of thing. So that's why the church home is kind of like home for me. I do not go to church every day or every Sunday. I tend to know that my prayer closet is where I go. And if it need be for me to speak to my lord, then I can speak to him wherever I am. I don't need a place of worship for that. So that's why I feel like certain things with Christianity don't blend with me, but I'm making it work for my way. And yeah, that's just about it, so I basically base my faith and my spirituality on at least five different denominations of spirituality and religion.

CHAPTER 6 – IMPLICATIONS

Examination of biographies and “I-Poems” in Chapter 4 demonstrated the transformative and dynamic nature of identity formation processes for participants. Findings addressed in Chapter 4 also revealed that, consistent with other studies, family acceptance and rejection plays a distinct role in determining youth’s extent of systems involvement, and that the filing of a PINS petitions, or voluntary child welfare placement, is one of the primary mechanisms by which youth become systems involved. Finally, participants’ narratives illuminated the ways in which schools and child welfare systems become pipelines into, or revolving doors among these systems in unique ways for LGBTQ youth of color.

Chapter 5 explored the ways in which participants’ narratives revealed incredible resiliency and strength as well as strategies of surviving oppressive systems, whether familial, school based, or child welfare and juvenile justice based. Findings also revealed tremendous amounts of interpersonal and state sanctioned forms of violence participants experienced both within and outside of the juvenile justice system. Moreover, they commonly arrived at juvenile detention facilities already having experienced considerable trauma and experience the juvenile justice system as retraumatizing and far from rehabilitative or therapeutic.

It is important to note some of the limitations of this study when looking at its findings. Firstly, the experiences of participants in this study were specific to New York State. While much was revealed that is generalizable to the culture of all girls juvenile detention facilities, some distinctions would likely arise in testimonies of LGBTQ young adults in other geographies and locations. Additionally, no interviews were conducted with LGBTQ young adults who had experiences in boys detention facilities. The culture within boys facilities is likely somewhat different and I imagine there may be distinct pathways for LGBTQ youth incarcerated within them. Finally, while broad outreach was conducted in order to speak with young adults who represented an array of queer and trans identities, a very small number of people of transgender

experience were represented within this study. The exacerbated mistreatment of transgender people inside and outside of detention, and the distinct organizing efforts of young trans people, both warrant future research looking specifically at the experiences of trans youth who have been in detention.

Intersectional Theorizing and Queer and Transgender Youth

Clearly, participants' testimonies revealed that focusing only on one aspect of youth identity would not only be inappropriate, it would be actively resisted. Moreover, it would fail to capture the reasons why queer and transgender youth of color become overrepresented in child welfare and juvenile justice systems and are frequently exposed to chronic violence and abuse within them. This speaks to the need to use an intersectional lens in social work policy, practice, and education.

In Incorporating Intersectionality in Social Work Practice, Research, Policy, and Education, the authors argue for the need for a paradigm shift within contemporary social work: “specifically this is a shift from a linear, either/or, one-dimensional paradigm to a dynamic, contextual, multilevel, both/and approach that considers the power of socially constructed relations of oppression and inequality” (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 2). Intersectionality—a comprehensive theory addressing these concerns for complexity and a “both/and” approach—has its origins in Black feminist thought and has also been widely utilized within queer theory. Patricia Hill Collins (1999) defines intersectionality as “particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation,” furthering the position that unlike additive models of oppression, “intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type and that all oppression work together in producing injustice.” In the article, “The Sociology of Sexualities: Queer and Beyond,” Joshua Gamson and Dawne Moon (2004) apply the connections often drawn from intersectionality theory to queer theory, noting that sexuality sociologists have begun to evaluate

the ways in which sexuality is woven within and among other culturally constructed categories of inequality. Similarly, David Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz (2005) strengthen this link to queer theory, noting that the “commitment to interrogating the social processes that not only produced and recognized but also normalized and sustained identity” increases the salience of intersectionality as a frame for evaluating multiple “social antagonisms.”

The fracturing impact of a singular focus upon sexual orientation and gender identity within educational venues, social services, and youth spaces, and its impact upon queer and trans youth of color, is increasingly being addressed within academic and nonacademic writing as well as in documentary film (Mehrotra, 2010; Gastic & Johnson, 2009; Wright, 2008; Kumashiro, 2001). Andrea Daley et al. (2007) emphasize interlocking oppressions in experiences of bullying among LGBTQ youth, arguing that:

A singular focus on sexual orientation as the presumed primary source of peer victimization for LGBTQ youth may inadvertently contribute to a “matrix of oppression” (youth’s experiences of simultaneous, multiple, and interlocking oppressions) by privileging and addressing only one form of inequality, without attention to the interactive relationships between systems of sexual orientation, gender, race/ethnicity, social class, and immigration/citizenship status. (p. 12)

Thus, the distinct experiences of marginalized youth in the justice system highlight the need to work on policy remedies from an intersectional framework, one that aims “to capture both structure and dynamics consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination,” when engaging in comprehensive reform efforts of either the justice or child welfare system (Crenshaw, 2000).

There is dual documentation showing an overrepresentation of both LGBTQ youth (most of whom are LGTBQ youth of color) and youth of color (some of whom are LGBTQ) within the juvenile justice system and the child welfare system (Mallon et al., 2002; Majd et al., 2009). Given this, I conclude that there is an urgent need to apply an intersectional lens to child welfare

and juvenile justice research, policy, and practice in order to gain an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which multiple institutionalized systems of oppression are operate in the lives of LGBTQ youth involved in these institutions.

The overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems and the analogous structural biases that persist in both systems, combined with the reality that family and criminal courts are a hub of decision making in the lives of LGBTQ youth in both systems and that LGBTQ youth face large-scale breaches of justice in both systems, indicates that a well-coordinated collaborative policy reform effort is not only warranted but also necessary. Moreover, given the overrepresentation of LGBTQ youth of color within both systems, the overrepresentation of young women of color—many of whom are LGBTQ—within the juvenile justice system, and the particularly acute mistreatment of transgender and gender nonconforming youth, policy and practice reform within legal, medical, educational, and social service arenas must be embedded within an intersectional framework. This intersectional framework must be one that is attentive to the overlapping, institutionalized forms of oppression that shape the lives of systems-involved LGBTQ youth and, as Black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins has argued, “reminds us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (1999, p. 9).

Two Pronged Approach: Transform and Reduce the Systems

Recommendations for Practice, Programming, and Policy in Juvenile Justice

The Equity Project, a national collaboration of individuals and organizations with diverse expertise relevant to LGBTQ youth in the juvenile justice system, is a multiyear initiative “aimed at ensuring that LGBTQ youth who are in the juvenile justice system are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness” (Majd et al., 2009). Spearheaded by attorneys, psychologists, psychiatrists, social service providers, community activists, and LGBTQ youth, the Equity Project released “Hidden Injustice” (Majd et al., 2009), a report that seeks to educate professionals working in

the juvenile justice system about the continuing stigma and systemic biases experienced by LGBTQ youth as well as to suggest concrete policy and practice reforms. A call to action, “Hidden Injustice” urges juvenile justice professionals to treat, and ensure that others treat, all LGBTQ youth with fairness, dignity, and respect. The report specifically encourages juvenile justice professionals to develop individualized, developmentally appropriate responses to the behavior of each LGBTQ youth, tailored to address the specific circumstances of his or her life, and explicitly prohibiting attempts to ridicule or change a youth’s sexual orientation or gender identity.

Acknowledging that many youth in the juvenile justice system have had child welfare involvement and recognizing the significant movement of LGBTQ youth between these systems, the Equity Project calls for collaboration between and among these two systems, arguing that juvenile courts should collaborate with other system partners and decision makers to develop and maintain a continuum of programs, services, and placements competent to serve LGBTQ youth, such as prevention programs and detention alternatives. Importantly, the report contends that individuals working within juvenile courts should be available to address the conflict that some families face over the sexual orientation or gender identity of their LGBTQ child. Consequently the report insists that juvenile justice professionals receive training and resources regarding the unique societal, familial, and developmental challenges confronting LGBTQ youth and the relevance of these issues to court proceedings.

“Hidden Injustice” additionally makes recommendations for more just and equitable treatment of LGBTQ youth that echo themes found within child welfare reform initiatives. Included among these is the insistence that, at all stages of the juvenile justice process, agencies and offices involved in the juvenile justice system (e.g., prosecutor, defender, and probation offices) develop, adopt, and enforce policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination and mistreatment of youth on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. The report also argues that juvenile courts must ensure the timely appointment of qualified and

well-resourced counsel to provide ardent defense advocacy at all stages of delinquency proceedings and that juvenile justice professionals must take responsibility for protecting the civil rights of LGBTQ youth.

Similar to the recommendation that LGBTQ youth be placed in the most intimate and family-like child welfare setting possible, the Equity Project asserts that the juvenile justice system must commit to using the least restrictive alternative necessary when intervening in the lives of youth and their families and avoid unnecessary detention. Finally, acknowledging the particularly acute mistreatment of transgender youth, the “Hidden Injustice” report insists that juvenile justice professionals promote the well-being of transgender youth by allowing them to express and live out their gender identity through choice of clothing, hairstyle, and name and by guaranteeing that they have access to appropriate medical care if necessary.

Data from this study clearly reveals that child welfare and juvenile justice systems often do not produce healthy outcomes for youth and their families. Furthermore, the most marginalized youth and families – by virtue of race, sexual orientation and gender identity, family composition, citizenship status, and/or some combination thereof -tend to have the greatest representation and to fare the worst abuse within them. Chapter 4 shared but some of the stories of systemic and actual violence enacted against participants, and the enduring impact of this violence upon the lives of participants and their families. Given these realities, major shifts must be made with regard to the way these systems operate and are funded. Family preservation, reunification, and reconciliation should be the primary goal underlying child welfare policy, given the commonly worse abuse that they frequently experience in out of home care. This abuse takes on a unique and sometimes exacerbated form for LGBTQ young adults as evidenced by the testimony of participants in this study. Participants spoke of the distinct ways that family fracture either prompted or further deepened their involvement within systems. The use of PINS petitions to sanction or manage sexual identity or gender by the parents of participants is a striking example of how the families’ inability to address the conflation of their

homophobia and transphobia with their difficulty in working through very real concerns related to their children (truancy, running away). Though it will not heal or resolve every family conflict related to youth sexual orientation or gender identity – and it certainly will not fix or alleviate the structural inequalities that result in low income families and families of color disproportionate representation in child welfare systems - therapeutic interventions, like those of the Family Acceptance Project, should be funded, implemented, and continually tested and developed. The likelihood that opportunities for this type of family therapy can cultivate some degree of healing and reconciliation for some families that will result in youth being more likely to grow up outside of institutions warrants its continued use and development. Participants' narratives also spoke to the benefits of queer group homes and kinship and foster family placements where their sexual orientation and gender identity are more likely to be accepted and affirmed. Thus, I also recommend the continued allocation of funding of queer group homes and the proactive recruitment of foster and adoptive families prepared to nourish and care for queer and transgender youth. Ultimately, allowing homophobic and transphobic people to become foster and adoptive parents does not benefit anyone. Consistent with the principles of *cultural humility*, and recognizing that there is not an absolute point of enlightenment, spaces for continued support of foster and adoptive parent and caregivers' attitudes towards queer and transgender people should be ongoing. Moreover, prospective queer and transgender foster and adoptive parents should be proactively recruited not only as parents, but as mentors for youth.

Participants' testimonies also demonstrated in detail their intimate experiences of the culture of sexual and physical violence that exists within juvenile detention facilities and the ways in which participants' testimonies demonstrated the likelihood that their lives prior to being incarcerated were commonly characterized by sexual and physical violence of an interpersonal and/or systemic nature. Participants' mapping out of their life histories demonstrated the ways in which negotiating multiple forms of gendered, classed, racialized and sexualized violence increased their likelihood of systems involvement. This violence took place

within the context of family, community spaces, schools, and various institutional residences – where its existence and perpetration should be understood as related to the intrinsically violent nature of the institutions themselves. This was related to high levels of exposure to law enforcement, and law enforcement bias, which also placed participants at increased likelihood for juvenile justice involvement in that they created a part of the context in which decisions regarding survival and daily living were made.

On a broad level, it is important that we understand and conceptualize violence in both its interpersonal and state sanctioned forms and acknowledge the relationship between larger scale ethics of violence and the ways in which they are interpersonally enacted. Childhood sexual abuse continues to be a widespread problem – indeed a crisis. Moreover, we have largely failed as a society to generate transformative solutions, or ones that allow dignity or healing for anyone. Now is the time for us to look at the root causes of violence and abuse, and the aspects of our culture that facilitate their pervasiveness. This involves acknowledging the ways in which an ethic of violence is built into the structures of so many of our systems and asking critical questions about how this came to be? Juvenile detention facilities – indeed all forms of imprisonment – are a symbolic representation of violence in its many forms and should not be misunderstood as rehabilitative. This was very clearly articulated in participants’ narrations of their life histories, which lend visibility to the dynamics of power and privilege embedded within discourses about “reducing crime” and “creating safety” through imprisonment and policies like “Stop and Frisk.”

In the last ten years, much attention has been given to the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), its purview, and application within adult and juvenile detention facilities alike. However, much of the focus has been on prevention of and consequences for cases of sexual assault of inmates by other inmates. As Pasko (2010) has argued, and as participant testimonies demonstrated, excessive use of force by correctional officers is not uncommonly motivated by homophobia, transphobia, and sexism, and always embedded within a gendered context and the

intrinsic imbalances of power that characterize dynamics between adult correctional officers and youth in detention. Multiple participants gave detailed accounts of sexualized violence characterized by microaggressions targeting youth sexual orientation, gender identity and gender presentation. Moreover, some participants shared that efforts to report mistreatment resulted in retaliation and further abuse. Given this reality, it is urgent that state sanctioned violence that occurs within detention facilities be recognized as such and taken into consideration under the purview of PREA.

Community Capacity and Restorative and Transformative Justice

Every possible effort should be made to reduce youth incarceration and the use of detention facilities while increasing community capacity. This includes supporting the robust and organic efforts of queer and transgender youth activist groups such as FIERCE, Queer Youth Space, and Streetwise and Safe, and their projects of documenting their own histories and conducting research within their own communities. Examples of community based restorative and transformative justice models and methods exist and have been implemented and studied.

Community collectives, such as generationFIVE, have also proposed alternative approaches to State intervention using transformative justice approaches. generationFIVE's mission is to end childhood sexual abuse within five generations by working to "mend the intergenerational impact of childhood sexual abuse on individuals, families, and communities. In their 2005 report *Toward Transformative Justice: A Liberatory Approach to Childhood Sexual Abuse and other forms of Intimate and Community Violence*, generationFIVE outlines a blueprint for the creation of "processes and institutions for individual and social justice that confront State and systemic violence" by developing campaigns to challenge the circumstances and social conditions that perpetuate all forms of violence; and by addressing intimate, interpersonal and community violence in ways that do not collude with State and systemic violence. Generation FIVE's framework for addressing violence is grounded in transformative

justice,³ the most appropriate framework for use in reconceptualizing and responding to the experiences of youth ensnared in juvenile justice systems because of its multilevel understanding of violence. GenerationFIVE's transformative justice framework is grounded in five core assumptions: that 1) ending child sexual abuse requires ending other forms of oppression and violence; 2) a changed world requires and supports individual, community, and political transformation towards liberation; 3) true justice in cases of child sexual abuse and other forms of violence requires that we transform and do not perpetuate the very conditions—State violence and community injustice – that allow child sexual abuse to continue; 4) integration of anti-oppression practices; and 5) innovation, evaluation, reinvention.

It is important to note the colonial legacies of systems of punishment institutionalized via prisons and detention centers and their traceability to institutions of slavery and genocide. Of equal importance is the concurrent displacement of culturally informed modes of justice in which transformative and restorative models have their origins. In “Catching Our Breath: A Decolonization Framework for Healing Indigenous Families” Evans-Campbell and Walters, (2006) propose best practices for understanding, responding to, and engaging in healing work with indigenous children and families given all that we have learned about historical trauma, or “the distress and suffering resulting from numerous compounding historically traumatic events experiences by a community over several generations (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 1999, as cited in Evans-Campbell & Walters, 2006). Based on events that are generally catastrophic in nature and shared by a targeted *collective*, historically traumatic events include things like genocide, massacre, sterilization of Native women without their consent, state sanctioned removal of

³ GenerationFIVE defines a Transformative Justice as an approach that calls for individual as well as community accountability and transformation. It seeks to provide survivors with immediate safety and long-term agency, healing, and reparations while holding offenders of child sexual abuse accountable within and by their communities. This accountability includes stopping immediate abuse, making a commitment to not engage in future abuse, and offering reparations for past abuse. Such offender accountability requires community responsibility and access to healing. Beyond survivors and offenders, TJ also seeks to transform inequity and power abuses within communities. Through building the capacity of communities to increase justice internally. Transformative Justice seeks to support collective action towards addressing larger issues of injustice and oppression.

native children from their homes via boarding schools, health related experimentation, and a succession of traumatic and systematic assault by foreign governments on indigenous. The impact of these cumulative responses upon AIAN families and communities is known as a “historical trauma response” or “soul wound,” or the bio-psycho-cultural-spiritual wounding of from historically traumatic events and historical trauma, consequences that result in a host of community levels social and health problems, including high rates of unemployment, substance use, violence, and poor health and mental health indicators. Historical Trauma Responses (HTR’s) may also be intergenerationally transmitted to offspring who have had not had direct encounters with traumatic events. Evans-Campbell and Walters (2006) have additionally conceptualized a Colonial Trauma Response (CTR), or “a complex set of historical (including HTR) and contemporary trauma responses to collective, individual, and interpersonal, colonization-based traumatic events” (p. 275). Historical trauma research is important for understanding the historical reasons why disproportionate numbers of youth of color become child welfare and juvenile justice systems involved, the contemporary and intergenerational impact of disproportionate involvement on youth, families, and communities, and decolonizing practice competencies, grounded in traditional modes of healing, and useful for their liberatory potential for both AIAN families and practitioners, as well as for their capacity to interrupt intergenerational cycles of trauma.

There are many ways in which the Community Advisory Board assembled for this project has acted as a Transformative Justice collective insofar as our work has sought to fulfill many of the aims outlined in Generation FIVE’s report. Specifically, we sought to address state sanctioned or systemic child abuse enacted against queer and transgender youth, broadly defined. This includes both intimate instances of interpersonal violence as well as the State and systems sanctioned violence that create the conditions for enactment of interpersonal acts of violence. We also sought to address the structural, administrative, and symbolic violence that informs the lives of queer and transgender youth and young adults. Moreover, we sought to

embody and imbue our processes with ideals of the accountability we wished to enact and to see enacted in the world and to dialogue, where possible, about the opportunities for and limitations of our ability to do so.

The more deeply I moved into planning for and conducting the research itself, the clearer it became that the funding context in which the research takes place – or does not – is a powerful barometer of social and political attitudes. There are ways in which the availability or unavailability of funding to conduct research around certain substantive issues, or using a particular set of methods, is its own form of data that I would be remiss to overlook. Critical writing in a number of disciplines and arenas, within academia, and outside of it, has sought to address the myriad ways in which funding streams shape research agendas and methodologies as well as organizational agendas and capabilities.

In the *Revolution Will Not be Funded*, Incite! (2007) maps out and historicizes the development and current state of 501(c)(3) funding and the rise of the not-for-profit industrial complex, a system of relationships between the state, the owning classes, foundations, and social justice and social service organizations “that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and every day management of political movements.” They argue that the current not for profit model holds the capacity to eclipse grassroots social justice movement building. Relatedly, in their text, *Critical Praxis and Transnational Feminisms*, Richa Nagar and Amanda Swarr (2010) argue that the meritocratic structure of academia places limitations upon the capacity for transnationally situated collaborative research. Arguably, this simultaneity of realities must be taken into consideration in any community university partnership. Negotiating funding structures, systems of reward, and mechanisms of survival, while remaining accountable to community well being, are realities faced by all would be participants in collaborative efforts for structural change. Ultimately, despite explicitly stated social justice missions, many, if not most organizations and academic departments – and individuals whose work takes place within them – are limited in their ability to create deeply transformative structural change. The same

Capitalist forces that drive the neo-liberal expansion of the prison industrial complex and contribute to the criminalization of young people such as those who participated in this study, are often deeply embedded in the structures of even the most progressive organizations, institutions, and programs. This speaks to the urgency of the need to envision creative and innovative ways to work intergenerationally, and across settings, disciplines, and forms of social action, in order to develop those very rare and deep forms of trust that Capitalism seeks to destroy. Participants' stories capture the resilience, activism, spirit, energy, openness, and creativity of LGBTQ youth and young adults most impacted by these systems. They should be at the heart of this absolutely necessary work.

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Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time today to talk about your experiences as a young adult with previous experience in a girls detention facility in New York. Through these interviews we hope to learn more about the experiences of LGBTQ and gender non-conforming young adults experiences within the juvenile justice system, as well as other experiences in your life in the areas of school, relationships, family, wellness, and community. The goal is to identify common themes that lead to LGBTQ and gender non-conforming young adults overrepresentation in girls detention facilities, your views on how this might change, as well as individual and community level systems of support and strength for further capacity building. This is the first of two optional interviews. You have the opportunity to meet with me a second time in case we do not have an opportunity to cover all of the interview sections, or in order to explore some areas in greater depth. I would like to stress that your participation in each of the two interviews is completely voluntary.

If you do not want to answer a particular question or talk about a particular topic, please let me know and we will move on. Sometimes I will ask a question that seems to have an obvious answer – however, I want to make sure that I do not misinterpret your responses.

Also, since we will be recording this interview, and a different person will be transcribing your words, I want to ensure that we accurately get all of your thoughts on the issues. If at any time you do not want me to record something, let me know, and I will turn off the recorder. If you prefer that the interview not be recorded at all, please let me know and I will take hand written notes. The information you share will be kept confidential which means that in no way will your words be linked to identifying information by anyone other than me.

Questions and Probes

1. TELL ABOUT SELF

Could you tell me a little bit about yourself and your life in the last six months?

PROBE: Are you working? in school? living alone or with people?

2. IDENTITIES AND UNDERSTANDING OF ASPECTS OF SELF

If you feel comfortable doing so, could you tell me whether and how you identify?

PROBE: How do you identify in terms of sexual orientation, gender, and/or gender identity? How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, or culture? In terms of social class? Religion or spirituality? Tribal membership? Nationality?

How do you understand these identities or aspects of who you are in relation to one another?

How has your understanding and relationship to these identities or different aspects of yourself changed or stayed the same over time?

Are there people with whom you share certain aspects of your identities and not others?

PROBE: Do you talk to your friends, family, others about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity? Are there people with whom you talk *only* about your sexual orientation or gender identity and not other aspects of who you are?

When did you first realize that you were gay/ag/queer/a lesbian/bisexual/attracted to girls/transgender/in the life/family?

Do you feel like you have had an experience or experiences that you would describe as “coming out,” or a process of “becoming” or “coming forth?”

Have you ever felt like you needed to hide or change some aspect of your identities in order to survive or feel safe?

What sources of pride and strength do you associate with different aspects of your identities?

3. RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY, PEERS, COMMUNITY

Could you describe the closest relationships in your life?

PROBE: Who do you consider to be part of your family? Were these the people that you grew up around?

Were you ever in the foster care system? If so, could you tell me a little bit about that experience?

PROBE: Could you talk to me about your experience of aging out of or being discharged from the foster care system? What was your permanency planning goal?

Whom do you consider to be your peers? Could you describe those relationships to me?

Could you talk a little bit about your experiences of community and what role communities play in your life? Could you talk a little bit about the challenges and strengths of the communities in which you participate? Are there physical places where you feel more safe (physically or emotionally) or unsafe in relation?

Do you talk to your friends, family, others about your sexual orientation/gender identity?

How would you describe their level of support/acceptance?

4. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Was religion or spirituality a part of your life growing up?

PROBE: Were there spiritual or religiously affiliated ceremonies that you took part in? Did you and your family or the people you grew up with attend a place of worship?

If so, would you describe your religious or spiritual upbringing as positive, negative, or perhaps a combination of the two? Please explain.

Is religion or spirituality a part of your life now? What are your feelings towards it as an adult?

5. SCHOOL BASED EXPERIENCES

Could you talk to me about your experiences in school?

PROBE: What different educational environments have you been in? Could you describe how you experienced these environments overall?

How would you describe your relationships with your peers and educators in the schools you attended?

Have you ever been expelled from school or had serious disciplinary action taken against you? What happened?

Are there particular clubs you participated in, awards or acknowledgements you received, accomplishments or relationships you feel particularly proud of in relation to school?

6. EXPERIENCES WITH COURT SYSTEMS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Have you had experience with the family or criminal court system? Would you mind talking to me a little bit about that experience?

Did you feel like any of the aspects of your identity that we discussed earlier in the interview influenced how you were treated in court?

Have you ever had involvement with the police? If so, would you mind describing those experiences?

Have you ever been arrested or detained? If so, on what charges? Were you found guilty of these charges? If so, do you feel that this was a fair and accurate conviction?

Did you feel like any aspects of your identity or appearance influenced how you were treated during your interactions?

7. EXPERIENCES IN JUVENILE DETENTION

Would you mind talking to me about your experience of having been in juvenile detention?

PROBE: Could you talk a little bit about the events in your life leading up to being in detention? Was there a breaking point or defining moment in the events of your life leading up to your experience of detention?

Could you tell me a little bit about your experience of being in a sex-segregated facility?

Do you feel like your sexual orientation or gender identity impacted your experience in the juvenile justice system? Did you feel like other aspects of your identity (such as your race, class, gender, or nationality) impacted your experience in the juvenile justice system?

What were your relationships like with people who worked in the facility? What were your relationships like with your peers in the facility?

Did you experience having been in the juvenile justice system as particularly helpful or harmful in any way?

Did you ever feel unsafe for any reason?

Could you talk about your experience of discharge and reentry (especially the six months following your discharge)? Were adequate discharge resources made available to you? What was your experience like seeking employment following your discharge? Have you ever been in the adult prison system?

8. FACTORS RELATED TO VIOLENCE

As in many communities, young adults who have been in girls detention facilities in the juvenile justice system struggle with issues related to sexual or physical violence against them. What are some of the challenges related to violence in the community and in the juvenile justice system?

Have you ever felt like you were the target because of one or multiple aspects of your identity or appearance?

For youth and young gender non conforming adults struggling with issues of violence, what strategies have people found helpful for staying healthy?

How do you think past experiences of trauma are related to violence against gender nonconforming youth and young adults in the community or in the juvenile justice system?

9. SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE

As with many communities, young adults who have been in the juvenile justice system struggle with issues related to substance use and abuse. What are some of the challenges related to substance use in the community – particularly as they relate to young people who've been in JJ and/or gender nonconforming young people?

For young adults struggling with substance abuse issues, what strategies have these people found for staying healthy and sober?

What factors do you think are related to substance use in your community(ies)?

How do you think past experiences of trauma are related to substance use and mental health among young adults in your community(ies)?

How do you think lifetime experiences of trauma are related to substance use and mental health among young adults in your community(ies)?

10. RESILIENCE, SUPPORTS, GOALS, AND THE FUTURE

Although some people face great challenges, many overcome these challenges. What do you think are the resiliency and strengths factors that help young people in your community(ies) stay strong?

PROBE: How is resiliency handed down through the generations? How do young adults in your community(ies) stay strong?

What do the communities you participate in do to encourage healthy behaviors for young adults? What could they do to further encourage healthy environments and behaviors?

When you have had times when you were troubled, stressed out, or ill, what has helped you get through? What did you do to take care of yourself?

Do you have people in your life who you consider to be mentors? Who are they? What role have they played in your life?

What do you feel most proud of in your life?

Who in your life do you consider to be part of your support system? Do you have heroes or role models?

What goals do you have for your future and the future of your communities?

If there were things that you could change about the world and you or your communities' experience in it, what would they be? How would you go about it?

11. CLOSING EXPERIENCES OR STORIES RESPONDENTS MIGHT HAVE

What other stories or experiences would you like to share before closing?

Closing

I'd like to tell you again how much I appreciate your willingness to talk with me.

During this time you've shared very important information. Thank you so much for sharing your stories with me. Do you have any questions for me or about the interview?

We also have a resource sheet we're handing out to everyone. It might be helpful to you or someone else in your life. After talking about experiences related to personal parts of your life, sometimes issues come up that you may want to explore more deeply. Are there any unfinished concerns or comments at this time that you want share or wish to follow up on in the future?

You can also contact me if you would like more information about follow-up resources.

Thank you again for taking time and sharing your stories and experiences.

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Contribute to the Wellness and Strength of LGBTQ Young People
by Participating in

OVERREPRESENTED, UNDERSERVED



ARE YOU:

- Between the ages of 18-25?
- Previously incarcerated within a girls' detention facility in the juvenile justice system in New York?
- Someone who identifies as AG, Aggressive, Trans, Boi, Lesbian, Two Spirit, Butch, Masculine of Center, Genderqueer, Gender Non-conforming, Gender Variant, or a related identity?

You may be eligible to participate in a research study about LGBTQ young adults' former experiences within juvenile justice systems and in the community.

You will receive up to \$80 for your participation in the study.

For more information contact: Sarah Mountz (914) 474- 3148
(This project is sponsored by the University of Washington) School of Social Work.)

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APPENDIX C: FINAL INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Monica
First Reading

I interviewed Monica on two occasions, approximately one week apart. Both interviews took place by a pond in Central Park, close to her home. Notably, I felt much differently after the first interview than the second. The first was harder to hear, as it covered much of her early life in various foster care homes where she was repeatedly sexually and physically abused. She also talked for an incredibly long time, and somewhat repeatedly about a very complex open relationship that she is in with a man and a woman, which is causing her a great deal of distress. It also was an excruciatingly hot day to be conducting an interview in the park. The second interview was significantly more upbeat, as it focuses on the future, her goals, and resiliency. It was also a much cooler day. I really liked this participant and felt like there were ways in which I could relate to her on a soul level, including her free spiritedness.

Monica was the only participant who spoke about polyamorous relationships, in contrast to many of the LGBTQ youth I interviewed in Seattle. I think it points to differences in cultures of LGBTQ youth (and adult) communities in NYC and Seattle. It was interesting to hear her talk about the different things that each of the other members of the relationship were providing her and the distinctions in her feelings of attraction and emotional connection towards men and women. She spoke on and on about women's beauty and how wonderful women were, which I always appreciate in talking to anyone.

Many of the plots within these interviews circulated around the early life experience of having been removed from her mother's care, just before her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and died shortly after. The participant was two when she was placed, and was part of a sibling group of five sisters who were initially placed together, though separated and reunited and separated again at various points in their lives. Sadly, their fracture, as this participant narrates it, sometimes had to do with experiences of her, specifically, being abused within foster family placements and disclosing the abuse to outside parties.

Memory also emerged as a big theme in relation to family fracture and – notably – in relation to information about cultural identity and history as well as family identity and history. Monica noted repeatedly that there are multiple stories about how she and her sister were initially removed from her mother's care, as well as other aspects of their collective history. This speaks to the need to situate the work within a historical trauma framework. Her narrative also speaks very clearly to the tensions that commonly exist between youth in foster care, their foster or adoptive parents, and their families of origin. Memory also emerged as a theme around the sexual abuse she experienced in multiple group homes, some of which she remembers in detail, and some of which emerges fractured in her dream life.

A pretty salient plot in these interviews was the experience of aging out/being discharged from the foster care system (in this case to her aunt's house for four or five years, and eventually to her own apartment) and the transition to adulthood. She explicitly named a lot of her survival strategies as such, and interestingly managed to convey a feeling of profound aloneness while also emphasizing the fundamental necessity of not being alone in life. Her current relationship seems to be in tension with how she feels and what she knows she needs and wants. Sexual

orientation was much less salient in this interview and in this person's experience, as she described it, then in many of the other interviews.

Monica's interviews also contained one of the most succinct descriptions of the relationship between previous trauma and substance abuse as well as a thorough description of the importance of mentorship.

Monica
"I-Poem"

I live alone
I have my own apartment
I been trying to get a job and it's real hard
I had a job
I had a court case the year before
I been holding up
I'm trying to love more and deal more with S.

I was working
I liked it
I like working
(since) I was younger
I always liked working
I love making money
I love learning new things

I had an interview
I got the job
I had open cases that I didn't know about
I get into it
I can't work
I can find a job
I've been putting applications in everywhere
I been putting' resumes out
I'm just dealing with it

I've had my own apartment for a year now
I feel like
I got my apartment, with all the milestones and things
I've been going
I got my apartment
I feel like it was god's way of just telling me
I need to learn to let certain things go
I have the personality where everything and everybody comes before myself.

I'm always there for everybody and nobody's ever there for me.
I'm trying to learn
I had my own crib
I can go out and spend money
I want
I have my own apartment

I have to pay my utilities, make sure there's food in the fridgerator
 I have to make sure I got an air conditioner
 I'm doing good
 I just made a year
 I already have a lot more stuff
 I take pride into it because at the end of the day
 I'm always alone
 I know that I can isolate myself away from everybody and be in my apartment.

I was living with my aunt
 I...couldn't really have enough time for myself
 I was in a crazy relationship
 I was still like, dealing with foster care
 I'm still trying to
 I messed up a lot
 I don't regret anything in my life (but if)
 I do regret anything, it's like, not finishing school
 I always put money before school
 I see I need school more than things

I was living on the Lower East Side
 I lived with my aunt four or five years
 I got my own apartment
 I see my aunt...my aunt...when
 I first got my apartment she called me all the time
 I was real lonely
 I'd call and I'd be crying
 I'm in a whole different stage
 I'm really by myself
 I'm really like the type
 I take my freedom to the max because
 I was locked down as a child
 I didn't really get to do what I want
 I mean, any age, anywhere, I ran stuff
 I always was a leader
 I always did what I want
 I've been living in my apartment
 I've been living with the struggles of being alone
 (making sure) I make the right decisions
 (making sure) I do everything right
 I'm learning that at the end of the day
 I got to really depend on me
 I love every minute of it
 I go through stuff
 I go through these milestones, it's making me stronger as a person
 I got my apartment
 I learned who's my real friends
 I let two friends live with me. They robbed me. Stole my money. Stole my social security check.
 I took care of them for a month
 (when) I first got my apartment,,it was like bad thing after bad thing
 I just started to think of it as

I'm the kind of person
 I hide
 I cover up my issues
 I hid everything and it's like, I felt like
 (when) I got my apartment it pushed everything that
 I was always hiding; it like put it in my face.
 (when) I first moved in my aunt's house
 I was overprotective
 I didn't talk to nobody
 I was just real mean
 I was so angry with everything
 I was making people not like me
 I was making people be distant
 I love to party, I love to party
 I learned to just deal with everything by partying now
 I just go out and try to enjoy myself
 I had done lost people in my life this year
 I went to like four funerals.

(My first love, the first guy) I was ever with in my whole entire life, he was murdered
 I still wasn't dealing with everything
 I lost my sister two days before my twenty-first birthday...due to um...AIDS
 I lost a friend before her
 I live by myself
 I come home and stuff, there's nobody here with me
 I done looked at my peoples' death
 I done seen my whole life
 I got to deal with this
 I would start to bug out
 I can't sleep at night
 I stay up all night
 I just don't want to go to sleep
 I try to live as much now, because you really don't know when you're gonna die
 I try to enjoy it
 I try not to complain
 I try not to be so angry about everything
 I try to stress
 (if I didn't take care of myself, I know that nobody would
 I look at everything I do as survival, because at the end of the day, if
 I'm starving, who's gonna feed me?
 I lived all the way up here by myself.

I receive social security
 I know I'm blessed for that
 I'm not blessed
 I'm thankful for it
 I get my social security for a reason
 I grew up
 I have disabilities
 I suffer from depression, I suffer from Post Traumatic Stress disorder, Bipolar
 I've been going to counseling since I was born

I deal with more

I say I'm bisexual because at the end of the day
 I recently been in a relationship with a female
 I have a total attraction to her
 I love her
 I feel comfortable with her
 I feel comfortable with myself
 I take care of her
 I had girls like you know hit on me and girls like me
 I learned my sexuality through my group homes.
 I don't know.
 I guess living in a house with girls
 I was just the youngest and stuff
 I always knew since I was younger
 I found females attractive
 I never thought I'd see the day where
 I see them in a different light, like:
 "I like her, that's my girlfriend, that's my wife right there."
 I always
 I'm picky, even male or girl
 I'd rather be by myself than be without what I wanted or WHO I wanted
 I've had my heart broken by males

I'm mixed. A lot people look at me as just black.
 I'm mixed with a whole bunch of stuff.
 I cannot be specific because I never met my father
 I know his family is West Indian
 I'm the only dark one out of all my sisters. My grandfather is Native American.
 I can't look up my ancestors and stuff because when he got here he changed his last name.
 I don't know too much because growing up in the foster care system.
 I just know what my aunts and them tell me.
 I know my background because at the end of the day they stay alive and they know.
 I always asked about my ancestors
 I always asked about my family
 I grew up in the foster care system, my whole entire life, so
 I didn't have any real family til I got to a certain age
 I knew when I was in foster families
 I wasn't related to them.
 I'm the only black one.

I believe in all types of things
 I'm a weirdo
 I believe in God, I guess
 I believe in Jesus
 I believe in Science
 I believe in Science Fiction.
 I'm a Libra
 I'm indecisive
 (so sometimes) I'm a true believer
 (and sometimes) I'm a non-believer

I'm only like that because there's been things that – you know – push me towards things
I'm very spiritual for anything
I get vibes and I could feel all stuff
I can feel it
I can hear it in your voice
I knew something was going to happen
I feel so strong
I could feel
I felt when I was about to get my apartment
I felt when the boy that I was in love with was cheating on me
I felt when everything was about to go wrong
(when) I got my apartment everything just felt like strange
I don't like too much
I get sick
I get vibes, like even off of people
I can't be around you if I don't like your vibe
I'll stay away from you
I'm never the type to just -you know – like somebody.
I can feel something
I can just be around them
I can just tell, like
I got into a fight two weeks ago
I felt like I was gonna fight
I went and told my cousins:
“I felt the vibe off the girl,
I know I'm gonna end up fighting her.”
I stand places.
I used to do yoga.
I wanted to learn to meditate.
I always try to do things that will bring me into my mind so
I could learn more about myself.
I just be like – damn
I'm real strange
I'm real weird.
I always say that and
I always think that cause even my cousin
I be like “oh my god, how did you do that?”
I think me and her is like the yin and yang fish
I always been like that though: to myself, always more like entwined with the earth
I'm very sexual. I'm just very sexual.
I always thought females was hot
I love the female body
I think we're the best
I always been picky towards males
I guess, growing up with a whole bunch of girls
I always had my pick of what's sexy to me
I'm attracted to it.
I don't care who's not.
I've always been that way.
I was younger I used to be curious about kissing girls and stuff
I got in my group home

I was living with them all the time
I used to chill with AG's and stuff
I used to be so curious
I used to hang out with them so much

I just had done something with another girl
I just was so in love with her breasts
I just wanted them
I'm like yo...it's confusing
I felt like I could go farther with a girl
I went to the group and we all chilling
I'm standing there and I'm like:
"I don't know. I think I'm confused."
I'm just bisexual
I like girls and I like boys
I just started crying because it was like yo
I was so confused
I was really, really confused
I don't know...I think that I really like girls and I really like boys
I had good friends so they made me feel good about it.

Monica
Final Summary

In the final reading of Monica's transcripts, I listened for the voices of "Leadership" and "Aloneness," both of which I'd heard very clearly during the preliminary reading.

One of the relationships between the voices of her experiences of "Leadership" and "Aloneness" is evident in her narration of the move to her first apartment. After being discharged from foster care, to live with her aunt for approx. four years, she decides to make the transition to independent living. It takes a year after submitting the application for housing, and she describes her first year of living alone as rocky. She both provides for her peers in need, and learns hard lessons about trust and self-reliance when those peers rob her while staying in her apartment. She also realizes that she has become deeply conditioned to an institutional gaze after so many years being in lockdown facilities: be they psych wards in hospitals, group homes, or detention. She is both proud of this new freedom – and the "milestones" to adult independence - and unsure of how to live within it. She also describes coming to a deep realization that she is ultimately responsible for her survival and that others cannot be counted on when called upon during times of personal need, despite the fact that she has played that role in the lives of others. This dynamic extends to an open relationship (love triangle) she is engaged in with another male and female, who are her age and are primary partners to each other. She describes taking care of them financially when they are in need and holding a depth of love and care for each of them that they hold only for each other.

Sometimes it was her "Leadership" or willingness to speak out (on behalf of herself or on behalf of the collective) that resulted in her feelings of "aloneness." Two examples in particular come to mind: firstly, when she was being physically abused in Ms. W's house and was taken aside at school and disclosed the abuse to concerned teachers and administrators. This resulted in the temporary removal of she and her siblings (and her longer term removal) from Ms. W's house, for which most of her siblings became angry with her and which caused a further rift between she and Ms. W that may have contributed to her continual institutionalization (in hospitals and group homes – which many, in turn, have contributed to her eventual juvenile justice involvement).

I saw again the complex relationship between Leadership and Aloneness when Monica shared her experience of being an outspoken leader and rebel at her RTC placement (where she felt abandoned by her adoptive mother) for which she is ultimately disciplined:

"They didn't want me on the campus no more because....nobody understands...I was on that campus for seven years, I was abandoned on that campus by my adoptive mother for seven years. So, I know how to talk to people. I know how to get what I want. I learned how to get what I want. And I learned how to –you know- from being on the campus I learned...knew how to control the girls. So it was like – you know- they got tired of me cause, they's like, for her to be the youngest and to have this much control over the older people and everybody, it's like – alright, we gotta take her away. I was having my cottage OP every night in groups, cause I was on the campus for a minute, you know, I done watched people get discharged, I done grew relationships with people, you know. I done...lived there. So I was like, alright, 'we family.' I would tell the girls in the cottage 'we family' and you don't hurt your family. They staff gonna stick together when they want to...they gonna always be together. Why can't we stick together? You know...I always knew how to talk...so it was easy for me to round up groups and start games and stuff...so...I used to have the girls in my cottage run out of program. They'd run out...be out all night. Go to school when we want to...smoking weed on the campus, drink on the campus.

And I stopped taking my medication and everything. Then one day I was running, they was chasing me or whatever, they tried to restrain me or whatever. But when they did restrain me it was funny cause they was just disrespecting me like 'you a ho,' calling me all types of names and stuff, talking about my mother and stuff. Cause at group homes that's how they get to you, they try to get your weaknesses to get you more upset. I learned that, I started laughing after a while cause I know that that's what they want."

The last incident she describes is the one that ultimately resulted in her first and only JJ placement. She was charged with assaulting the counselor who was pulling her hair with a screwdriver, which she reports she did not do and believes that she was framed by the RTC staff who wanted to "teach her a lesson." After being in detention for two weeks, she describes being isolated in her own cottage for several weeks after returning to the RTC, an experience of ultimate aloneness, which she describes as breaking her.

Something that really stood out to me was that, despite so much emphasis on the absolute necessity of self-reliance and survival skills, and her recognition of the need to focus more on self-care and less on taking care of others, she also places a lot of stress on connectedness and the importance of having people to bear witness towards the end of the interview. I asked the question:

"What do you think makes you and people in your community stay strong in the midst of discrimination and various obstacles?"

She responded:

"I don't feel like nobody should go through anything alone. So you should always have one person who – you know – agrees with everything you do, that makes you happy...that's there, that supports you. Everybody needs at least one person in their life to support them. I don't think anybody should go through stuff alone – just have nobody. Nobody. No. I don't see how you can do it. Like me, if I don't have nobody, I at least want one person. "