

**Understanding Aging-Out of LGBTQ Services in Chicago:
A Youth Participatory Action Research Project**

BY

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THESIS

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Summary

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) young people often depend on community-based service programs to meet their resource and social support needs. In Chicago, Illinois there is an informal network of LGTBQ youth-specific programming situated on Chicago's Northside in the middle-class, white, gay enclave, Boystown. Young people – many of whom are poor and low income and of color -- come to Boystown from across the city to access these programs' critical resources (e.g., shelter, medical and mental health care) and space to build community with other LGBTQ youth and supportive adults. Once youth program patrons reach "adulthood" at age 25, they are ineligible to access youth program resources, leaving them with few alternatives to meet their resource and social support needs. As a volunteer at a Chicago-based LGBTQ youth service program for more than two years, I learned that aging-out was considered problematic by youth program staff and patrons alike, prompting me to facilitate a youth participatory action research (YPAR) study to explore aging-out. I recruited 11 current LGBTQ youth program patrons to join a research collective to explore how young people experience aging-out.

As a collective, we investigated both the experience of utilizing and aging-out of LGBTQ youth specific resources in and around Boystown using multiple qualitative methods including critical autoethnography and focus group and interview methodology. We engaged in formal qualitative analysis processes and presented our findings and recommendations to a group of current youth program patrons, young adults who had aged-out of services, and adult program staff and volunteers.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation focuses on our findings related to the ways in which queer, poor and low-income youth of color must navigate complex race and social class systems in

Summary (continued)

order to access services and social support in the Boystown neighborhood. Chapter 3 focuses on the aging-out process, including how young people experience aging-out and the policies in place at local organizations. In this chapter, I share recommendations to improve LGBTQ youth programming and support young people as they transition into adulthood. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the process of engaging in a par project with young people, highlighting our “long and winding road” to partnership. In this chapter, I touch on some of the critical turning points in our process and challenge the false dichotomy of a project which is either successful or a failure.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
GNC	Gender Nonconforming
GNC-POC	Gender Nonconforming Person/People of Color
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PR	Participatory Research
QPOC	Queer Person/People of Color
QT-POC	Queer and Transgender People of Color
YPAR	Youth Participatory Action Research

1 INTRODUCTION

I laid the groundwork for this dissertation more than three years ago when I began volunteering for an LGBTQ youth social service program in Chicago, which throughout this dissertation I will refer to as “the Agency”, a pseudonym. I started as a volunteer with aspirations of building trust with youth patrons and program staff, hoping that one day I would engage in a participatory action research project with a group of youth from the Agency. As I built trust and relationships with this community of young people and staff, I searched for an issue to research -- something the youth and staff would agree was worthy of inquiry and likely to contribute to “real” change. The issue of young people aging-out of “youth”-specific services by their 25th birthday, often with little preparation or hope for alternative adult resources, quickly fit the bill and became the topic around which this dissertation was crafted. Over five months, I engaged with a team of 11 young people -- many who came and went throughout the process -- to study the experience of aging-out in the context of a gay enclave characterized by White, middle-class residents.

The process of research in partnership with young people yielded several sources of data and findings, all of which I used to craft the remaining chapters in this dissertation. Chapter 2 focuses on the ways in which a specific group of young people – those who are queer, of color, and typically poor or low-income and relying on social services to meet their basic needs -- experience marginalization in Chicago’s Boystown. This marginalization occurs at the neighborhood-level where residents and business owners position queer young people as *Other*. It also occurs at the organization-level in the neighborhood, particularly at the Agency, whose service delivery priorities are often conflicting (i.e., serving middle-class gay, white men and women *and* seniors *and* queer, poor, youth of color), thereby producing a hierarchy of clientele,

of which young people feel the most disinvested. The marginalization and Othering of these youth appears to be primarily in service of maintaining the comfort of the White, Gay, bourgeoisie residents and Agency clientele. Chapter 3 focuses on young people's experiences accessing and aging-out of LGBTQ-specific youth programming and the ways in which they are unprepared for the aging-out process. In this chapter, I argue that the problems associated with aging-out are shaped by normative constructions of the life course and adulthood which fail to recognize the social and structural-level barriers which impeded marginalized young people's preparedness for adulthood. Chapter 4 details the process of engaging in participatory action research with young people, telling our story through a focus on the ways in which the approach's "mutually beneficial praxis" may have been impossible given the context of our research.

1.1 Statement of the Problem and Significance

People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning ("LGBTQ") have unique health-related needs and face inequities relative to their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2014; Mayer et al., 2008; Meyer, 2001). In the last decade, government entities recognized what public health researchers have long known -- that these inequities should be a public health priority (National Institutes of Health, 2016; Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2017). Most national objectives related to eliminating inequities focus on increasing data collection towards a national estimate of the LGBTQ population. Indeed, there is a paucity of data, though estimates suggest 2% to 4% of adults identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual and 0.6% identify as transgender (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016; Gates, 2011; Ward, Dahlhamer, Galinsky, & Joestl, 2014). Young people are more likely to identify a LGBTQ, with Millennials -- those born between 1980 and 1998 --

identifying as LGBTQ at two times that of any other generation (i.e., Gen X, Baby Boomers, and Traditionalists (Gates, 2017).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer young people, or “youth”, face pronounced health and social inequities relative to their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts, including worse mental health, more experiences of violence (at home and at school), and overrepresentation among homeless and juvenile justice populations (Birkett, Newcomb, & Mustanski, 2015; Hunt & Moodie-Mills, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt & Gwadz, 2005; Marshal et al., 2011; Mustanski & Liu, 2013; Ryan & Rivers, 2003). Several factors have been identified as influencing positive health outcomes for queer young people, however, including safe, affirming school environments and supportive family and friends (Bouris et al., 2010; Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl & Malik, 2010; Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; Needham & Austin, 2010).

When school or home is unsafe or does not affirm a young person’s sexual or gender identity, or when material conditions are insufficient to meet a young person’s basic needs (e.g., shelter, food), they may turn to community-based LGBTQ youth programming, seeking resources and social support (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, 2015; Movement Advancement Project & CenterLink, 2016; Paceley, Keene & Lough, 2016; Wells et al., 2013). These programs, however, are often only available in certain communities (e.g., urban, a gay enclave) and generally have age-based service restrictions.

In Chicago, LGBTQ community-based programming is concentrated on the city’s Northside neighborhood “Boystown”, a gay enclave of predominately middle-class, White residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015a,b). Queer youth, many of whom are of color and/or from

low-income communities, come to Boystown seeking resources and social support through community-based LGBTQ youth programming. In addition to finding resources (until they are 25 and thus ineligible), they find themselves Othered and marginalized by neighborhood residents and business owners because of their gender and racial/ethnic identities, social class, age, and gender non-conformity (Daniel-McCarter, 2012; Rosenberg, 2017).

Young people, or “Emerging Adults” -- those in their late teens to (at least) the mid-twenties (Arnett, 2000, 2007), are at a critical juncture in the life course, one in which experiences and opportunities shape long-term health trajectories (Halfon, Larson, Lu, Tullis, & Russ, 2014; Shanahan, 2000). While some queer youth may move through this time-period and into adulthood relatively easily, others will “struggle as a result of challenges such as stigma, discrimination, family disapproval, social rejection, and violence” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2017, para 2). For queer youth with marginalized identities and lacking in sufficient material conditions, however, this transition may be especially tenuous. As they are locked out mainstream “adult” systems (e.g., full-time employment, college) or funneled into oppressive systems (e.g., prison), they are prevented from achieving normative constructions of adulthood and success and likely, well-being. The young people who age-out of LGBTQ community-based programming in Chicago’s Boystown are often victim to policies shaped by normative constructions of the life course which imply that people are adults by age 25. For these young people, the tenuous transition to adulthood is compounded by the loss of resources and social support associated with aging-out.

There is dearth of scholarship on the experience of young people who age-out of LGBTQ community-based youth programming. To contribute to this gap in the literature, this dissertation offers insight into the experience of utilizing and aging-out LGBTQ community-based youth

services in Chicago. The data presented herein were gathered during a youth participatory action research (YPAR) with 11 patrons of an LGBTQ youth program in Boystown, the Agency.

Chapter 2 describes the effects of Boystown's White, homonormative, cisnormative culture on young people of color's experiences utilizing queer services in the neighborhood. Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the practice and policy implications of the aging-out process in the context of LGBTQ-community based youth programming, providing recommendations for improving current practice. Chapter 4 reviews and critiques the YPAR process of the dissertation project, considering specifically the influence of the academy on the potential for a democratic partnership between adults and youth. The final chapter (5) provides a conclusion to the dissertation, including future directions for related research.

1.2 Research Questions

I initiated the dissertation project with general research questions about aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth programming and the conduct of YPAR. As expected, the questions evolved over time and are presented as follows, in each of the main chapters:

Chapter 2: Maintaining Homonormativity in a Gay Enclave: Community Policing Queer Youth of Color in Chicago's Boystown

1. How do poor or low-income, youth of color experience utilizing LGBTQ community-based youth services on Chicago's Northside/in Boystown?
2. How does community policing impact queer young people's experiences in Boystown?

Chapter 3: "*Youth Don't Have it all Together Just Because You Turn 25*": Exploring LGBTQ Community-Based Youth Service Provision in Chicago and the Problem with Aging-Out

3. What is the process of aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth services?
4. How do young people experience aging-out and entering "adulthood"?

Chapter 4: "Just Tell Us What You Want Us to Do": a Winding Road to Partnership and Other Lessons in Participatory Action Research

5. What is the process of engaging in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project with patrons of an LGBTQ community-based youth program?
6. How can a group of young people and I engage in democratic process towards collective action on aging-out in the context of a dissertation project?
 - a. To what extent can a YPAR project adhere to the goals of the approach?

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Youth Participatory Action Research

I elected to engage in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project because the goals of the approach -- specifically co-learning, reciprocal collaboration, and collective action for social justice -- align with my philosophical views on research and the promotion of public health. Youth Participatory Action Research is a youth-specific version of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which challenges positivist approaches to research, reframing the “researcher” and the “researched”, eschewing the historical silencing of community voices in favor of researcher interpretations. (Wallerstein & Duran, 2011). Participatory Action Research draws upon a wide range of scholarship on emancipatory research and education, including feminist and critical race theorists and educator Paulo Freire whose seminal work “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” laid a foundation for key processes in PAR including the development of “critical consciousness” (Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2008; Freire, 1970).

In YPAR, young people collaborate with adults to address issues affecting their lives, often in educational or community-based program settings. Youth Participatory Action Research repositions youth as “legitimate and essential collaborators” (Morrell, 2008, p. 158) rather than tokenized, or passive researcher subjects (Hart, 1992). Youth Participatory Action Research facilitates youth having their voices heard, their ideas valued, and their desires honored, while simultaneously allowing for personal and professional skill development and collective action (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Youth Participatory Action Research advocates argue that youth

should be included in research for three key reasons. First, youth have traditionally been left out of research on their lives, privileging the expertise and knowledge possessed by adult researchers over youth's local knowledge and abilities to identify problems and take action (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Checkoway, 2011; Morell, 2008). Second, youth understand their lives in ways that adult researchers cannot; youth should have control over research not only because it is ethically correct, but also because youth participation has the potential for uncovering the most valid findings and contributing the most significantly to social change (Morell, 2008), as outlined by Freire,

Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation? They will not gain this liberation by chance but through the praxis of their quest for it through their recognition of the necessity to fight for it. (2010, p.45).

Third, youth's development can be positively influenced through participation in research. Youth Participatory Action Research projects offer youth opportunities to garner both personal and professional skills (Morell, 2008). Through research and action, youth begin to take ownership of the work and its outcomes, while also building connections to each other and to their larger communities (Share & Stacks, 2006).

1.3.2 The Youth Research Collective

Once I had conceptualized an approach to investigating aging-out using YPAR, I began assembling the "Youth Research Collective". My initial goal was to gather a team of 10 to 12 current or former Agency youth program participants (including those who may have aged-out). I worked with the director and manager of the youth program to coordinate times to recruit participants for the collective. They provided me with suggestions for how and when to advertise the opportunity and facilitated my recruitment activities.

On August 24, 2016, I used 20 minutes to present the project and advertise the screening interviews during the community meeting in the CoH youth space. About 8 to 10 youth and a few youth program staff attended the session. I briefly described the project and engaged the group in an activity to learn what they thought about when they thought of “research” “participation” and “action”. I used this activity as an introduction to differentiating between more traditional researcher-driven projects and youth participatory action research approaches. At the end of the presentation, I invited youth attendees (including volunteers who were former youth participants) who were at least 18 years old to approach me on one of three days/times at the Center, first come first serve, to discuss the project more and engage in a screening interview. I placed a large post-it sheet on the wall in the youth space with the dates and times I would be available to conduct these screening interviews.

I conducted screening interviews with 14 young people, 12 of whom were current youth participants and two young adults who had aged-out but were participating as volunteers in the program. During the interviews, I used a screening guide to assess and document interest in the project (“How would you rate your interest in participating in this project - High, Moderate, or Low?”), prior experience participating in research (“How would you rate your experience with research projects - High, Moderate, or Low?”), strengths that could be leveraged for the project (“What are some of your strengths that you could bring to this project?”), weaknesses related to work/projects, and willingness/ability to attend 80% of the scheduled 15 sessions for consecutive weeks on Tuesday at the Agency 5 - 6:30 p.m. (see Appendix A for “Youth Researcher Candidate Evaluation Screening Form” used to document the screening process). I did not turn anyone away from an interview. I scheduled additional interviews with those who were unable to meet during one of the pre-specified times slots.

I invited 13 out of 14 young people to join the project. The young person who was not invited to join the research team had a conflict during our planned meeting times and demonstrated a lack of interest in the project during the screening interview (which I felt justified not prioritizing his availability for our meetings). I sent him an email thanking him for his interest and letting him know that we would be meeting on a day of the week on which when he had indicated that he was unavailable.

1.3.3 Data Collection

The youth researchers and I utilized several forms of data collection to answer our research questions -- See Table 1 for the overview of the data collection methods involved in this dissertation. We engaged in what I refer to as a “critical autoethnography” throughout the duration of the project. This meant that as a Collective we engaged in a “self-study”, focused predominantly on the youth researchers’ experiences and personal stories, especially related to service utilization and aging-out. The role of the youth’s stories was critical to our process and allowed us to learn from their lives, helping us to develop a nuanced understanding about their experiences which we then used to further contextualize our other sources of data (described below). The youth’s telling of their own stories was also what Denzin (2013, p. 7) describes as “interventionist” – “seeking to give notice to those who may otherwise not be allowed to tell their story or who are denied a voice to speak” becoming one of several forms of social “action” that occurred during our process (Cahill, 2004; Fine & Barreras, 2001).

In addition to our critical autoethnographic inquiry, we collect data outside of our group. First, we held four focus groups with 26 current and former patrons of LGBTQ community-based youth programming in Chicago to learn about how their experience utilizing, and when applicable aging-out out of, youth services. Then, near the end of collecting our focus group

data, we elected to gather individual interviews with current and former LGBTQ youth program staff and volunteers. These interviews provided insight into the process of service provision and aging-out policy at the programs frequented by the youth in our Collective and the participants in our focus groups. Both the focus group and the interview data were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.

I independently engaged in participant-observation throughout the project to document and learn from the experience and to further contextualize the youth researchers' autoethnographic, as well as our focus group and interview, data. I wrote field notes after each Collective meeting, or after a one-on-one conversation with a young person (e.g., in a coffee shop following our weekly meeting), to thoroughly document what had occurred (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). These notes were typically completed within 24 hours of the interaction. On occasion, if I did not have the time or energy to type the notes, I dictated them using an audio recorder. I wrote my field notes using some, if not all, of the nine following observational dimensions (as outlined by Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008, p. 512):

1. Space – Physical layout of the place(s)
2. Actor – Range of people involved
3. Activity – A set of related activities that occur
4. Object – The physical things that are present
5. Act – Single actions people undertake
6. Event – Activities that people carry out
7. Time – The sequencing of events that occur
8. Goal – Things that people are trying to accomplish
9. Feeling -- Emotions felt and expressed

TABLE I

DATA COLLECTION METHODS EMPLOYED IN THE DISSERTATION: TYPE, SAMPLE, DATES COLLECTED, DATA COLLECTORS, AND PURPOSE

Method	Sampling Frame	Dates Collected	Data Collectors	Associated Research Questions/Purpose
Individual Interview	LGBTQ Community-Based Social Service Providers	01/31/17 - 02/20/17	Jennifer, Youth Researchers	Utilizing and Aging-Out of LGBTQ Youth Services
Focus Group	Youth/young adults within 2 years of aging-out or who have aged-out (over 25)	12/16/16 - 01/07/17	Youth Researchers	Utilizing and Aging-Out of LGBTQ Youth Services
Participant-Observation (Field Notes and Audio Recordings of Meetings)	Youth researchers, the Research Collective, the Agency, Boystown neighborhood	07/14/14 - 05/06/17	Jennifer	Utilizing and Aging-Out of LGBTQ Youth Services, YPAR Process
Critical Autoethnography (Notes, Discussion)	Youth Researchers	9/20/16 - 03/14/17	Jennifer, Youth Researchers	Utilizing and Aging-Out of LGBTQ Youth Services, YPAR Process

1.3.3.1 Focus Groups

We designed the focus group guide to use open-ended questions to elicit detailed information from participants about their experiences both utilizing and aging-out of, or preparing for aging-out of, LGBTQ youth services (see Appendix B for full guide). The initial questions on the guide were intended to elicit participants' perceptions of LGBTQ youth social service and the aging-out process,

1. How do you feel about LGBTQ-friendly or LGBTQ-specific services for youth?

Probes:

- a. Which services do you have positive opinions about? Why?
- b. Which ones do you have less than positive opinions about? Why?

2. How was it for you when you aged-out of services?

Probes:

- a. How did you prepare for aging-out, if at all?
- b. How did the programs or services support you in aging-out?

We also included questions later in the guide to probe specifically about discrimination experienced by participants,

- Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination when you were accessing youth or adult LGBTQ-friendly services? What was that experience like?

Probes:

- a. What is the role of racial/ethnic discrimination in these experiences?
- b. What is the role of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in these experiences?

- c. Have you experienced any form of discrimination when accessing services that were not specifically “LGBTQ-friendly”?

The final question we included on the guide (other than a question “Is there anything else you would like to share about aging-out?”) was intended to elicit discussion on strategic ways to improve or alter aging-out policies,

- Imagine that you have a chance to sit down with the executive director of an LGBTQ social service agency in Chicago and they want to know how to update their policies for their youth program. Specifically, they ask for your help decide who can use services and until what age, if any. What are some things you would want to tell them to consider in their new policy?

Probes:

- a. How would age be a factor in usage?
- b. What other elements would be important to consider for the updates in the policies?

We designed a survey to gather socio-demographic information from participants in order to adequately describe who we had talked to and their various identities, including racial/ethnic, sexual, gender, and religious identities (see Appendix C for the survey). We also included questions about age, gender expression, general health, education, social services used in the past year.

We spent several meetings preparing to collect the focus group data. The first meeting on facilitation was led by two youth with experience facilitating discussions and collecting data. They taught the other team members how to ask non-leading questions and how to calm nerves during group facilitation. Our subsequent meetings on preparing for data collection focused on

how to consent participants, how to move around the focus group guide and use probes to elicit more information from participants, how to manage “difficult” participants (e.g., ‘the over-talker’, disengaged participants, off-topic participants), and when and if facilitators should respond to questions as participants during the focus groups. We also used these meetings to plan the dates and locations of the focus groups and discuss who would facilitate the groups.

We recruited focus group participants via two fliers, one with original artwork from a youth researcher and one with a stock image of a transgender identity symbol. Beginning in late November 2016, we engaged in convenience and purposive sampling recruitment strategies for several weeks. We placed fliers in strategic locations across Chicago where queer young people may gather (e.g., coffee shops and community spaces in Boystown, college student unions). Participants were invited to contact me via phone or email to discuss the study and determine eligibility. I then invited participants to join one of the scheduled groups.

Between December 2016 and January 7, 2017, we conducted four focus groups with between 4 and 10 youth (ages 20 to 29) in each group (n=26), who had, at any point, used LGBTQ “youth” services in the city of Chicago (or surrounding suburbs). We recruited more than 35 participants to join the groups, though many did not attend. Each of the focus groups occurred on extremely cold days in Chicago, likely contributing non-participation. We stopped recruiting participants following our fourth focus group, as the final two groups were not yielding substantively different information from the first two (i.e., we had reached data saturation; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and because we wished to devote available funds to engage social service providers in interviews -- something we decided after we began focus group data collection as we began to realize that our data were “one-sided”.

The first three groups were facilitated by two members of our team and the fourth group was facilitated by two members plus a note-taker from the team. One team member, Terry, was a facilitator at all four of the groups, which provided continuity throughout data collection. Two audio recorders we placed on either end of the table during the focus group discussions to allow for the subsequent verbatim transcription of the conversation. The groups lasted between 54 minutes and one hour and 10 minutes, plus the time to consent participants prior to beginning the discussion. Each focus group participant was consented by one of the youth researchers prior to the start of the group. Participants were asked to sign two copies of the consent form; we collected one and asked participants to keep the other. Participants were asked to complete socio-demographic survey following each group (or while they waited for the group to begin). All but two of the 26 participants completed the survey. The two that did not complete the survey arrived late to the focus group and left quickly after the group discussion was finished. All 26 participants received \$20 cash as a token of our appreciation for their time. The youth researcher who facilitated the groups (or took notes) were paid \$20 cash for their time.

Near the end of the first focus group discussion one of the youth researcher moderators (T.D.) decided to engage participants in a word association exercise. He asked participants to close their eyes and think about what words or phrases came to mind when they thought about “aging-out”. This practice was implemented at the end of all four focus groups. Image A: Aging-Out Word Association Example, provides a depiction of the words/phrases elicited during the first focus group, which included the terms/phrases “25”, “Disappoint”, “Ageism”, “Violence”, and “Imminent”.

Following the focus groups, the facilitators and I engaged in an audio-recorded “debrief” of the group. As part of this debrief the facilitators and I engaged in an analytical discussion

where the facilitators shared what struck them as interesting and surprising during the focus group discussion and what they did not yet understand. This debrief also served as an opportunity to reflect on the process of the focus group, including our questions and probes, and how to improve future groups. Because one of the youth researchers was a facilitator at all four of the groups, these discussions on process were easily implemented in the following focus group sessions. All audio recordings of the focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim by either me (Focus Groups 1 and 2) or a professional transcription agency (Focus Groups 3 and 4).

For each focus group, I brought all materials, including the recorders, consent forms, and incentives. I provided support to the youth researchers and greeted each participant, introducing myself to them and letting them know they could contact me after the discussion with questions or concerns. I did not elect to sit in on the focus groups, however, and stayed outside the room until it was time to provide participants with their incentives.

1.3.3.2 Individual Interviews

After completing the focus groups and an initial analytic discussion of our data, the team decided that we did not have the full “story” of what it means to age-out or what the aging-out process looks like and how youth are prepared for moving on to “adulthood”. We agreed that adding interviews with social service providers from the agencies that many of our focus group participants discussed would be an important addition to our study. While we knew that adding this method to our project would significantly increase our timeline, we decided that the information from providers was crucial to the overall study. We agreed that interview participant would be compensated \$20 for their time. We also agreed that Youth Research Collective members who served as interviewers would also be paid \$20 for their time and effort.

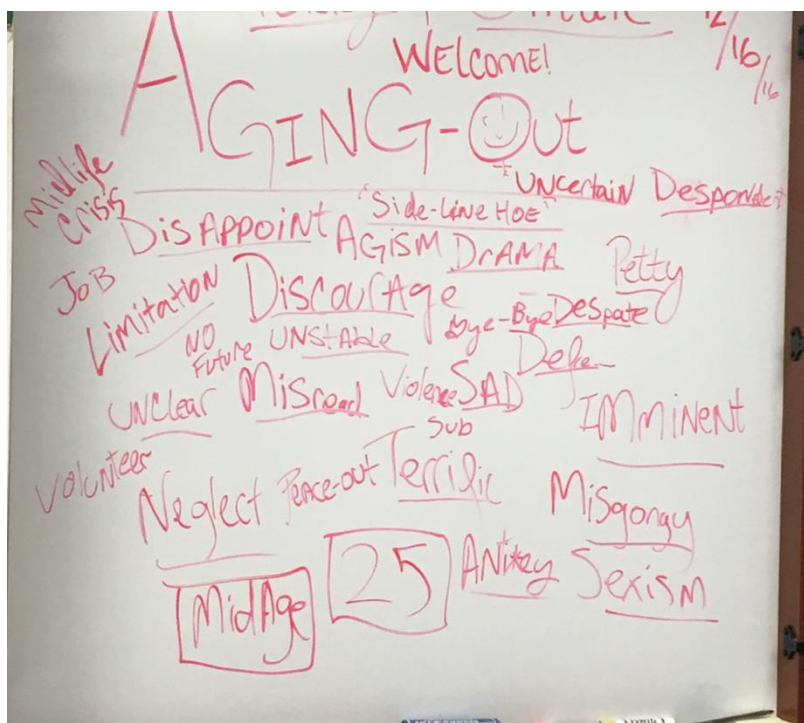


Figure 1. Aging-out word association example

We used the focus group guide to create the interview guide, retaining the majority of the questions but altering them to make sense for the different sampling frame (social service providers; see Appendix D for guide). Thus, the constructs of interest were consistent across our data. We added an initial question to the guide related to the interviewee's background,

I'd like to start with learning a little bit about you. Can you tell me about your present or former work or volunteer experience within the LGBTQ community?

We planned to conduct between five and ten interviews, a number that would allow us to conduct one or two interviews with staff from the main LGBTQ social service agencies in the Boystown/Lakeview area, namely those which were frequented by youth researchers and/or discussed by focus groups participants. As a Collective, we brainstormed current and former staff members known to the youth and me at the various organizations. We decided on an initial

list of eight individuals to invite to participate. Team members volunteered to contact individuals from the list with whom they had a relationship. We used a recruitment script to recruit participants via email, phone, and in-person. All but one person invited to participate in an interview accepted our invitation. The person who declined to participate explained that they were no longer working with an agency serving queer young people in Boystown and that they were not yet ready to talk about their experiences at their former employer. We recruited interview participants between January and February, 2017.

We conducted 10 total interviews with current (n=9) or former (n=1) social service providers serving LGBTQ youth. We chose to interview one former social service provider who had recently left their position in the Network given their extensive experience in providing social services to queer youth in Chicago and elsewhere. In an effort to improve the data quality, I elected to be present at each of the individual interviews whenever possible. The interviews lasted between 39 minutes and 73 minutes, plus the time to consent the interviewee prior to beginning the conversation. Each interviewee was consented by me or the youth interviewer/co-interviewer. The interviews took place at a location of the interviewee's choosing, typically at their place of work or a nearby coffee shop. At the end of each interview, the interviewee was offered \$20 cash as a token of our appreciation. A few the interviewees asked that we used the money for another purpose (e.g., buying snacks for dinner at a youth program later that day).

I facilitated one interview independently (the youth researcher who was scheduled to co-facilitate was unable to attend). Eight of the interviews were co-facilitated by one of two members of our team and me. One interview was facilitated by a youth researcher independently. All interviewees agreed to be audio recorded. After conducting a few of the initial interviews, we identified additional interviewees (based on new ideas from the team or from our interview

participants). We stopped recruiting participants after 10 interviews because we felt as though the interviews were not yielding additional information (i.e., we had reached data saturation and no new relevant themes were emerging [Corbin & Strauss, 2015]) and because it became financially infeasible to continue. The 10 audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

1.3.4 Protection of Human Subjects

I submitted the initial application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) on August 8, 2016. All youth researchers were consented before attending their first research meeting. Part of the consent process was a discussion of my role as a volunteer at the Agency who had previously led discussion groups but who was now interacting with the youth as a researcher. Focus Group participant and interview participants were consented at the beginning of the group discussion/interview. All participants, including the youth researchers, informed that they could change their mind about participation at any time during the process. All participants were informed that they could skip any discussions/questions that they did not want to answer. Prior to recording audio (at focus groups, interviews, or our research team meetings), we always asked all present for permission to turn on the recorders. I made a habit of asking the youth each week if they felt comfortable with me turning on the recorders.

For the youth researchers, I employed a model of “continuous consent”, meaning that the youth researchers always had the option to consent to some activities and decline to participate in others. This also mean that they had the option to request that something they did or said be left out of the research. Per this model of continuous consent, I encouraged the youth to always consider what is best for them. When youth researchers expressed a desire to “step away” from the project indefinitely or for a pre-determined period of time, which a number of youth did

throughout the project, I honored their requests and stressed that their well-being and personal needs were of the utmost importance.

I followed the IRB-approved protocol of data collection and management in order to protect the identities of all participants in the research. Study documents were kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office and were kept on a secure cloud-based service provided by UIC (“Box”). Identifying information was stripped from the data before hard copies were shared with the youth researchers (to ensure confidentiality even if the documents were misplaced) and before it was uploaded to the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose (2017).

1.3.5 Analysis

Analysis for this project was conducted by hand (in partnership with the youth researchers) and via computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software Dedoose (2017). The youth researchers and I were informed by several approaches to analysis, including Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014), Holistic Content Approach (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), and other qualitative (e.g., those outlined by Corbin & Strauss, 2015, LeCompte & Schensul, 2012, and Mason, 2002) and participatory approaches (e.g., Dill, 2015). Specific analysis procedures included reading and re-reading textual data and listening to audio-recorded data, followed by an iterative process of coding, memoing, themeing, and re-storying the data. We employed several strategies to increase validity of our findings, such as the use of participatory analysis of the focus group and autoethnographic data (Dill, 2015; described below) and one youth researcher providing additional member-checking of my individual analysis of our full dataset (through one-on-one meetings).

The youth researchers and I engaged in several analytical exercises that preceded more formal analysis procedures (i.e., coding and identifying themes), such as analytical debriefs and analytical mapping exercises. Our “analytical debriefs” occurred immediately after the focus group data were collected (between the focus group data collectors and me) and during the next Collective meeting. During these sessions, the facilitators and note takers shared their initial impressions and interpretations of the focus groups. The sessions that occurred during a Collective meeting allowed for the youth researchers who were not present to learn about and ask questions regarding the focus groups. Once the focus group data were collected, each youth researcher (who was actively engaged in the project at that point) was then given access to the audio recordings of the focus groups and asked to independently listen to and take notes on emerging impressions and questions. As a Collective, we then engaged in more analytical debriefs, in which each of the youth would share their notes from their independent “analysis”. We used these discussions towards the identification of a list of deductive and inductive initial codes to help us systematically categorize our data (Charmaz, 2014; Ryan & Bernard, 2004; Saldaña, 2013). Once we had identified a list of codes that we thought would allow us to best categorize our data and derive our final themes, we developed definitions for each code. This coding development process, too, was iterative as sometimes the addition of a new code would result in revision of another. Our work resulted in more than 50 codes.

Though my initial plan was to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (“CAQDAS”) to apply the more than 50 codes to the focus group transcripts, I quickly realized that applying these codes would do little to help us as a Collective make meaning of our data given the number and nuance of each code. I feared that we would code the data too closely and have a difficult time drawing conclusions from the line-by-line coding that I had planned. I

shared my concerns with the Collective and we agreed that we needed more time to use group dialogue to engage in analysis towards the development of a more general coding schema.

I then led the group in a series of analytical mapping exercises to further ground ourselves in our data, identify emerging ideas, and then decide what we would do next. These exercises helped us to think through what was present in our data compared to what the youth researcher knew based on their own lived experiences and what other “hunches” we had based on our analytical discussions to-date. The exercises involved identifying an interesting question we had formed from our current understanding of our data and mapping out data as “responses” to help us answer the question. For example, we asked ourselves, *“How does the physical and social environment affect service utilization and aging-out?”* and *“How does individual motivation affect the aging-out process?”* We then identified the factors present in our data that could be mapped onto our question (e.g., how feelings of being unsafe in Boystown might deter a young person from utilizing services). Figure 2 depicts how we mapped our data about service utilization onto the physical and social environment. Figure 3 presents the data electronically.

The youth researchers and I agreed that we had a clearer sense of our data once we completed our analytical mapping exercises and were ready to move into another stage of analysis. In decide how we would move forward with coding, we followed Saldaña (2013, p. 59) refers to as “sage yet tiresome advice” -- “it depends” and elected to employ coding processes which would lead to easily drawing conclusions from large amounts of narrative data. We used the following code types in this process,

Descriptive: Codes, typically, nouns which summarize the topic of a passage (the topic should not be confused with a summary of its content). Most of our codes were descriptive codes. (Example: “Motivation”, “Inequity in Services”, “Banning”).

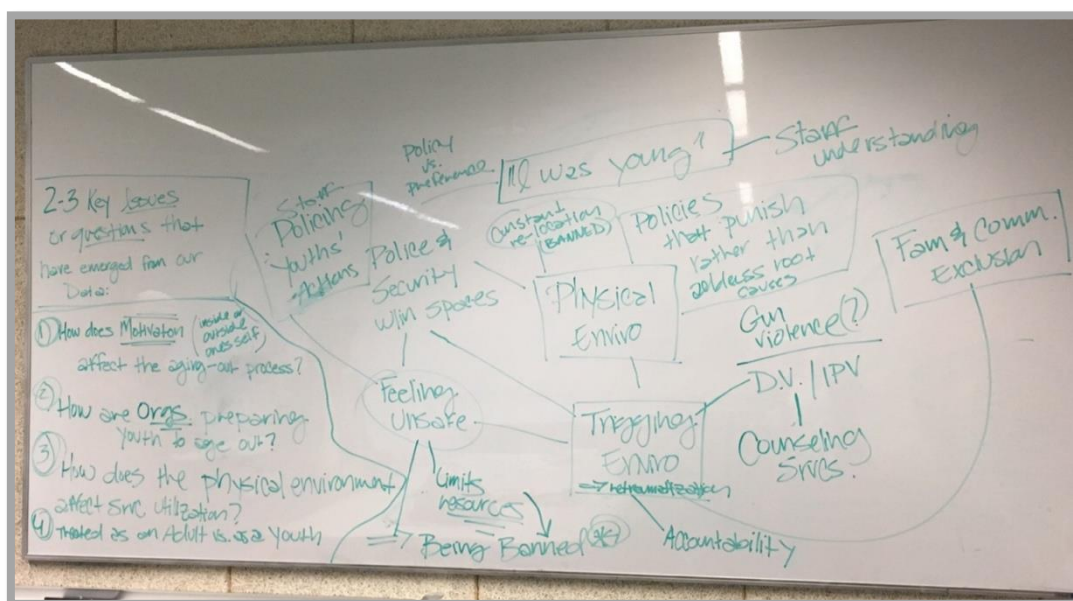


Figure 2. Mapping the physical and social environment

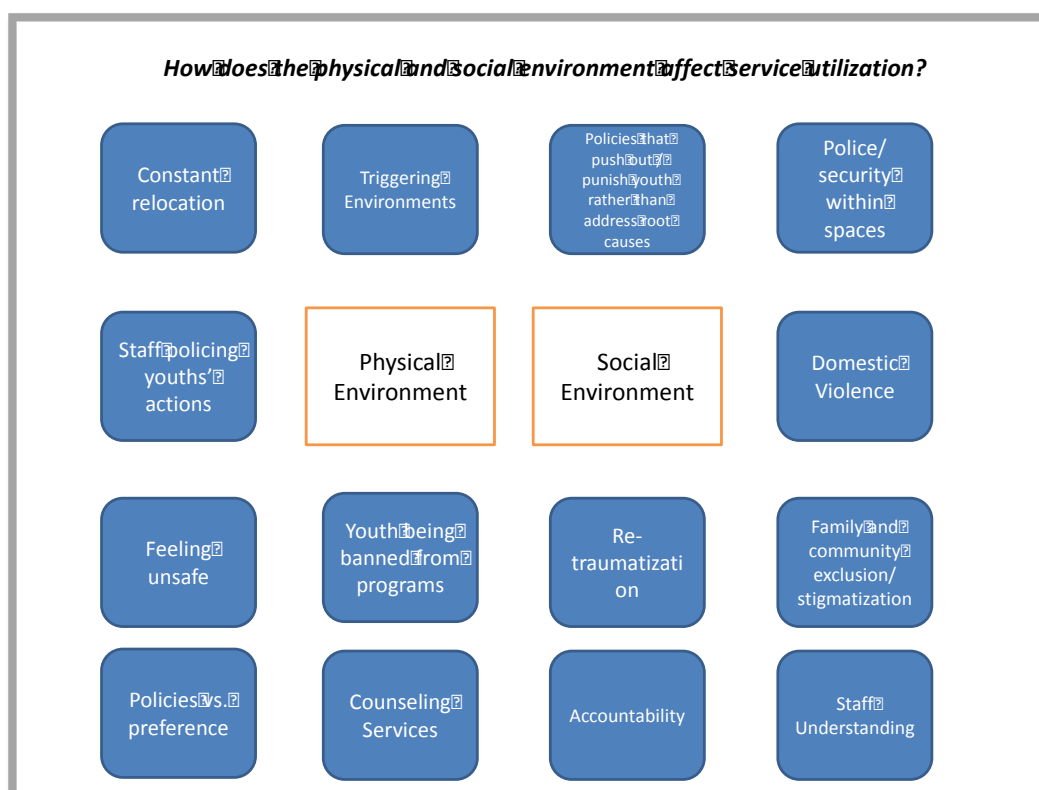


Figure 3. Mapping the physical and social environment: electronic version

In vivo: Codes which maintain participants' language. We used these codes sparingly (Example: "I was young and didn't know no better").

Sub-codes: These codes are "second order tag[s] assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 77). We generally added sub-codes to our codebook during the coding process if we realized that a primary code was not specific enough to allow us to retrieve the data later for interpretation. (Example: Primary code: "Youth/young folks experiencing issues with getting services or assistance from programs", Sub-codes: "Issues directly related to aging-out", "The Blame game".)

We started coding with a set of 12 codes. We added seven codes during the coding for issues that were not sufficiently captured under our original 12 codes. We also used the code of "great quotes" to capture instances when participants' words provided rich description of an issue or process, were emotionally provocative. We also applied the "great quotes" code any time a text segment made one or more of the researchers, for any other reason, say "Wow, *that's* a great quote!!".

Saldaña (2013, p. 26) recommends manual coding for novice qualitative data analysts and "small-scale projects" as using CAQDAS programs can be "overwhelming for some, if not most". Thus, as a team, we manually coded our data (four transcripts and selected field notes) the "old fashioned" way - using highlighters and hard copies of the verbatim transcripts. Our process was characterized by each of the youth researchers and I reading through the transcripts and alerting others when we identified a segment that could be captured under one or more of our codes or which was interesting or important to them. We would then discuss the segment, which code(s) we thought were most appropriate and then attempt to reach a consensus about code application. Often, I would encourage the youth researchers to consider which codes *best*

matched the text segment and explained that we should use as few codes as possible per segment to ease our final analysis (Saldaña, 2013). This process spanned multiple meetings. We typically only coded one transcript per meeting. Once we had coded the textual data from our focus groups, I transferred the selected text segments and associated codes into qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose (citation).

After all the coded segments had been applied in Dedoose, we began interpreting our data. We started by revisiting our goals for the research, determining which issues from our data were most important to share with the “community” (LGBTQ social service providers and current or former ‘clients’). We then pulled all segments of our most salient codes (considering frequency across the data, confirming and disconfirming cases, and fit with our research questions) and, using a hard copy of the coded text selections, discussed what the big “take-aways” were in those coded excerpts. We also considered what would be the most useful in a practice setting, prioritizing that over theoretical interpretations of the data. We also considered the co-occurrence of codes, which allowed us to identify issues that were either co-occurring and potentially related (“The blame game” and “internal motivation”) or instances where our codes were similar to one another and could likely be discussed in the same final theme (e.g., “issues related to aging-out” and “service gaps for 25 - 54 year olds” fell under a larger theme related to aging-out of youth services).

The members of our Collective (including me) often disagreed when initially selecting segments, applying codes, and identifying our major themes. The discussion that arose from these disagreements and eventual analytical consensus, engendered rich discussions, ultimately allowing us to feel confident in the *reliability* of our interpretations. These processes also for a check on the validity of our interpretations, as the youth researchers often had shared lived-

experiences with focus group participants and would provide information to further contextualize our analysis (e.g., helping us understand what a participant likely meant by a certain comment). Taken together, our data analysis can be understood as a systematic process of coding and interpretation of data through the lens of youth researchers with shared experiences and guided by me.

We conducted interviews with 10 interviewees representing one of seven programs across five organizations near the end of the project. Because we collected the interviews as the project was officially ending, the youth researchers were not involved in coding and analyzing the interview data. After each interview, however, the youth researcher conducting or co-conducting the interview and I engaged in an analytical debrief about interview, similar to our focus group debriefing sessions. Thus, my analysis of the interview data is informed by those debriefing conversations with the youth interviewers and the participatory analysis processes of the Collective.

I employed a similar coding style to the interview data that we used for the focus group data, using a mix of descriptive, in vivo, and sub-codes. I also included process codes to allow for the flagging of data that were related to a process or action (as is popular in grounded theory coding; Charmaz, 2014). After coding the interview data, I returned to the focus group data and selected ethnographic data, applying the newly generated codes as appropriate (see Appendix F for a final list of codes). As I coded, I also created memos, allowing me to capture my initial analytic questions or interpretations (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). For example, in one memo I posited, *“It seems as though difficulty with aging-out is related to internal motivation among youth. This is something the youth researchers were very interested in, but something I am surprised by”*. The memos also served as a place to capture my questions related to the process

of data collection, for example, “*Should another follow-up question been asked here in order to get a deeper understanding of this phenomenon?*” and the process of coding, “*Do I need to create a code to capture what is happening here?*”. After I finished coding a document, I would look across the coding-related to determine if an adjustment should be made before moving forward (e.g., the addition of a new code, the collapsing of two codes into one, the re-coding of previously coded data).

Unfortunately, at the point of data analysis, I was unable to address the questions about how to change or improve the process of data collection as they emerged in my memos. The youth and I did engage in analytical debriefs after each focus group and interview about the process to identify things that should be adjusted in future data collection. These debriefs, however, may have been insufficient to improve our data collection procedures. Had our team (and I) engaged in more targeted memoing of our data *throughout* collection, we may have been able to address process-related concerns in real-time, thereby strengthening the quality of our data.

I exported all excerpts and their associated codes and memos once coding was complete. I created “code summaries” for each code, which provided an overview, in narrative form, of what those excerpts as a group indicated. I did this for each code while also allowing the memos to remind me of my initial analytical insights or hunches. As I was creating these summaries, I began to “code-weave” -- “integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 248). Through code-weaving, the connections between codes, and the ultimate emergence of high-level themes began to take place. I then engaged in composing a set of overall themes from the data, followed by identifying the themes were most useful in answering the emergent research questions. I then crafted the

“story” of the data in narrative form. The findings presented in this dissertation are thus a triangulation of the *youth-driven* analysis and interpretations coupled with my *youth-informed* analysis and interpretations.

1.4 Theoretical Lenses

1.4.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, *Feminist Intersectional Theory*, or the use of an “*intersectional lens*”, have been important components of this study, both in guiding my work as a member of our Collective, and, particularly in analysis of our data. Feminist Intersectional Theory, initially advanced by Black women scholars in the late 1970’s, emerged as a response to single-identity frames and analyses in service of advancing the concept of multiple, intersecting identities of gender, race, and class and the ways in which prejudice mediates multi-level oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1983). An important component of intersectionality is its emphasis on the “meaningful whole” of individuals, rather than the “mere addition of ethnicity, sexual orientation, and sex/gender” (Bowleg, 2008, p. 312).

A contemporary intersectional analysis considers not only gender, race, and class in the context of oppression, but also sexual identity, ability/disability, age, religion, and immigrant-status. Indeed, Few-Demo implores scholars to consider people’s “multiple social locations”, the ways in which social identities overlap and conflict in context, and how these conflicts affect people’s negotiation of “systems of privilege, oppression, [and] opportunity [...] change across the life course and geography” (Few-Demo, 2014, p. 171).

Initially this concept seemed to be important because the youth who access resources in Boystown have multiple, “interlocking” marginalized identities and social positions. It became even more central to the study, however, as data collection began, and the *context* of youth

utilizing and aging-out of services became increasingly salient. As we began to unpack the youth researchers' experiences of marginalization in Boystown, what initially appeared to be mediated by racism or by an "additive" approach to understanding inequity alone -- viewing identities as "separate, independent, and summative" -- soon appeared instead as a constellation of overlapping discriminations experienced concurrently and mutually reinforcing one another (Bowleg, 2008). We began to understand that in Boystown and within the walls of local LGBTQ organizations, youth are not only experiencing marginalization because they are Black or Brown, but also because they reject traditional social constructions of a gender binary, because they are from poor or working-class communities, because they are in need of social services, because they are "young", and overall, because they are all these things *at once*. From this understanding, we saw queer youth of color in Boystown representing the antithesis of who *should* populate an "acceptable" gay enclave -- one in which a city would invest and where straight, cisgender people would feel comfortable.

1.4.2 Queer Time and Space

The concept of *Queer Time and Space* became an important guide in my understanding what Boystown and the network of youth social services means to queer youth of color. "Queer Theory" challenges what is considered normal, in terms of sexuality, gender, the life course and time. It pushes back against heteronormativity and those who benefit most from it while also rejecting a monolithic gay identity (Giffney, 2012). Queer theory has also been applied to a variety of "normal" concepts as a means of countering what is traditionally accepted. In terms of sexuality and gender, Warner (1991, p. 8) states,

Even when coupled with a toleration of minority sexualities, heteronormativity has a totalizing tendency that can only be overcome by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world.

Queer theorists, however, have been critiqued for neglecting to consider aging and the life course in their theory development (Brown, 2009). In an effort to bring the concept of queer aging into the larger framework of queer theory, the concepts of *queer time* and *queer space* have been introduced. Queer time and space rejects the heteronormative/homonormative “institutionalized life course” of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death (Brown, 2009, p. 71) in favor of a focus on the present (Robinson-Wood & Weber, 2016). In queer time and space, there is room for interdependency between generations who are not biologically linked, opening space for varied, non-traditional support systems (Brown, 2009).

The relevance of *queer time* and *queer space* is evident among queer youth of color accessing services in Boystown. Many have inconsistent contact with their families. Others have no contact with their families at all. Via spaces provided for queer youth in Boystown, young people build intergenerational support networks, usually with youth program staff and volunteers as well as with other youth.

Intersectionality and Queer Time/Space served as guides for inquiry -- they provided me/our Collective with a critical lens, through which we developed our research questions, methods, and analytical choices. Perhaps most importantly, they guided the interpretation of our findings, pushing us to consider how these frames change what we see in our data and how our findings fit within larger conceptualizations of queer youth of color and their experiences of marginalization and resistance.¹

¹ Although I learned about the relevance of considering “intersectionality” and “queer time/space” in classrooms and from feminist and queer scholars, the youth researchers of our Collective needed little “teaching” to consider these concepts throughout our project. Their lives are inherently shaped by their intersecting, interlocking, identities and the need for a “non-normative” time and space within which they can live. Thus, I strategically employed these frameworks, whereas the youth researchers naturally employed them.

1.5 Definitions

1.5.1 Emerging Adulthood and “Youth”

Life stages (e.g., adolescent, youth, adult) and their associated expectations are socially constructed, making their applications variable across time and place. For many years, the life course in the U.S. was thought to follow a linear trajectory which moved from childhood to adolescence, culminating in adulthood. In the 1960's, however, the industrialized life-course began to change, ushering in a prolonged period between adolescence and adulthood, characterized by a delay in marriage, parenthood, the completion of education, and financial independence (Shanahan, 2000; Waters, Carr, & Kafalas, 2011). In 2000, Arnett first published a theory of “emerging adulthood” to describe the period of time -- a new life stage -- from the late teens through (at least) the mid-twenties. During emerging adulthood,

Many different directions remain possible, [...] little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life's possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course. (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

Emerging adulthood as a theory and life stage has since been widely accepted in social sciences (Arnett, 2007; Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2014) despite critiques of its lacking cultural relevance across “minority” groups (e.g., Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). In the seminal paper on the theory, Arnett (2000, p. 470) does acknowledge that life stages are “culturally constructed, not universal and immutable” and that some young people do not have the privilege to devote their emerging adulthood to things like “identity development or exploration”.

“Youth”, a more nebulous term than “emerging adult,” generally describes those who are neither children nor adults. The United Nations (2013) acknowledges the ambiguity in the term, but for data reporting purposes generally utilizes “youth” to refer to those who are 15 to 24 years

old. Healthy People 2020 does not have a “youth” category, instead defining “adolescents” as those 10 to 19 years old and “young adults” as those 20 to 24 years old, which together account for approximately 20% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

1.5.2 Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming

In contrast to the sexual identities represented by LGB, *transgender* (“T”) and *gender non-conforming* are gender identities. Transgender has been defined in several ways, with the Institute of Medicine’s (2011) definition encompassing the term’s various usages, closing with a focus on the total rejection of a gender binary,

Individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex originally assigned to them at birth or whose gender expression varies significantly from what is traditionally associated with or typical for that sex (i.e., people identified as male at birth who subsequently identify as female, and people identified as female at birth who later identify as male), as well as other individuals who vary from or reject traditional cultural conceptualizations of gender in terms of the male–female dichotomy.

Unfortunately, the T -- gender identity -- in LGBTQ is often conflated with LGB -- sexual identity (Institute of Medicine, 2011).

Gender non-conforming (“GNC”; which *some* might assert is under the “transgender” umbrella) is similar to the labels² “gender variant”, “gender fluid”, and “gender non-binary”. Pullen Sansfaçon, Robichaud, & Dumais-Michaud (2015, p. 40), define GNC people as “engage in varying degrees of cross-gender behavior”; whereas the American Psychological Association, (2015, p. 862) define GNC as an “umbrella term to describe people whose gender expression or gender identity differs from gender norms associated with their assigned birth sex”.

The youth participants at the Agency invoked multiple, sometimes concurrent gender identity labels, depending on the time and setting. Youth patrons would often respond to the

² This is not an exhaustive list.

question “what are your preferred gender pronouns?” with, “it doesn’t matter as long as they are respectful”, leading me to believe that they did not feel restricted to a gender binary and had the freedom to express themselves in the moment. This comfort in gender fluidity, however, may have been possible due to our presence in a LGBTQ “safe space”, as settings, as opposed to more hetero -, cisnormative ones, such as school, mainstream organizations, or at home.

1.5.3 Queer

The politically-charged term “queer” became popular in the early 1990’s by activists and researchers (Cohen, 1997). For some, it serves as an umbrella term to refer to all LGBTQ people, for others it serves as a political statement which pushed back sexual and gender binaries, seeing sexual and gender identities as fluid. Still for others, it may denote a complex set of sexual behaviors and desires for which there is no other label. While the term is popular among younger people, it is not embraced by all who identify with some or all of the LGBTQ community, given its historical use as a homophobic slur. In a seminal writing on queer politics, Cohen (1997, p. 440) highlights the utility of the label “queer” as it is both political *and* affirming,

For many of us, the label ‘queer’ symbolizes an acknowledgement that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisided resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility”.

In popular discourse, many are combining the labels “queer” and “people of color” to signify a specific community of racial/ethnic minority people, such as Queer People of Color (“QPoC”), Queer and Gender Nonconforming People of Color (“GNC-PoC”), and Queer and Trans People of Color (“QT-PoC”). These terms were not popular among the young people at the Agency during my time as a volunteer and researcher, nor did they emerge as salient identity labels during data collection. For this reason, they will rarely be used throughout the dissertation.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is comprised of three main chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of the research I conducted in partnership with the young people from our Collective. Each of these the main chapters are written as qualitative research articles for publication, including an introduction, literature review, methods, findings, and discussion/conclusion. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on findings produced in partnership with the youth researchers. Chapter 4 is based on my own analysis of the YPAR process. The dissertation closes with a short conclusion in Chapter 5, highlighting the overall findings and future directions for research.

2 MAINTAINING HOMONORMATIVITY IN A GAY ENCLAVE: COMMUNITY POLICING OF POOR AND LOW-INCOME QUEER YOUTH OF COLOR IN CHICAGO'S BOYSTOWN

In this chapter I focus on the ways in which queer, poor and low-income, youth of color experience marginalization in the gay enclave, “Boystown”, and within the context of a large, LGBTQ youth and adult social service agency located therein.

2.1 Introduction

In the fall of 2016, I partnered with 11 youth patrons to form a research collective (the “Collective”) at the Agency^{3,4} -- one of the most prominent LGBTQ-serving community-based organizations in Chicago’s gay enclave “Boystown”. As a Collective, we investigated how young people experience utilizing and aging-out of LGBTQ youth services in Chicago. From our inquiry emerged a complex understanding of the ways in which queer, poor and low-income, youth of color come to Boystown to access social support and needed resources and in doing so, must navigate complex racial and social class systems in place in Chicago as a whole, but also in Boystown and the organizations located therein.

2.1.1 The Inequitable Social and Health Outcomes of Queer Youth of Color

It has been well-documented that queer youth, particularly *of color*, experience health and social inequities relative to their heterosexual and cisgender peer (e.g., Kann et al., 2011; Marshal et al., 2011; Ryan & Rivers, 2006). Queer youth also have limited spaces where they

³ The actual name of the organizations discussed in this article have been changed.

⁴ The Agency’s mission is to advance community and secure the health and well-being of the LGBTQ people of Chicagoland [with a vision of] a thriving lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer community, living powerfully in supportive inclusive environments.

feel safe; for many, home and/or school are sources of violence or marginalization, rather than support and development (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Durso & Gates, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Reis & Saewyc, 1999; Rew, Whittaker, Taylor-Seehafer, & Smith, 2005). Compared to heterosexual, cisgender youth, queer youth more often believe that they “must leave their communities to make their hopes and dreams for the future come true” (Human Rights Campaign, n.d., p. 2).

Hostile school climates, family rejection, racism, classism, adultism and cisgenderism converge to disproportionately funnel queer young people of color into the foster care, homelessness, and criminal justice systems (Wilson, Cooper, Kastanis, & Nezhad, 2014; Hunt & Moodie-Mills, 2012). For these youth, LGBTQ community-based programming may be one of the few resources available to meet their basic needs and provide social support in an affirming atmosphere. In Chicago, LGBTQ community-based programming is overwhelmingly located on the city’s Northside in the White, middle-class, gay enclave,⁵ Boystown. Young people come to Boystown to access LGBTQ resources from all over the city and, in particular, from poor and low-income communities of color on the city’s South and West sides. Upon arriving in the neighborhood, however, young people often find themselves in an untenable situation; one in which they are marginalized through community policing not only in neighborhood, but also within the walls of *some* of the community-based organizations situated therein. Despite inequitable treatment by residents, business owners, and the nonprofits responsible for serving them, these poor, queer young people of color often have few alternatives for places where they their sexual and gender identities will be affirmed and celebrated; thus, they remain in Boystown

⁵ Gay enclaves are areas where gay White men, and to a lesser extent, lesbians, trans people, and “queers of color”, can find community and feel safe (Brown, 2014).

continue to access the LGBTQ-specific organizations in the neighborhood, including the Agency.

2.1.2 A Segregated Chicago

Chicago is ranked as the most racial/ethnically segregated city in the country (Silver, 2015). *The State of Racial Justice in Chicago* tells the story of “three cities” in which the city’s three largest ethnic groups -- Black, Latinx, and White (each accounting for approximately one-third of the city’s population) -- live in separate neighborhoods and differently experience housing, economics, health, and justice (Henricks, Lewis, Arenas, & Lewis, 2017, p. 1). Figure 4 provides a snapshot of the city’s geographical segregation between racial/ethnic groups. In Chicago, “whites live primarily on the [Northside], in and surrounding downtown, and in a few communities on the edge of the city, while Blacks are concentrated South and West and Latinxs Southwest and Northwest” (Henricks et al., 2017, p. 22). Though some Black Chicagoans reside in neighborhoods which are predominately White, almost no White Chicagoans live in Black neighborhoods.

When communities or neighborhoods are socially and economically marginalized, as are many of the poor and low-income Black and Latinx communities, they “may be marked by a stigma of place, referred to spatial stigma”, influencing community member’s “sense of self, their daily experiences, and their relationship with outsiders” (Graham et al., 2016, p. 105). Graham and colleagues assert that spatial stigma is a determinant of health at all levels of the social ecology. Coupled with pronounced segregation, spatial stigma affects community members ability to physically leave their communities, their interactions with those inside and outside of their community, and their living conditions and opportunities to be healthy (Bechteler, 2016; Cohen, Prachand, Bocskay, Sayer, & Schuh, 2017; Graham et al., 2016; Keene

& Padilla, 2014; Sampson, 2012). Indeed, Black and Latinx Chicagoans face stark health and social inequities compared to their White counterparts, including higher unemployment, lower median household income, more transportation inaccessibility, lower high school graduation rates, and over-policing and higher involvement with the criminal justice system (Dirksen & Prachand, 2016; Henricks et al., 2017).

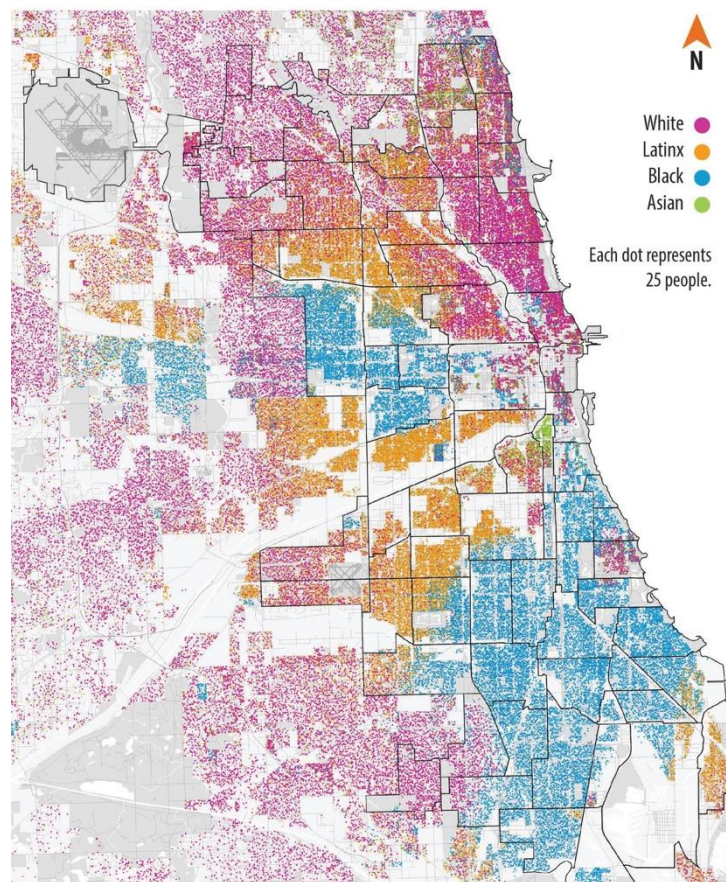


Figure 4. Racial/ethnic composition of Chicago, 2010

2010 U.S. Census Data, *as cited in* Henricks et al., 2017, p. 23

2.1.3 Boystown and the Agency

Chicago's Northside neighborhood, Boystown, was the first formally designated "gay neighborhood" in a U.S. city (Orne, 2017a,b). Compared to the poor and low-income communities of color on the South and West sides, Boystown and surrounding Community Area "Lakeview" residents are middle-class (median household yearly income of \$75,882) and predominately White (84.9%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015a,b). Boystown is heavily invested in by the city of Chicago, which spent \$3.2 million of its "tight budget" to "geographically institutionaliz[e] gayness" through the placement of "twenty-two, twenty-three foot-high, metal illuminated rainbow-ringed pylons up and down the main thoroughfare" (Daniel-McCarter, 2012, p. 5).

In the heart of Boystown is the Agency "[a] multimillion-dollar community center offer[ing] social services and community events for Chicago's queer community" (Orne, 2017b, location 2269). The Agency, which opened in 2007 (though the organization has been around in other forms for several decades), is housed in a three-story, modern building shared with a high-end grocery store chain. The Agency's lobby is a well-known "hang-out" space for grocery shoppers, neighborhood residents and visitors and has been called a great place for "people watching" by local media. The Agency is unique among the myriad LGBTQ-focused social service and healthcare organizations in the Boystown neighborhood – both because of its physical structure and busy common area, but also because of the diversity of its clients and its reputation. Though the Agency does serve a diverse clientele (seniors, youth, middle-class, and poor and low-income clients), it has been widely criticized for its mission drift from promoting health across Chicago's LGBTQ "community". Critics contend that the Agency marginalizes its queer, poor and low-income youth patrons of color from predominately South and West side

neighborhoods in service of maintaining the comfort of the White, middle-class gay mainstream demographic of Boystown. Orne (2017) recounts witnessing the Agency's efforts to keep queer, poor, youth of color out of the building when in 2013 he was attempting to host an informal interview for his ethnographic. After scoping out and setting up an interview in one of the many "tucked away locations", he was told by a staff member that he was "out of bounds" and needed to find another, open location to hold the interview. He followed up with a contact at the Agency, inquiring about the peculiar rules preventing him from meeting in what appeared to be an open sitting area. He learned that "the staff [are] told to police the space, to reduce the amount of available sitting space for the primarily Black youth to loiter [...] perhaps forcing them to go to other locations" (Orne, 2017b, location 2508). Orne's experience elucidates the ways in which Boystown and the Agency welcomes "others" insofar as they stay within predetermined physical boundaries and engage in "acceptable" behavior.

2.1.4 The Culture of Exclusion shaped by Homonormativity

The experiences of the queer, poor and low-income Black and Brown youth who come to Boystown from their home communities – particularly to access social support and resources – are shaped by the neighborhood's culture of homonormativity (Duggan, 2003) and socio-spatial stigmatization (Graham et al., 2016; Keen & Padilla, 2014) of the South and West sides which dictate who belongs – white, middle-class, cisgender "Northsiders" and who does not – Black and Brown, poor and low-income, queer and trans youth from the South and West sides of the city.

An extension of White Normativity,⁶ homonormativity reifies the “normalness” of White, middle-class, cisgender gay men (and sometimes women). Rendering queers of color aberrant and Other, homonormativity fails to “contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions” thereby maintaining the White, middle-class status quo (Duggan, 2003, p. 50; Kacere, 2015; Rosenberg, 2017). Centering issues of the White “bourgeoisie” -- e.g., marriage⁷ and the military – a homonormative culture dismisses the more widespread and pressing economic and social issues such as poverty and militarization (D’Emilio, 2014; Duggan, 2003; King, 2009; Moodie-Mills, 2010; Warner, 1999).

The ways in which a culture of whiteness, homonormativity, and spatial stigma excludes and marginalizes Black, Brown, and queer bodies from “other” places in gay neighborhoods, and specifically, Boystown, have been documented by several scholars (e.g., Orne, 2017a; Rosenberg, 2017; Tilsen & Nylund, 2010). Orne’s (2017a) ethnographic work highlights the ways in which neighborhood residents view the changes in Boystown overtime, including its demographic shifts in visitors and residents. In a conversation with “an older, affluent white gay” Orne learns that the good is “how nice everything is nowadays” and the bad are “the ghetto trannies and gay kids on the street”. In this exchange, Orne is introduced to some of the key issues undergirding the treatment of queer, poor and low-income young people of color in Boystown – they are from a “different”, spatially stigmatized community (i.e., one which is “ghetto”; Graham et al., 2016; Keen & Padilla, 2014), they are “trannies” (i.e., not cisgender, or, they are “queer”), and that they are “on the street” (i.e., poor). Orne clarifies for the reader that the “ghetto trannies” and kids described by his participant are, “from the south side” or “other

⁶ White Normativity is defined as “cultural norms and practices that make whiteness appear natural, normal, and right” (Ward, 2008, p. 564).

⁷ Gay marriage is one of the penultimate examples of homonormative political priorities.

neighborhoods” (Orne, 2017b, Chapter 12, para 3), supporting his conclusion that Boystown rejects those who are “trans, who are too brown and black, or who are too poor [because] they don’t fit [the neighborhood’s] image as a gay Disney, a safe theme park, a petting zoo” (Orne, 2017a, p. 4).

2.1.5 Community Policing

Community policing -- “informal social control to enforce order without the direct participation of police” (Rosenberg, 2017, p. 138) through which individual citizens and organizations serve as arms of the states (Herbert, 2001, 2005) – is one of the key ways in which queer, poor and low-income, Black and Brown youth are marginalized and controlled in Boystown. Community policing is an important aspect of “neoliberalism”, “a new regime of economic and political relationships” which shifts state responsibility (here, law enforcement) to community residents and business owners (Herbert, 2005). In Boystown, a neoliberal, racist, classist undercurrent reifies the idea that social disorder in the neighborhood is the fault of the queer youth of color from spatially stigmatized Chicago neighborhoods (Mc-Daniel-Carter, 2012; Orne, 2017a,b), positioning business owners, nonprofit leaders and staff, and neighborhood residents as those responsible for maintaining safety and order in the neighborhood (Roseberg, 2017).

The “Take Back Boystown” Facebook and social media campaign is the one of the most important recent examples of community queer youth of color in the neighborhood. The administrators of the “Take Back Boystown” Facebook page called it a forum for sharing “suggestions, ideas, and thoughts on how we can preserve what we have and go back to the safe fun neighborhood Boystown is known for” (Daniel-McCarter, 2012, p.5). It was widely regarded, however, as a venue for resident to levy complaints against queer youth of color in the

neighborhood. Though those who posted on the site did not explicitly call Black and Brown queer youth the culprits of neighborhood violence, they blamed incidents on “thugs” and “hoodlums”, clearly coded racially-coded language. In addition to residents, local business owners engaged in community policing, with the local business alliance funding off-dirty police officers to patrol the already heavily-policed area (Daniel-McCarter, 2012; Orme, 2012).

Rosenberg (2017) provides another example of the community policing queer youth of color, placing blame square on the nonprofit organizations in Boystown, including the Agency and a federally qualified health center serving the LGBTQ community. Then a staff member at a nonprofit clothing swap in the neighborhood run by the health center, Rosenberg recounts being asked by a fellow staff member to closely monitor youth patrons for stealing. They also describe witnessing the placement of a “no loitering” on the front the Agency -- an act that Rosenberg deemed to be clearly directed at the poor and low-income queer youth of color, to prevent them from “hanging-out” in front of the building.

The study presented herein builds on the work of Daniel-McCarter (2012) and Rosenberg (2017) as well as others who through their work have highlighted the classist and racist systems both overtly and covertly serving to marginalize queer young people of color in Boystown (e.g., Orme, 2017a,b). Their work and ours aims to elucidate the role of community policing and social exclusion in service of “homonormative queers” maintaining their “bourgeoisie lifestyle” (Tilsen & Nylund, 2010, p. 96). Our study also demonstrates the ways in which queer youth of color are resilient in the face of homonormativity and resistant to push-out by community members, business owners, and nonprofits, by continuing to access resources, create social support networks, and carve out a space for themselves in the community.

2.2 Methodology

The analysis presented in this chapter is part of a larger Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project to study of young people's experience aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth services in Chicago. Youth Participatory Action Research is a youth-specific version of the more general "Participatory Action Research" (PAR) and "Community-Based Participatory Research" (CBPR) approaches which share the common goals of equitable involvement of community members and researchers in the conduct of research. In PAR/CBPR, research is in service *of* and collaboration *with* local communities. These participatory research approaches aim to build the capacity of community members to address issues of salience in their lives; it acknowledges and gives deference to local knowledge on community issues (Guba, Egon, & Lincoln, 1994; Israel, Eng, & Schulz, 2012; Israel, Schultz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). According to Morrell (2008, p. 158), "YPAR is an approach to research for action and change that conceptualizes youth as legitimate and essential collaborators". In YPAR projects, researchers work to create opportunities for youth to study the social problems directly affecting them and conceptualize action-oriented responses to those problems (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Youth Participatory Action Research facilitates youth having their voices heard, their ideas valued, and their desires honored, while simultaneously allowing for personal and professional skill development.

After serving as a weekly volunteer for two years, I initiated the YPAR project by partnering with a group of 11 youth (ages 18 to 24) who were current patrons at the Agency in September 2016. Together we became a research collective ("the Collective"). The 11 youth were consented as "participants" in the study, though they simultaneously became co-researchers who I added to Institutional Review Board (IRB) research protocol. Using critical ethnographic,

qualitative methods, we engaged in a five-month-long project. We employed multiple data collection procedures, including focus groups and individual interviews to learn from those outside of our Collective, as well as critical ethnography participant-observation to document and learn from our own experiences and the setting of our study. I involved the youth researchers in every aspect of the research, including question identification, study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and dissemination of our findings. All study activities were approved by UIC's IRB.

2.2.1 Focus Groups

We decided at the beginning of our project that we wanted to collect “stories”, or, qualitative data, about young people’s experiences utilizing LGBTQ services in Boystown. We elected focus group methodology for its time and cost efficiency and its ability to generate a collective understanding of phenomena (Kieffer et al., 2005; Morgan, 1997) as well as allowing us to observe “the jokes, insults, innuendoes, responses, sensitivities and dynamics of the group, as group members interact with one another [...] offer[ing] new insights” into our research questions (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005, p. 2588-9).

Beginning in late November 2016, we engaged in convenience and purposive sampling recruitment strategies for several weeks. We placed fliers in strategic locations across Chicago where queer young people may gather (e.g., coffee shops and community spaces in Boystown, college student unions). Participants were invited to contact me via phone or email to discuss the study and determine eligibility. I then invited participants to join one of the scheduled groups.

Between December 2016 and January 7, 2017, we conducted four focus groups with between 4 and 10 youth (ages 20 to 29) in each group (n=26), who had, at any point, used LGBTQ “youth” services in the city of Chicago (or surrounding suburbs). We recruited more

than 35 participants to join the groups, though many did not attend. Each of the focus groups occurred on extremely cold days in Chicago, likely contributing non-participation. We stopped recruiting participants following our fourth focus group, as the final two groups were not yielding substantively different information from the first two (i.e., we had reached data saturation; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and because we wished to devote available funds to engage social service providers in interviews -- something we decided after we began focus group data collection as we began to realize that our data were “one-sided”.

Two or three of the youth researchers moderated each focus group in a private area on the campuses of two local universities. The moderators consented all participants prior to beginning the group discussions, each lasting between 54 and 70 minutes. Moderators used a semi-structured focused group guide to elicit conversation about the benefits and draw-backs of “LGBTQ youth social services”, participants’ experiences with services, including racism and cisgenderism, and ways that services can be improved to better serve young people. For example, the discussions began with general questions to gather participants’ perceptions of LGBTQ- “friendly” or -specific social services and their “aging-out” experiences,

- How do you feel about LGBTQ-friendly or LGBTQ-specific services for youth?

Probes:

- Which services do you have positive opinions about? Why?
- Which ones do you have less than positive opinions about? Why?

The conversations then focused on issues of “aging-out”, as many of the participants had already experienced aging-out of services at 25,

- How was it for you when you aged-out of services?

Probes:

- How did you prepare for aging-out, if at all?
- How did the programs or services support you in aging-out?

Partway through the group discussion, moderators asked participants the following series of questions/probes specifically about discrimination, most of which are the focus of this manuscript,

- Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination when you were accessing youth or adult LGBTQ-friendly services? What was that experience like?

Probes:

- What is the role of racial/ethnic discrimination in these experiences?
- What is the role of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in these experiences?
- Have you experienced any form of discrimination when accessing services that were not specifically “LGBTQ-friendly”?

The moderators provided focus group participants with \$20 cash as a token of our appreciation for their time. We used two digital recorders to capture the audio from each focus group; these audio files were then transcribed verbatim -- two by me and two by a professional transcription agency. I “cleaned” all transcripts by comparing them against the audio recordings and fixing any errors.

2.2.2 Individual Interviews

Once our focus groups were underway, we elected to add individual interview methodology to our study to allow us to engage in in-depth conversations with service providers -- to help us get the full “picture” LGBTQ social services and experiences in Boystown. We selected interviews rather than focus groups because we knew that participants would be social service providers for different organizations and have different jobs titles and associated

responsibilities, which we thought would make a group-level discussion less productive.

Interviews were also logistically simpler than focus groups, as we could meet the interviewees at their office or somewhere nearby, often during their workday.

We began recruiting interviewees in January 2017, inviting those service providers who worked for the LGBTQ-specific or LGBTQ- “friendly” (i.e., they served a large proportion of LGBTQ clients) programs most discussed by focus group participants. We used a recruitment script to invite interviewees via email, phone, or in-person to participate. Only one of the 11 social service providers invited to participate declined our invitation.

We conducted interviews with 10 current social service providers, across seven agencies/organizations, from January 31 and February 20, 2017. Nine of the 10 interviewees worked or volunteered at an organization situated in Boystown or the larger community area of Lakeview. The other interviewee worked for an organization that was not in Boystown/Lakeview, but is frequented by many of the youth who utilize LGBTQ services in Boystown/Lakeview. Eight of the interviewees were paid staff at their organization, one interviewee was a volunteer, and one interviewee was a former staff member who had left their job at an LGBTQ youth-serving program in the previous six months. After 10 interviews, we ceased recruiting new participants as we believed we had reached data saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and because it became financially infeasible to continue to provide financial incentives to participants.

Eight of the 10 interviews were co-facilitated by a youth researcher from our Collective and me. One interview was facilitated by a youth researcher independently and one was facilitated by me independently. We consented each interviewee prior to beginning the interview. We used a semi-structured interview guide with questions nearly identical to those of the focus

group guide, but with language altered (when necessary) to reflect the current position of the interviewees (service providers) as opposed to those of the focus group participants (current/former service recipients). We did ask interviewees to describe their organization's age-out policy and protocols, something that was largely absent from our focus group discussions as participants were generally unfamiliar with organizational policies and processes. We also asked interviewees to give us insight into their background -- work history, education, interest in social service -- to help contextualize their interview and point of view.

The interviews took place at a location of the interviewee's choosing, typically at their place of work or a nearby coffee shop, each lasting between 39 minutes and 73 minutes. Interview participants were provided with \$20 cash as a token of our appreciation for their time. A few the interviewees asked that we use the money for another purpose (e.g., buying snacks for a local youth social service program). Each interview was recorded using two digital audio recorders; the audio files were then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription agency. I "cleaned" the transcripts by comparing them against the audio recordings and fixing any errors.

2.2.3 Ethnography and Participant-Observation

An ethnographic approach is one in which the researcher is immersed in a culture or among a group for an extended period of time, during which he/she engages in a systematic, inductive approach to understanding the social order and processes of the culture/group. For this study the youth and I were "ethnographers" of ourselves ("autoethnography"), of our setting, and of the process of our Collective. As ethnographers, we gathered whatever data were available to "throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). These data were in the form of audio recordings of each of our meetings as a Collective, hand-written or typed notes from our various conversations/discussions, lists of ideas,

rules, suggestions, and maps or flow charts of specific processes (e.g., how racism affects service utilization in Boystown). One of the key ways that we engaged in autoethnographic inquiry, was during focus group-like conversation in which I asked the youth researchers specific discussion questions about their OWN experiences growing up, utilizing LGBTQ services, leaving home (if applicable), and what it meant to them to become an “adult”.

Participant-observation is a key component of ethnography and is characterized by the ethnographer “tak[ing] part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their culture” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 260). The youth and I were both participants in our Collective and in the community of LGBTQ social services (as “service recipients” and researchers) as well as observers of our own experiences and the process of engaging in a youth participatory action research study.

In addition to the data we gathered as a Collective, I took regular field notes and wrote analytic memos to document what I learned as a participant-observer. These field notes and memos were characterized by “short, fragmented narratives” which Cruz (2011, p. 550) calls “ethnographic snapshots” -- “intense bursts of information that in very few words tell us so much about the daily conditions of LGBTQ youth”. These notes, or “snapshots”, allowed me to capture my observations throughout the project of both our process and the issues emerging within our group and in the spaces I frequented in Boystown, such as the Agency, or in nearby businesses. Taken together, my ethnographic snapshots and our group-produced ethnographic data helped to contextualize our focus group and interview data.

2.2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis took place in two “rounds”, each iterative and eclectic. In the first round, the youth researchers and I engaged in a participatory narrative analysis in which the youth researchers were analyzing their own data (autoethnographic stories) and our other data textual and audio data to develop a holistic understanding of how young people experience utilizing queer youth services in Chicago’s Boystown (and in surrounding areas; Dill, 2015). The first round was characterized by group-level discussions -- “analytical debriefs” and “analytical mapping exercises” -- toward the identification of initial codes to assist in the categorization of our textual and audio data. We used these discussions towards the identification of a list of deductive and inductive initial codes to help us systematically categorize our data (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; LeCompte & Schensul, 2013; Mason, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2004; Saldaña, 2013). We utilized three key “types” of codes -- descriptive codes (nouns summarizing the topic of a passage), in vivo codes (those which maintain participants’ language; Saldaña, 2013), and a code we named “great quotes” to capture instances when our data provided an especially rich description of an issue or process and/or were emotionally provocative. We also applied the “great quotes” code any time a text segment made one or more of the researchers, for any other reason, say “Wow, that’s a great quote!!”. We manually coded our textual data using an initial set of 12 codes. We added seven codes during the coding for issues that were not sufficiently captured under our original 12 codes. Once our data were coded, we engaged in group discussion about the coded segments toward the identification of high-level “themes” (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013; Ryan & Bernard, 2004), or issues/topics which cut across our codes and provided insight into our research questions.

The first round of analysis informed our second round which allowed me (with assistance from one of the youth researchers) to do a “deeper dive” into our data. For this round, I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (“CAQDAS”) Dedoose (2017) to conduct a second round of coding using an updated, more nuanced list of codes. As I coded, I also engaged in memoing of the data, allowing me to capture, in narrative form, my analytic questions and nascent interpretations (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). Once the data had been coded and memoed during this second round, I exported all excerpts and their associated memos for each code. I created “code summaries” for each code, which provided an overview, in narrative form, of what those excerpts as a group indicated. I did this for each code while also allowing the memos to remind me of my initial analytical insights or hunches. As I was creating these summaries, I began to “code-weave”. Code-weaving is “the actual integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 248). Through code-weaving, the connections between codes, and the ultimate emergence of high-level themes began to take place. I then engaged in composing a set of overall themes from the data from the data. I then crafted the “story” of the data in narrative form. The findings presented in this chapter are thus a triangulation of the two rounds of data analysis, each with varying degrees of youth researcher participation.

2.2.5 Participant Demographics

We collected demographics on 24 of our 26 focus group participants (two participants left the group before completing the demographic survey). As we designed our study, the youth researchers and I agreed that it was important to be able to describe our focus group participants in order to provide insight into the types of young people who shared their experiences accessing services in Boystown. Though we had intended to recruit participants with a wide range of ages

(20 years and older), our participants were on average 25, with the oldest participant being only 29. More than three quarters of participants who completed our short, demographic survey (n=24), identified as Black/African American (80%, n=19); the remainder identified as biracial (8%, n=2, Black/White and Black/Native American), multiracial (8%, n= 2, Latinx/Black/White, Latinx/White/Native American), and Jamaican (4%, n=1).

We allowed for an open-ended response to participants' gender identity and sexual orientation. Majority of participants identified as male (58%, n=14), with the next largest groups identifying as Female (25% n = 6), transgender 13% (n=3), and gender fluid (n=1, 4%). Of the 22 participants who responded to the sexual identity question, eight (36%) identified as bisexual, 5 (23%) as straight, 4 (18%) as gay, 3 (14%) as pansexual, 1 (4.5%) as queer, and 1 (4.5%) as sexually fluid. More than half of the participants had attended some college (n=13, 54%), one-third (n=8, 33%) had completed high school, and remainder (n=3, 13%) had not completed high school.

We elected to not collect demographics from the 10 social service provider interviewees, though we know through our personal and professional relationships with the interviewees that as a group they are racially and ethnically diverse with some interviewees identifying as members of the "LBGTQ community" or as queer and others as straight and/or cisgender allies. We elected not to collect this information because we felt that it was most important to understand the demographics of the focus of our study – young people who had aged-out or who would soon age-out – rather than on the providers, as the original point of those interviews were to learn more about how young people experience aging-out. We also did not systematically collect the demographics of the 12 members of our Collective (11 youth and me), however, our group had a mix of youth identifying as White, Black, biracial, multiracial, gay, and straight, transgender, gender fluid, and queer. All the youth were between the ages of 18 and 24 at the time of the research. I am White, straight, cisgender, and in my thirties.

2.3 Findings

2.3.1 Travel to the “Northside”

Through our various methods, we learned that queer youth of color come to Boystown from many different parts of Chicago and from neighboring states, such as Wisconsin and Indiana. Figure 5 is a map of Chicago’s 77 community areas, providing a snapshot of regions where some of the youth in our Collective were raised and depicting their travel to Boystown from their home communities (none were raised in the neighborhood). The figure shows that two of our Collective’s youth researchers, Terry and Antonio,⁸ each initially came from their “Southside” communities of Roseland and Bronzeville/Douglas to Boystown. Another youth researcher, Hans, is from West Rogers Park and commutes several times per week to Boystown to access the Agency’s youth program. In the figure, the youths’ home communities are represented by blue circles and their direction of travel to Boystown is represented by black arrows. The community area of Lakeview is circled in orange and the Boystown neighborhood is circled in green. Not pictured is the distance travelled by two of our youth researchers, Omar who moved to Boystown from neighboring Wisconsin while he was still in high school and Nina who was raised in northern Illinois.

We learned that youth leave their home communities for three, interrelated, reasons. The first, to find support for and affirmation of their queer identities. For some young people, even if coming to Boystown means experiencing marginalization, returning home is not an option. For example, Antonio, a Black, gay, man in his early twenties, from a religious family on Chicago’s Southside Roseland neighborhood, fled his home community at a teenager-- where he

⁸ Some youth researchers asked to have their names used in this dissertation. Others did not provide a preference for their name versus a pseudonym. When youth did not provide a preference, I have created a pseudonym.

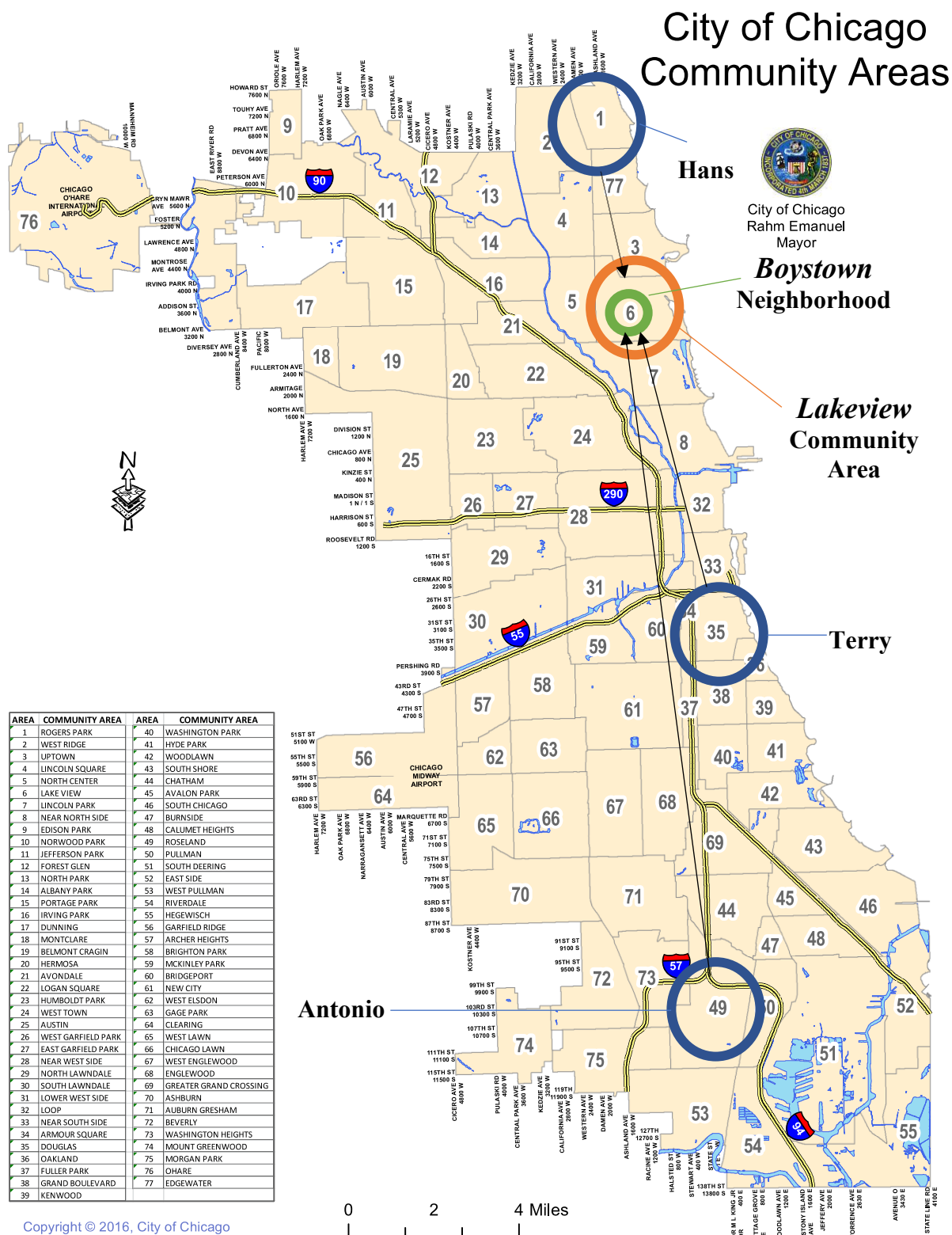


Figure 5. City of Chicago community areas and youth's travel to Boystown

experienced both abuse and family unacceptance of his identity -- for Boystown, seeking support and shelter at various programs in the neighborhood. Antonio, like many queer youth of color, has experienced marginalization throughout his time in the neighborhood – he does not tie these experiences to one specific organization, though he has experienced several issues while accessing services at the Agency. Even over the course of our project, he was suspended for a month from the Agency, explaining to me -- “basically, I got into an altercation with a youth who had been threatening me for a month – serious ‘life-ending’ threats”.

Rather than address Antonio’s safety, or mediate the situation, he and the young person who was threatening him were suspended. This suspension blocked his access to the Agency’s resources and to his friends, without resolving the threats of violence against him. Despite these experiences at the Agency (and in the neighborhood as a whole), to Antonio, Boystown is home. Partly because of his longtime presence in the neighborhood, he is now the youngest person to ever be hired by the youth program of one of the largest LGBTQ organizations in the neighborhood – a health center with a youth-specific program, a goal he worked towards over many years. During one of our Collective’s discussions, he explained,

[I knew that when] I did rise up out of this homelessness, I was gonna have a foundation...I’m knew that I was going to use this system, and slowly reconfigure it as I went along. [Antonio, Youth Researcher]

In this comment, Antonio is describing his strategic use of the resources in Boystown and highlighting his sense of agency to create change and the resilience among the queer youth of color who come to the neighborhood seeking support. Rather than retreating to a community that he fled at a young age Antonio is clear in his conviction to eventually change the community and resource systems within it and in that conviction, is taking ownership of the community, despite its flaws.

The second reason that queer youth come to the neighborhood is the lack of LGBTQ-specific resources where they live, for example, gender confirming health care or shelter. These resources are often not available in these neighborhoods because the residents are *assumed* to be less tolerant or supportive of LGBTQ-identified people, and thus queer youth would be “unsafe” accessing services therein. Because of this perceived lack of safety, LGBTQ services are concentrated on the inclusive “Northside”. For many youth, these resources are a necessity even if they are marginalized in the process. A youth/young person in one of our focus groups explains this necessity,

People who stay out West, South, over East, we’ve got to come all the way up North [to access services] but if this is the only resource you’ve got, you’ve got to get it. You want it, you’ve got to get it, no matter where it’s at. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 4]

The third reason that queer, poor and low-income youth of color come to Boystown is because their families, despite supporting their queer identities, cannot provide them financial support after high school. One young person from our Collective, Terry, was adopted at a young age by a loving and supportive woman. Today, he retains a close relationship with his adoptive mother and is building a relationship with his biological mother, both of whom are supportive of his gay identity. While he was in high school in the Bronzeville neighborhood of the Douglas community areas, he had the support of his adoptive mother and biological siblings as well as teachers and a Gay-Straight Alliance (which he initiated at the school). After high school, however, he was “on his own” and began to struggle emotionally and financially. As a result, for many years, Terry has leveraged the support of other queer youth of color and the resources in Boystown, including access to healthcare and housing assistance. During our conversations as a Collective, Terry made clear his beliefs about the neighborhood -- many of the people who live in and patron the neighborhood (in particular, White, gay, middle-class men) are racist, classist,

transphobic, and even ageist. Though he feels strongly about the “isms” at play in the neighborhood, he has recently gotten a job LGBTQ community-based organization, something that, like Antonio, he had hoped to achieve for a long time. Because of his now steady income, he can afford to get his own apartment. When I asked him where he is planning to move he responded, “I know the Northside is bad but there’s no way I’m going back to the Southside. My work is here, by friends are here, I know it here. I know it sounds bad, but I just really wouldn’t want to live on the Southside again”. I interpreted “I know it sounds bad” to mean that he is aware that some people may consider this a choice to live among the relatively wealthy, White people of the Northside, rather than the lower-income Black people (including his family) of the Southside. Despite feeling like he *should* return to “the Southside”, Terry now considers “the Northside” is home -- where he lives, works, and spends the majority of his time.

2.3.2 Anywhere but Here

They want you to go somewhere else – south, west, anywhere that’s not.... anywhere but here.
[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group Participant]

Our data made clear that queer youth, in particular queer Black youth, feel unwanted in Boystown, both by residents and business owners, as well as by the nonprofits serving them,

I’m gonna be real with you, you’ve got White people providing you a service. Mainly Black people come and receive the services [in the neighborhood]. [But the people in the neighborhood] want you to stay away from up North. They want you to go somewhere else – south, west, anywhere that’s not.... anywhere but here. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 3]

The Agency, was widely regarded as a place for “White gay men”,

[That Agency] was tailored for older White gay men. Only for the past five to six years has the [program for youth] been open, but it was shut down for a while due to racism and unruly activities. They don’t broadcast [the youth program] because they don’t want us up here. [Marcos, Youth Researcher]

The organization’s former policy requiring youth to enter the building through a backdoor, demonstrates the extent to which queer, poor and low-income youth of color were separated

from the Agency's most important clientele. Early in our meetings as a Collective, I learned about this former policy. Though the youth patrons were told that this backdoor entry was to protect their safety, they saw it as an attempt to shield the White patrons from having to see and interact with them.

I witnessed the overt separation of queer youth of color from the rest of the Agency during my volunteer training in 2014 – long after the “back door policy” had been eliminated. The beginning of our training involved a group discussion about issues of power and privilege and how, as volunteers, we should be aware of these facets of society. We even engaged in an activity in which we mapped the “root” causes of discrimination and social inequities onto the roots of a paper tree. After the training concluded, we were given a tour of the Agency's three-story building. On the second floor, we were taken to the outside of keycard-entry-only door with a window into the main room of the “youth space”. As we looked through the window at the young people who were overwhelmingly Black and Brown, we learned that most of these youth are homeless and often sell sex. Many of them, we were told, get all their needs met by the Agency and other nonprofit programs in the area, including lunch at a drop-in program down the street, dinner at the Agency, and sleeping at an emergency shelter for youth one block away.

That youth were required to enter through a backdoor and that their situations as being homeless and/or selling sex are “learning” points for new Volunteers are but two example of the ways in which youth are shamed and demoralized in Boystown. When youth are hidden from the community, who is *really* being protected? As the findings from this study suggest, it is the homonormative culture of Boystown that is protected at the expense of the queer youth of color's safety, dignity, and sense of belonging.

2.3.3 Policing Youth Within the Community-Based LGBTQ Organizations

It looks like racism, yeah. It looks like specifically... it looks like policing.
[Social Service Provider, Interview 4].

Queer, poor and low-income youth of color often find their movements and behavior policed within the walls of local LGBTQ organizations, especially at the Agency. I, however, rarely experienced such problems. Staff and patrons smiled at me, asked if I needed assistance with anything, and did not appear to question my movements. When in the company of youth from our Collective, however, the experiences were different. When I was with the youth, I became a conduit through which to control the youth. On one occasion, for example, I was explicitly asked to move youth out of an open lobby on the second-floor of the Agency's building (the same place Orne [2017a,b] describes he asked to move out of when he attempted to collect an ethnographic interview in 2013 and later learned was kept off limits to deter Black youth from moving freely throughout the building). That night, I was five minutes late for our regularly-scheduled 5 p.m. meeting. Because youth are unable to go to the conference room where we usually meet unaccompanied, they were forced to wait for me in the second-floor lobby. I arrived to find the youth researchers standing in the lobby, talking amongst themselves, waiting for me to escort them back. The receptionist quickly spotted me, calling out in a concerned tone, "Jennifer, you're here. Great. They cannot be here! Please move them to your room as soon as possible or ask them to go into the youth space". They spoke directly to me, as if the youth were not standing between us and could hear the exchange. I heeded the request and guided the group back to our conference room. Some of the youth researchers seemed annoyed at being asked to move, saying that they are always asked to move from that lobby. Others did not seem to notice or care. At the time, I was surprised that the youth were not allowed to be in the lobby. I had taken a phone call or waited for a friend in that lobby on multiple occasions there

without anyone asking me to move. Over time, I began to understand this occurrence was only one example of the ways in which queer youth of color's movements are policed and their behavior controlled through nonprofit polices.

In addition to policing their movement, some nonprofits in the neighborhood involve law enforcement as a means to further control them and their behavior, including enacting policies which require police be called, even at if violence is threatened. The Agency has a reputation for involving the security staff and local police even to address minor, non-violent issues. The social service providers we interviewed vehemently critiqued these policies. The following quotes explain why participants believed that involving the police is an inappropriate response to youth violence,

I felt concerned about [involving the police] because, as we both know, as we all know, police mean something very different. There are many people in our community who don't feel safe with the police for very good reason. [Social Service Provider, Interview 8]

We would never call the police on the youth [because] we know that the police are harm, they create the harm. [Social Service Provider, Interview 5]

2.3.3.1 “Banning” Youth Patrons from LGBTQ Organizations

The youth/young adult focus group participants and the social service interviewees described policies they considered to be antithetical to the needs of youth, thereby preventing them from getting needs met and further marginalizing them. “Banning” is an example of such a policy. Banning occurs when youth are barred from using services at a specific organization once they are perceived as having engaged, or threatening to engage, in violent behavior.⁹

Participants consistently discussed banning policies and practices as ineffective and unfair. In

⁹ I learned through a conversation with a staff member of the Agency's youth program that the organization is adamant that this policy not be referred to as “banning”. They refer to it as “suspension”. In the case of a lifetime ban, it is called “indefinite suspension”. The youth researchers and our participants, however, consistently referred to it as “banning”, thus, we use the term, too.

some cases, there is a “lifetime ban” in which youth can never again access an organization’s resources. In some cases, they cannot even be in an organization’s communal space, such as the lobby area of the Agency which is shared with Whole Foods. Others receive a suspension -- they are barred from services for a set amount of time. Several participants in our second focus group indicated that they had been banned or pushed out of services in the neighborhood,

There were times when [staff] would see me coming up the street and call the police.
[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

So, [being banned] was a constant struggle...you would think that an organization would understand, ‘here’s a youth that’s traumatized, is still trying to [...] remove them self from the oppression of like society...here I am, I’m young, I’m Black, I’m trans and I’m looking for resources in a straight [world]. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

Interviewees who discussed banning policies (this topic was not addressed in all the interviews) were uncomfortable with and unsupportive of them,

The policy that we ended up having to enforce is that if a young person ever had been suspended for violence, or threats of violence, they’re not welcome to be in the lobby, ever again. I feel like if a young person is making threats, or is experiencing violence, then that’s an opportunity for us to welcome them and to hold them closer [not push them away]. [Social Service Provider, Interview 8]

The youth researchers in our Collective were familiar with banning and its implications, as they all knew people who had been banned indefinitely or temporarily. In fact, during our project, one of the youth researchers was suspended from the Agency for a month. He was, however, allowed to attend our meetings.

2.3.3.2 You Can’t Work Here

The Agency has a policy which states that youth cannot work the organization while they are still youth clients or, even if they are no longer clients, are under 25 or have been a client in the past three years¹⁰ (I am not aware of the rationale behind this policy). This is true for all jobs

¹⁰ Other organizations serving queer youth in Boystown may also have this policy, but that information did not emerge from our data.

in the organization, even those that are not within the youth program (e.g., front desk receptionist, janitor, health educator). Participants and the youth researchers in our Collective pointed to policies like this as contributing to queer youth of color's default position as service recipients. They were upset that they could not contribute in a meaningful way to the organizations serving them and earn money while doing so,

What if you've got your shit together and you want to help other people out? Like, a lot of these programs, you have to age-out before you can actually go back to work there to help other people. [Focus Group 4]

As a Collective, we understood policies which prevented young people from working at LGBTQ youth-serving organizations as antithetical to the mission of such organizations as they prevented queer youth from getting jobs and taking leadership positions which might allow them to improve their social position and well-being.

Over the course of our project at least four of the 10 youth researchers were attempting to get jobs at organizations in the neighborhood. Terry was regularly told by different Agency hiring managers that he would soon be the exception to the hiring policy and be hired despite being 23 and a current youth center patron. Time after time, he was told that the hiring manager could circumvent the policy against hiring youth. He described feeling deflated and frustrated, as he had become dependent on the services in the neighborhood (and the small stipend from our project) to meet even his most basic needs.

One of the organizations in the neighborhood recently adjusted their hiring policy and hired their first full-time employee who was a current program participant and under the age of 25 (Antonio the youth researcher discussed earlier). They soon hired two additional members of our research team -- Marcos was hired by the youth program and Terry was hired by the parent

organization. When we interviewed a social service provider from that organization they described the ways in which the organization creates policies,

[W]henever we make policies here, we're very thoughtful about them. We're thoughtful about what type of reaction we'll get, but then we also have to think about safety, confidentiality, so when we do things, we're definitely putting the youth first...So, any policy we come up with here, we're always thinking of the youth first no matter what. [Social Service Provider, Interview 5]

2.3.4 Policing Youth in Boystown

I definitely think [the way people are treated here is] a racial thing. There's a police station right there off of Addison. They do not like us. They do not like us because we Black, we transgender, we this and that. It is your job to protect us. You're already right there letting us know that you're not going to protect us. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 4]

The youth researchers from our Collective and our participants described clearly their experiences of being policed by residents, business owners, and law enforcement in Boystown,

[I]f the cops stop us, they want to know what we're doing in the neighborhood, or, "we heard there was a noise complaint in the neighborhood," telling us to be quiet, versus 16 Cubs fans walking down the street drunk, happy about the game and stuff [Terry, Youth Researcher/Interviewer]

A topic that came up through the study (both within our Collective at during our data collection) was the "Take Back Boystown" campaign. This campaign was understood by the youth researchers and our participants as a clear act of policing of Black and Brown bodies in the area,

So anybody remember 'Taking Back Belmont',¹¹ the website? If you don't know, [it] is where you use this website [to raise funds] to actually have an ordinance [in] place to say that a certain amount of certain looking people cannot -- Negroes, niggers -- cannot come up to this area. And, they could basically racial profile you and have you [get] back on the train if you get off [at Belmont]. [Marcos, Youth Researcher]

¹¹ Participants often called the "Taking Back Boystown" campaign by different names, such as "Taking Back Belmont" and "Take our Boystown Back".

Social service provider interviewees fit the campaign in to the larger context of what queer youth of color (and adults on occasion) must deal with as they move through Boystown, in the following excerpts,

We're like 'well, we should just leave Lakeview.' They hate our young people, they have these awful websites that people start rumors all the time. One time there was even a person in the neighborhood where, [when] one of our young people who was sleeping on the steps of the [building], like bundled up, not bothering anybody, just sleeping, she took a picture and posted it on Facebook about how the neighborhood is going down or something, just like really awful. And all he was doing was sleeping. [Social Service Provider, Interview 6]

Navigating through Boystown in general, you have to deal with some of the shit from people at gas station, and people not [...] wanting your presence there. You have to deal with those things. [Within these organization] we don't really talk about those things [...] like, we're not talking about me being called a nigger on my way down the street, or we're not talking about the "Take our Boystown Back" signs. [Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

The second excerpt highlights how, despite these overt experiences of racism in the neighborhood, nonprofits situated therein are not "talking about those things". Only one of the social service providers that we interviewed did not clearly indicate that they had witnessed racism against youth in Boystown. At a later point in the interview, however, they do criticize LGBTQ community-based organizations for enacting overly harsh penalties against youth for nonviolent behavior,

Youth Researcher [YR]/Interviewer: [D]o you think discrimination comes into like, when it comes to these youth in the neighborhood trying to access resource from the community?

Interviewee: Like for instance?

YR: Like for instance, there was an instance where at one organization, for the safety of the youth, they were only allowed to use the back door when it first opened saying that they had to, the youth had to be safe and the youth brought up the question who do we need to be safe from and the whole idea of bring back, take back Boystown, that whole committee about like trying to get the youth out of the community. Like the whole "Southside trash" incident where a bunch of White men called a bunch of Black men "Southside trash" and telling them go back to the Southside and ruin their own neighborhood, so in instances like that, do you think race or discrimination comes into effect when these youth are trying to access resources?

Interviewee: Yeah. That's crazy. That happened?

YR: Yeah, those are like, those are just small stories we've heard and stuff. I'm just asking have you seen it? Have you seen it happen or even heard about it happening?

Interviewee: No, because I don't know. No and I don't ever want to hear those stories because I...no, no, no. [Social Service Provider, Interview 10]

2.3.5 Youth Policing Each Other: Motivation and "The Blame Game"

I feel like the people who wasn't going to actually strive to go further [are] sitting there getting these resources and then the resources is gone for people who could have actually benefited from them. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 3]

Much to my dismay, the youth researchers of our Collective were considerably interested in what they called "motivation". Overtime, I learned that the youth researchers viewed motivation as an internal desire *and* action to improve one's life, typically become financially stable through employment and securing stable housing. I was nervous for the youth researchers to embark on a discussion about internal motivation with our focus group participants, because I thought it might seem as though we had an individualistic perception on how youth experience the world (as opposed to acknowledging the social and structural influences shaping their lives). I was even more nervous to inquire about motivation with the social service provider interviewees; I thought they might judge us for even more harshly that youth/young adults for asking such questions. I decided, however, that if the youth researchers wanted to asked participants about the role of motivation, then it was not my place to stop them. Consequently, the data on motivation gleaned proved to be quite rich, tying together experiences of Othering, policing, and controlling of queer youth of color.

There was a clear departure between focus group and interview participants' perceptions of the ways in which motivation is garnered and how it affects young people. Focus group participants generally placed blame on young people for not using services effectively or for taking up space in programs without benefiting from them. Our Collective named this phenomenon "*the Blame Game*". We discovered that the young adult focus group participants

often pointed to *individual factors* as the reason that youth might lack motivation for changing their circumstances. We also began to conceptualize this youth-youth “blame” as an effect of the context of service delivery -- one that, while placing the youth as Other than the rest of the community, pits youth against each other. The following excerpt provides an example of this youth-youth blame and competition for resources,

And these people get like the services of [housing] and stuff like that and it [will] be like, where they pay for the first three months of [a person's] rent. And, they still in there like ‘oh yeah, I got my own stuff.’ At the end, it’s just like when the three months is up, the back to [a shelter]. I feel like the people who wasn’t going to actually strive to go further [are] sitting there getting these resources and then the resources is gone for people who could have actually benefited from them. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 3]

Interviewees, conversely, most often pointed to the *structural factors* that affect young people’s motivation to make changes, as evidenced in the following excerpt,

What’s interesting is like they’ll see people who have been here for a long time and make assumptions that they’re not trying, whereas I work with people and I know that they’re trying really hard and stuff just takes a long time. And even to me, to be motivated to be able to be successful in ways that society says – so, to go to school, to find a job, to have a house, all of those things, they’re not gonna be able to focus on those things when [their] basic needs can’t be met. When you don’t know when you’re gonna eat, when you can sleep, you don’t feel safe, like all of those things. It’s pretty unrealistic to expect people to do X, Y, and Z when they’re in a constant state of not being sure of [their] survival. [Social Service Provider, Interview 6]

One interviewee, however, did not have the same reaction as most of the other interviewees to our query about motivation among youth,

It’s a merry-go-round. It goes around and around from this, to this, to this, to this. Every kid knows where to get everything. They know where to get breakfast, they know where to get lunch, they know where to get clothes...they go ‘round and ‘round and ‘round. Why get a job [when you] can get breakfast, lunch, and dinner? Why get a job? Absolutely it’s motivation. How bad do you want it? It’s not how bad do you want it. It’s what are you going to do to get it? [Social Service Provider, Interview 10]

In this excerpt, the interviewee is taking a more “tough love” approach to motivation. While they do, to some extent, “blame” the merry-go-round of services, they focus more on “how bad do [youth] want it?” or “what are [they] going to do to get it?”.

2.3.5.1 *The Belmont Lifestyle and the Bermuda Triangle*

The youth researchers introduced the concept of “*The Belmont Lifestyle*” early-on in our project -- pointing to the relationship between the location of services LGBTQ youth programming and the influence of place on service utilization. Belmont is both a street and the name of a Chicago Public Transit train stop in the heart of Boystown. *The Belmont Lifestyle* is a set of actions or acts or situations in which youth utilizing LGBTQ resources get “caught-up” in having fun in the neighborhood, such as going out with friends, finding new spots to hang-out and chill (e.g., drop-in centers), and often includes using alcohol and drugs. For some of our focus group participants and the youth researchers in our Collective, the Belmont Lifestyle became a source of blame for a lack of “motivation” among young people,

They go up North, they wanna hang in Boystown. Like, this is the time you need to use your resources when you can move on in your life and better yourself. Like...most of them just go up there [to] hang-out, [they] wanna smoke all day, wanna walk the streets, wanna walk the strip. [Youth, Young Adult, Focus Group 1]

The neighborhood and the potential to get sucked into the “lifestyle” was also considered to be an impediment to improving one’s circumstances,

Remember you came [to the neighborhood] for a reason. So, use their resources, the benefits, to do what you’ve got to do and get about your situation. [Focus Group 4]

The youth researchers and focus group participants introduced another concept related to geography and service utilization, “*the Bermuda Triangle*” (something that was alluded to during my volunteer training tour of the Agency in 2014). The Bermuda Triangle is made up of three organizations frequently used by youth seeking services in the neighborhood -- two offering drop-in services and one offering emergency shelter, all within walking distance of one each other. Accordingly, youth get ‘caught up’ in the Bermuda Triangle, becoming dependent on the three resources,

People just sit at [drop-in center A] and like basically the routine would be, go to the [emergency housing], wake up, go to [drop-in center B], go to [drop-in center A] come back to the [emergency shelter] and just use the resources. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 3]

One of the youth researchers, Jerrod, too, blamed The Bermuda Triangle for “hindering people”, explaining that LGBTQ youth program staff “baby people” making it difficult for youth to “self-motivate” towards self-sufficiency and financial independence. This “blame game” appears as a natural reaction to a context that vilifies youth of color and treats them as Other, therefore these data must be understood in context.

2.3.6 Cultural (In)Competency

[W]e shouldn't have to conform ourselves to accommodate cis people, they should conform to accommodate us, this is out space. This is our safe space...[and] if you're going to create a safe space, make it safe for the group of people that you're [claiming] to make it safe for.
[Social Service Provider, Interview 7]

One might expect organizations which specifically serve queer- and LGBTQ-identities patrons to have some of the most extensive cultural competency trainings, practices, and policies in place. What our data show, however, is that organizations which are said to be “queer-competent” are often competent in only some identities, such as LGB, and not in others, such as transgender, queer, Black and Brown. Participants explained to us that staff at some organizations which are “queer-competent” are clearly disrespectful of people’s gender identity. This disrespect is can be subtle, such as neglecting to ask a patron for their preferred gender pronouns (PGPs), or overt, such as misgendering a patron (i.e., calling people by a pronoun that does not match his/her/their preferred pronoun and/or gender presentation) or insulting their gender presentation. For example, one of the social service provider interviewees described learning of others’ experiences at an LGBTQ community-based program in which transgender, female-identified patrons were followed into “female” bathrooms and asked to instead to use the

gender-neutral bathrooms on another floor. Some of the social service provider interviewees also explained that there is a lack of basic accommodations for those who are gender non-conforming or transgender,

My experience at lots of places is that they'll talk about being queer competent. When you walk through the space, there aren't gender neutral bathrooms...they don't ask about pronouns, there's not anything in writing or in the space that's very clearly queer-specific...There's no posters....there's no services laid out that are queer-specific. So, it's like, 'alright, I don't know how you get to name yourself [queer competent], but [you need] to prove it. [Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

[W]e shouldn't have to conform ourselves to accommodate cis people, they should conform to accommodate us, this is out space. This is our safe space...[and] if you're going to create a safe space, make it safe for the group of people that you're [claiming] to make it safe for. Just because you're 'LGBT-friendly', doesn't mean that you respect people's pronouns or you're competent to their direct needs. [Some shelters might say, 'oh, we're queer competent] and we'll accept trans women, but you have to sleep with the men'. [Social Service Provider, Interview 7]

Participants also discussed that even when there are fully “queer-competent” practices in place, such as gender neutral bathrooms or asking for the preferred gender pronouns of patrons, cultural competency related to racial/ethnic identities is lacking. Some participants even pointed to blatant racism at “queer-competent” organizations. As a Collective, we regularly discussed the ways in which “queer” organization were not actually open to people of color, even if they claimed to be. The following excerpt provides another example of this cultural (in)competence,

I've experienced [organizations which are] queer-competent in very specific little bubbles - 'oh we're good at working with White gay men or really good at working with cis gay folks, or bi folks – like a cis person who dates other cis people'... to be very honest, racism is a huge part of it...queer specific programming doesn't mean necessarily that they're not going to be racist. [For] queer folks of color - their name may be respected, they may have a bathroom they can use, but they're experiencing microaggressions or flat out, blatant, overt racism. “That bathroom isn't doing me much if I can't use it because now you're worried that I'm using it because I'm Black” - I hear that all the time. So, these competencies have to be intersectional. I would say at this point, they're not. [Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

Interview participants also provided examples of ways in which organizations' policies are not sensitive to historical racism and the needs of queer youth of color. That policies were

“competent” sexual orientation but not to gender and race, were consistently discussed. The following excerpt details a policy that is not in line with the needs of “at-risk youth”,

[There is] a three-strike rule. If you don’t show up for [therapy/counseling] three times, you one, accrue a balance that you have to pay off before you come back, and two, are out of services. This is supposed to be the most comprehensive, inclusive, accessible service in Chicago, and it’s not, right? It is for *them*, for folks who are coming for other services, right? But for at-risk youth, who are engaging in these systems at all times and who just need to space to breather, I don’t feel comfortable charging \$20 [for a therapy session]. [Social Service Provider, Interview 4]

2.3.6.1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Organization Staff and Leaders

“Don’t Look Like Us”

The members of our Collective and our participants criticized the lack of Black, Brown, and queer staff and leadership at LGBTQ organizations in Boystown (and elsewhere). Indeed, that staff and leaders of color and who are transgender or gender nonconforming are not in place *explains* some of the lack of cultural competency,

I think it’s important that the staff have experience identities that are similar or relatable to the participants and not necessarily all folks. Right. I think that I’m not trying to say that like somebody who’s not queer can’t work with queer folks because ... yeah, I think allies are a huge part of how work happens and change happens. But it’s also important, right, if you look through history and never see a person who looks like you or identifies like you, it’s really hard to feel like where you fit. Right. So, I think that’s the same services. [Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

Some interviewees thought a commitment to youth patrons, rather than an essentializing focus on shared identity alone, was more important for staff,

[When I was hiring people I felt that] you didn’t have to be queer, but you definitely had to be competent and when I train people, the minute you come through the door, you had to be transformative [...] when you come in it’s about services. [S]taff aren’t like that at a lot of programs [...] And so that’s the dynamic [I wanted], you actually care about the youth. [Social Service Provider, Interview 7]

Beyond staff being representative of the clients they serve, participants across focus groups and interviews discussed that the *leadership* of many of the organizations are overwhelming male and White,

A lot of organizations on the Northside of Chicago cater towards non-binary, same gender loving trans individuals who are people of color. But then, when you look at the leadership of some of these organizations, none of the leadership looks like these people that are being served.” [Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

A lot of these programs don’t have enough people of color in management roles. Direct service providers are people of color, but management, there’s not too many people of color in management roles. So, it’s that out-of-touch element. If you can’t relate on some level, how are you going to provide a service? A proper service?” [Social Service Provider, Interview 7]

The lack of queer leaders of color likely contributes to (or outright dictates) the homonormative culture of LGBTQ organizations in Boystown.

2.3.6.2 Tokenizing Queer Youth of Color

The youth researchers in our Collective regularly criticized LGBTQ youth programs for not meaningfully including youth in policy and decision-making – this was especially true for the Agency which they believed hired few people of color for high-level positions. Though some organizations do have mechanisms for eliciting feedback from youth about how to improve services and supports, such as “youth boards” or “youth councils”, the youth researchers believed these to be more for show, rather than for engendering change. The social service provider interviewees, too, acknowledged this deficiency of “youth voice” within many of the organizations in Boystown,

I think a lot of times people throw a general reality out there where it’s kind of just like ‘Okay, well, we’re inclusive. We’re a safe space.’ But, you’re the one creating that ‘safe space’ and that’s how you define a safe place, but you’re not giving that to the clients to decide what’s safe for them. [Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

[At my former organization] they really prioritized youth voice, in a way that was authentic and genuine, and not just tokenized language, [which] I think, is unfortunately what happens a lot of the time. [Social Service Provider, Interview 8]

One of our Collective’s youth researchers, Terry, has been featured in marketing materials for the Agency. His picture appears in emails to the Agency’s listserve and on printed marketing materials. During our project, it became a running joke how he was not receiving

royalties from the Agency for the use of his images. This theme of the tokenization of youth to garner money for nonprofits, was a common theme among the focus group and interview participants,

There were times when one of these organizations was about close, where me and my friends [...] had to write letters and things to Mayor Daley or whoever the man was. [T]hat's how these places stayed open. So, then I felt like I was being cheated, because here I am writing [a letter] with my non-spelling ass [...] for no reason. You used me. To keep your organization open, to keep getting money and here I am still having to walk through the rain." [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

This program is for youth [...] This is supposed to be for young people and, if it's not for young people, then who the fuck is it for, right? [A] lot of times it's more of a marketing piece [...] in not-for-profits it is about making money to have these programs still exist, but I mean what's the point of having the programs exist to make money and they aren't actually doing anything to really help the group that they're trying to service? [Social Service Provider, Interview 4]

So, like, the fetishizing, it's like, 'Okay, well, you're getting a big chunk of your grant money [to support] Black people, Black same-gender loving men, but do you really care about the issues that Black same-gender loving men face?' [Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

2.3.7 Is Moving to a New Neighborhood the Solution?

Some LGBTQ-specific social services are starting to be offered in other parts of town, for example the federally qualified health center in Boystown now also offers services on Chicago's "Southside". Participants generally considered this to be a positive change. There was concern about the ability of young people to use the resources in neighborhoods that do not have a substantial queer-identified population -- the reason many of them come to Boystown in the first place. One of the social service provider interviewees discussed considerations for moving their organization out of the Boystown neighborhood. They do acknowledge, however, that moving to a new location will not fix the discriminations that LGBTQ youth experience.

Well, we talked about moving [the organization and it] would either be just like further north [...] or areas that we've gone [before]. We're very mindful when we're thinking about what it means for [the other services in the neighborhood] and for the young people and so it would have to be close to Red line so they could access those two things easily

still. But, it's not like racism is...a Lakeview[/Boystown] thing, right? [Yes], it *is* pronounced here. But it's a global thing and if it's not about race it will be about gender presentation, it will be about whatever, you know? [Social Service Provider, Interview 6]

Few of the other social service provider interviewees described plans for their organizations to move to other parts of town. We did not probe specifically for this in most of the interviews, however. Despite the problems that are clear in Boystown and within LGBTQ community-based organizations, like Interviewee 6 told us, there are reasons for keeping services situated where they are and that issues of racism, cisgenderism, classism, and more will likely be problems in other neighborhoods, too. We also learned little from the interviewees about plans to improve the circumstances within these organizations or for youth in the community. For many of the interviewees there is likely few opportunities to participate in organizational change, as most described themselves as overworked, underpaid, in organizations which are understaffed, and without sufficient organizational capital to influence policies.

2.4 Discussion

Our study suggests that queer, poor and low-income youth of color who come to Boystown are experiencing profound marginalization through community policing characterized by a culture of white- and homonormativity. For these young people, in order to find community and have their needs met, it is necessary to navigate the complex racial and social class systems in place in the neighborhood. The irony is that, despite sharing sexual and gender minority identities with these youth, many neighborhood residents, business owners, and nonprofit staff position them as “other” based on a local social hierarchy which privileges the White, middle-class, cisgender residents and visitors. Though White youth do utilize services at the community-based LGBTQ youth programs in Boystown, they were not represented in our sample of focus group participants. Some members of our Collective did, however, identify as White. These

youth researchers shared other social identities with the youth of color in our Collective, including a poor and low-income class and queer identities.¹² The White youth provided similar insights and interpretations during our participatory processes as the youth researchers of color. This leads us to believe that while Black and Brown youth likely experience compounded marginalization due to their racialized identities, the majority of the young people utilizing the LGBTQ youth-specific services included in our inquiry were navigating classist and transphobic systems, in addition to the overtly racist ones at work in Boystown (and elsewhere).

2.4.1 Time for Change?

Our findings align closely with others who have documented the community policing and marginalization of queer people of color in gay enclaves (e.g., Chicago -- Daniel-McCarter, 2012; Orne, 2017; Rosenberg, 2017; San Francisco --Rek, 2009; and Miami -- Kanai & Kenttamaa-Squires, 2015). Despite mounting evidence, it seems that little is changing in gay enclaves to welcome and affirm queer people of color. The story of the Agency and “The Grocery Store”¹³ provides an example of the marginal changes in Boystown despite community pressure to address clear issues of discrimination and marginalization.

As explained earlier, the Agency and a high-end grocery store (the Grocery Store) share space in the heart of Boystown, including the lobby area of the building. The lobby of the Agency/the Grocery store is a popular common spaces where shoppers, residents, and visitors play board games around tables, sit alone listening to headphones and typing on their laptops, or eating lunch with friends and family. . The lobby is also a regular hang-out for young people

¹² Hans, a youth researcher, was an outlier in the Collective in terms of his identities and associated experiences in Boystown. He is White, middle-class, and has completed college. He often did not report similar policing experiences as the other youth researchers.

¹³ A pseudonym had been used.

waiting for the Agency's youth program to open at 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Despite the lobby being clearly branded as part of and staffed by the Agency (and not the Grocery Store), it is "controlled" by the Grocery Store. Current policies of the Agency (or of the Grocery Store -- it is difficult to discern *who* exactly is creating and enacting the policies) dictate that in order to be in the lobby, patrons must have purchased food from the grocery store. There are also policies dictating that anyone who is caught stealing from the Grocery Store is banned from the Agency. This policy is not publicly listed (to our knowledge), but the youth patrons of know that it exists and believe that it is directly targeting them (and I agree) as they are often in the lobby being noisy (as young people are) and not eating food from the Grocery Store.

The Agency acting as an extension of the Grocery Store, through the policing of patrons' behavior and movement was raised in a 2012 interview of the Agency's CEO by a well-known Chicago-based newspaper:

[Interviewer:] Is it true that if you're caught stealing from [the Grocery Store], you are banned from [the Agency]?

[CEO:] If you are caught stealing and you're a patron of [the Agency], there is restorative justice. Restorative justice¹⁴ means you're banned; you have to come back and meet with everyone that is involved in the consequence and how are you going to make it right.

[The Agency] works really closely with us and in most cases, they let it go.

[Interviewer:] Why is [the Agency] policing for [the Grocery Store]?

[CEO:] We want to be a good neighborhood here. And if there is a challenge here and someone is stealing food, instead of [the Grocery Store] prosecuting them, and they can, calling us instead really makes a difference because they're also being a good neighbor. (Sosin, 2012)

¹⁴ It is worth noting that one of our interviewees who served as a staff member at the Agency explained that despite their continuous requests to employ "restorative justice practices" in lieu calling police to respond to perceived violence in the youth space, leadership would not agree to a change in policy.

In the same interview, the CEO is asked about the former “back-door policy” requiring youth patrons to use a separate door to enter the building (discussed by our Collective and in the findings of this chapter). The CEO responded,

The side door was always intended to be the entrance for the youth program. That's why it was designed ... so that youth could have their own privacy. We did use it the first year and a half, and then we stopped. We haven't used it for two years now because of that response. We don't want people to feel like they're second-class citizens. We do use all the doors when the house is packed.” (Sosin, 2012)

In the quote, the CEO is acknowledging that the policy existed and pointing to what the youth in our Collective alluded to -- that they “felt like second-class citizens” when they were made to go through a separate door from the rest of the patrons, making clear that they are outside the homonormative culture of the Agency. The quote also indicates that the policy was enacted for youth’s “privacy”, rather than acknowledging *why* such privacy would be needed within a gay enclave. While the responses from the Agency’s CEO indicates that the issues raised by our Collective and our participants are not new or unknown, it seems little has been done since 2012 to address issues of policing and marginalization. Or, the members of our Collective and our participants somehow “missed the memo”.

2.4.2 Clear Solutions?

Efforts to center the needs of queer youth of color must be authentic, rather than tokenizing. As one of the interviewees notes, we need “adult allies [to be] more vocal and supportive and holding people accountable for their shit” [Social Service Provider, Interview 6]. In this excerpt, they are making the case for adults supporting queer youth of color more strategically and directly. This may mean addressing the structures of power, i.e., racism, classism, queer-phobia, head-on, calling out those organizations and business when they engage in both covert and overt acts of policing and Othering youth. This may also mean that

organizations be more strategic and authentic in the ways in which they push back against homonormative constructions of what it means to be a member of the “LGBTQ community”.

2.4.3 Resisting Homonormativity

Tilsen and Nylund (2010) explain that in the time of the 1969 Stonewall riots, gay activists were engaging in a “reverse discourse”, one that redefined what normativity meant. These activists pushed back against heteronormativity’s “violence, marginalizing, and humiliating tactics” to carve out a space to be “themselves”. What happens, Tilsen and Nylund ask, when members of the queer community then embrace that originally oppressive discourse in order to gain their “place at the larger societal table”? ... homonormativity. Citing Duggan (2003, p. 95-96,) they explain,

What was, in a pre-Stonewall context, liberating, transgressive, and resistant of *heterosexual* hegemony, has now become **restrictive, normative, and compliant by reifying traditional notions of identity and family** and embracing neo-liberal capitalist values” (emphasis added).

Boystown residents and LGBTQ community-based organization leaders are indeed sitting at this “societal table” and, through policing, othering, and marginalizing queer youth of color, maintaining their mainstream identities. It is through this “acceptable”, or normative, gay identity that the White, middle-class residents and visitors of Boystown harness power and elevate their social status. Queer, poor and low-income youth of color, whose identities are positioned as non-normative, are thus relegated to a lower social status. The findings from this study, however, suggest these youth are engaging in subversive acts of resistance against their marginalization, including “reverse discourse” of their “other” status. Our focus group and interview participants as well as the youth in our Collective demonstrated that, despite their social position in the neighborhood, young people of color remain in Boystown, claiming it as (at least partly) their own. Youth researcher Antonio’s determination to build a “foundation” in

Boystown and “slowly reconfigure [the system]” is one such act of resistance. Terry’s determination to get a job in at a nonprofit in Boystown, despite being told repeatedly that he was too young or lacked the adequate experience, is another act of resistance against organizations which have determined that he is not the “right” person for a job working with queer youth of color (despite his *being* a queer youth/young adult of color).

The more the youth resist and remain in the neighborhood, the more residents, patrons, business owners, and nonprofit leaders push back. They create campaigns criminalizing and pushing-out youth out of the neighborhood (i.e., Take Back Lakeview/Take Back Boystown campaigns). They enact policies that hide the youth from the “homonormative queers” who patron their organizations. They refuse to hire youth, preventing them from getting jobs serving other queer youth of color in the neighborhood. This counter-resistance, however, does not deter queer youth of color from getting their needs met, because “if this is the only resource you’ve got, you’ve got to get it. You want it, you’ve got to get it, no matter where it’s at”.

2.5 Conclusion

A key limitation of the study are our sources of data. We collected data from both current and former youth patrons as well as from staff and volunteers at LGBTQ youth service agencies, but we did not gather data from other service users, neighborhood residents, or business owners. All of these groups of people may have provided additional insight into Boystown generally, and the culture of homonormativity more specifically. We collected qualitative data only, which is not generalizable to a larger group of youth-serving organizations or LGBTQ youth. We believe, however, that these findings data highly transferable to other geographical and organizational settings, especially other gay enclaves in American cities.

Future research would benefit from deeper inquiry into queer young people's acts of resistance in gay enclaves and how institutional policies can support or hinder this action. There is also a need to document how young people can be better integrated in decision making and control of community-based LGBTQ organizations. Specifically, how can young people help shape policies which are "queer-competent", anti-racist, and youth-centered? How can young people effectively counter homonormative constructions of belonging in gay enclaves? What is the role of adult allies in this work? These are just a few questions that might turn social science scholarship towards resistance and change, rather than the often deficit-oriented exploration of the experiences of queer young people of color.

3 *“YOU DON’T HAVE IT ALL TOGETHER JUST BECAUSE YOU TURN 25”:*
EXPLORING COMMUNITY-BASED LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,
TRANSGENDER, QUEER OR QUESTIONING YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION IN
CHICAGO AND THE PROBLEM WITH “AGING-OUT”

3.1 Introduction

In Chicago, a large group of predominantly queer youth of color, many of whom are experiencing housing instability, get their health and social needs met through an informal network of LGBTQ community-based programs. These programs are administered by organizations located in Chicago’s “Boystown” -- a predominately White, middle-class, gay enclave of the city. Available services include education and career guidance, financial assistance, HIV testing, treatment, and support, mentoring, case management, mental health counseling, emergency shelter, and long-term youth housing. Most of the services are for “youth”-only, meaning that once patrons “age-out” of services at 25 they are ineligible for “youth”-specific programming and resources. Accompanying this loss resources is a loss of a community of affirmation and support upon which they have come to depend, many since the age of 13. These losses often occur without formal preparation, leaving newly-minted 25-year-olds with few options for accessing LGBTQ-specific resources and social support.

I learned about the “aging-out problem” when in the summer of 2014 I began volunteering for an LGBTQ-youth serving program offered by “the Agency”, a community-based nonprofit in the heart of Boystown. As a volunteer, my job was to cook dinner on Monday nights for 15 to 30 predominately Black/African-American, 13 to 24-year-old youth patrons, many of whom were experiencing housing instability/homelessness. In order to have dinner ready by 6:30 p.m., I arrived before the youth (who are allowed to enter the program space

beginning at 4:30 p.m.) and, to sufficiently clean the kitchen, left after the youth (around 7 p.m.). Early in my volunteering I noticed that once the final youth patrons left the building, it was common for an “aged-out” patron -- someone who has turned 25 and thus is no longer eligible for youth programming -- to quietly slip into the program space to quickly catch-up with staff and volunteers. Sometimes these brief visits served as a “hello” and an opportunity to share exciting news, such as securing a new job or apartment, or provide a status update on a romantic relationship. Other times, these visits were pleas for assistance, characterized by requests for food, public transit vouchers, or access to the computer/internet located in the program space.

What struck me the most is that these aged-out youth -- or, “adults” -- are not unlike the youth patrons allowed in the space prior to 7 p.m. In fact, many of the current “youth” and aged-out “adults” are in the same circle of friends, share apartments, and engaging in romantic relationships. Often, the only real difference between these groups is their *perceived* life stage -- “youth” versus “adulthood”. I was certainly not the only one working with the youth at the Agency who recognized the problem of youth aging-out before they were ready. In fact, during my search for a dissertation topic of salience to the queer youth community, staff members, and current and former youth patrons explained that the “aging-out problem” does not get the amount of attention it warrants. Several staff members shared similar concerns, urging me to study aging-out, explaining “these youth are turning 25 and they are nowhere closer to being ready to be independent than they were a few years ago. You need to study this!” I heeded this advice and, in collaboration with a group of queer youth researchers, engaged in a study about the process of aging-out with a goal of identifying practical solutions to improving this “problem”.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will begin by providing an overview of the available literature, as well as the gaps related specifically to young people aging-out of LGBTQ

community-based programming and their transitions to adulthood. I will then detail the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach that allowed 11 young people and me to study what it means to utilize and age-out of LGBTQ youth services in Chicago. I will close with a discussion of how the findings from our YPAR study can be used to improve the current provision of LGBTQ community-based youth services, with a focus on the ways in which programs might adjust service provision to meet young people's needs and life-stage, rather than solely providing services based on age.

3.1.1 Theories of Emerging Adulthood and Young Adulthood

The concepts of “age”, the “life course”, “youth”, and “adulthood”, are socially constructed and thus, changing over time. According to Beck (2016), the construction of age has “real consequences” determining “who is legally responsible for their actions [...] what roles people are allowed to assume in society, how people view each other and [...] themselves” (para. 10). Since the early 1900's, the normative life stages in the U.S. (and other industrialized nations) have been widely recognized as encompassing a linear path from childhood to adolescence, followed by adulthood. In the 1960's, however, a new construction of “emerging adulthood” (and “young adulthood”; Furstenberg, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2014) has quickly become accepted as a life stage compassing the time between the late teens and the mid-twenties (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2007).^{15,16} These concepts emerged in response to changes in reaching traditional, albeit heteronormative and cisnormative, markers of adulthood, such as delaying (or

¹⁵ “Emerging adulthood” is thought to occur from the late teens through mid/late twenties (18 - 25) and “early adulthood” between 18 to 34.

forgoing altogether) marriage, parenthood, the completion of education, and financial independence (Shanahan, 2000).

Emerging adulthood is “not simply a brief period of transition into adult roles but a distinct period of the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life directions” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Emerging adulthood is thought to be the most “volatile” of the life stages and by the end “most people have made life choices that have enduring ramifications” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). Some scholars have criticized the concept of emerging adulthood as being inapplicable to minority young people such as racial/ethnic minorities and immigrant-origin young people (e.g., Hendry & Kloep, 2007; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Arnett (2007, p. 69) however, contends that emerging adulthood is still an applicable *theory*, though acknowledging that emerging adulthood as a life stage “is potentially the most heterogeneous of all [...] and the features [of the theory] are not universal but rather, are common during this time period”.

Queer Youth’s Trajectory into Adulthood and the “Normative” Lifecourse

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer young people have markedly different health outcomes and “risks” compared to their heterosexual, cisgender peers, many of which persist into adulthood (Pearson, Thrane, & Wilkinson, 2017). For example, queer youth report less family connectedness and greater family rejection (Grossman, D’Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005; Needham & Austin, 2010). Queer youth, particularly of color, are overrepresented among the general youth homeless population (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, Gates, 2015; Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt & Gwadz, 2005; Wardenski, 2005) and the juvenile justice system (Hunt & Moodie-Mills, 2012). Queer youth also report significantly more problems within school settings, including feeling unsafe and lower grade-point-averages (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Reis & Saewyc, 1999).

Given these inequities, many queer young people are moving through emerging adulthood -- a time when experiences can shape long-term opportunities to be healthy (Halfon, Larson, Lu, Tullis & Russ, 2014) -- and entering “adulthood”¹⁷ from a different developmental place than their peers. Consequently, there is a clear need to “queer” normative constructions of the lifecourse reframing when and if certain markers of adulthood *should* be met (Torkelson, 2012). At present, the field lacks a conceptual handle on “individuals whose lives and identities bear little relation to traditional sexual norm schemes” (Torkelson, 2012, p. 134). By queering our understanding of the lifecourse -- particularly young adulthood -- scholars may be able to better understand how young people experience the transition into adulthood and “independence” and how young people can best be supported during this crucial life stage.

There is a clear need for queer “counterpublics” because queer youth are often marginalized within heteronormative and cisnormative spaces (e.g., at home, in school). Kjaran (2016, p. 255) explains that counterpublics allow marginalized groups “the opportunity to produce counter-discourses [remaking] that particular space and [...] formulating oppositional identities, bodies, and appearances”. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community-based centers often meets this need, facilitating the creation of LGBTQ youth counterpublics through the provision of youth-specific programming.

3.1.2 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Community-Based Youth Services and “Aging-Out”

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community-based centers provide access and/or referrals to health and social services as well as “safe space” where youth and adults can

¹⁷ I utilize quotations around “adulthood” to denote the social construction of this term/life stage and to highlight the ambiguity of what it means to be an adult in contemporary U.S. society.

engage with similarly-identified people and build relationships (Movement Advancement Project & CenterLink, 2016; Paceley, Keene & Lough, 2016). The fifth biennial survey of LGBT community centers in the U.S. identified 143 LGBTQ community centers (compared to 100 centers in 2014), serving 43,500 individuals in a typical week, across 40 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico (Movement Advancement & CenterLink, 2016). Patrons of these centers are disproportionately male, people of color, transgender, and/or low income. More than half of center patrons are “youth”/“young adults” (ages 15 to 30), with 80% of centers providing youth-specific programming.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community centers may be one, if not the only, “safe space”/counterpublic away from school and home where queer youth disproportionally experience discrimination and violence (Choi et al., 2015; Durso & Gates, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014; Reis & Saewyc, 1999). It is well-established that parental/familial support and participation in gay-straight alliances in school (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2011; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010) can serve as important protective factor in queer youth’s health and well-being. For many youth, however, these supports are either unavailable or insufficient to meet their social and physical needs. Furthermore, these supports are often time-bound -- available during school or while living at home with one’s family. This may explain why young people up to 30 years old account for such a large percentage of LGBTQ center patrons and why youth programming is available at more than 80% of centers across the country. Youth programming, too, is typically time-bound (though to an older age than traditional school settings), with youth aging-out at (or around) age 25.

Aging-out of youth programming is relevant because some LGBTQ-specific services, e.g., housing/shelter, are not available for adults. For example, 46% of centers in the Movement Advancement/Surveylink (2016) study provide programming for homeless queer *youth*, but only 33% provide services for homeless LGBTQ patrons *in general*, meaning that when some young people age-out of homeless resources for youth there will be no LGBTQ-specific option for continuing to access resources. This may mean that they will no longer access emergency shelter and instead to sleep in public or seek housing support from friends/family or that they will be forced to utilize “adult” homeless resources which are not LGBTQ-specific.

Despite the important role of LGBTQ youth programming in community-based centers, scholars have generally neglected to study what happens when young people age-out of youth programming and are forced to access adult-specific services (LGBTQ or not). To our knowledge, only one study has been published which directly addresses this type of aging-out. Wagamam, Foushee, and Cavaliere (2016, p. 144), explain that during a partnership with an LGBTQ youth program in the urban southwestern U.S. they learned of a programmatic need to explore the “lack of support around aging out of the organization, which happened for participants on their twenty-fifth birthday” -- the same impetus for the present study. In their 2016 publication, Wagaman et al. do not review programmatic-related findings from their study (something they specifically note omitting for the analysis for that paper), but instead focus on “contributing to the literature on LGBTQ emerging adulthood, and to explore the application of emerging adulthood theory to LGBTQ emerging adults”. Though the programmatic findings would have been useful in supporting the current study and allowing for a comparison of our data with theirs, the available findings are still instructive. Through focus group and interview methodology with a group of racially/ethnically diverse “emerging adults” ages 21 to 26

former/current patrons (31% White, 25% Black/African-American, 25% Latinx), as well as from agency staff members, Wagaman and colleagues indented several themes. These findings related to young adult participants' struggle to achieve "independence" while also experiencing homelessness and intersecting oppressions related to their class, sexual, gender, and race/ethnic identities. Findings also reflected how young people build internal strength to engage in hetero or cisnormative settings and their desires to contribute to a more accepting society in the future (Wagaman, et al., 2016).

Aside from the Wagaman et al. (2016) study, there is little to draw from to better understand and eventually support the process young people aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth services. Given the dearth of relevant literature and the expressed programmatic need to better support young people as they age out (both described by Wagaman et al. and in our study), it is important to explore aging-out in the context of queer youth services. The study presented herein aims to contribute to this need by providing an interpretive understanding of how queer youth of color, many of whom are currently or formerly homeless, experience aging-out of LGBTQ community-based services situated (primarily) in Chicago's Boystown neighborhood.

3.2 Theoretical Approach: Intersectionality

Intersectionality or, Feminist Intersectional Theory, provides an appropriate frame with which to consider how young people may be experiencing the transition out of LGBTQ community-based services into adulthood. Advanced by Black women scholars in the late 1970's, intersectionality emerged as a response to the then popular single-identity frames and analyses (i.e. anti-sexist movements by White women and anti-race movements by Black and

White men (Combahee River Collective, 1983). Today, Intersectionality considers, in addition to race, class, and gender, ability/disability, sexual identity, religion, nationality, and age.

Through an intersectional lens we are able to look beyond a singular “queer” identity and consider the multiple identities which shape and influence the lives of queer youth service users. Even before the youth researchers and I initiated our Research Collective, I found it impossible (and unnecessary) to disentangle the identities of the youth and young adults who utilized LGBTQ youth services at the Agency (and at other local programs). I found that, from the beginning, my initial research questions focused on what it meant to utilize “youth” services in a predominately White, middle-class gay enclave in Chicago for young people who are predominately Black, Brown, queer, *and* unstably housed. As the reader will see, our study findings are intersectional, too, because our participants -- current and former youth patrons of LGBTQ youth services and staff -- naturally discussed the interplay between young people’s multiple, marginalized, social identities and aging-out of youth social services and into transitioning to adulthood.

3.3 Methodology

To understand the ways in which young people experience aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth services in Chicago and enter “adulthood”, we engaged in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project. Youth Participatory Action Research is a youth-specific version of the more general “Participatory Action Research” (PAR) and “Community-Based Participatory Research” (CBPR) approaches which share the common goals of equitable involvement of community members and researchers in the conduct of research. In PAR/CBPR, research is in service *of* and collaboration *with* local communities. These participatory research approaches aim to build the capacity of community members to address issues of salience in

their lives; it acknowledges and gives deference to local knowledge on community issues (Guba, Egon, & Lincoln, 1994; Israel, Eng, & Schulz, 2012; Israel, Schultz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Rodriquez & Brown, 2009). According to Morrell (2008, p. 158), “YPAR is an approach to research for action and change that conceptualizes youth as legitimate and essential collaborators”. In YPAR projects, researchers work to create opportunities for youth to study the social problems directly affecting them and conceptualize action-oriented responses to those problems (Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Youth Participatory Action Research facilitates youth having their voices heard, their ideas valued, and their desires honored, while simultaneously allowing for personal and professional skill development.

After serving as a weekly volunteer for two years, I initiated the YPAR project by partnering with a group of 11 youth (ages 18 to 24) who were current patrons at the Agency in September 2016. Together we became the Youth Research Collective (“the Collective”). The 11 youth were consented as “participants” in the study, though they simultaneously became co-researchers who I added to Institutional Review Board (IRB) research protocol. Using critical ethnographic, qualitative methods, we engaged in a five-month-long project. We employed multiple data collection procedures, including focus groups and individual interviews to learn from those outside of our Collective, as well as critical ethnography participant-observation to document and learn from our own experiences and the setting of our study. I involved the youth researchers in every aspect of the research, including question identification, study design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and dissemination of our findings. All study activities were approved by UIC’s IRB.

3.3.1 Question Identification and Research Foci

As a Collective, we determined that we would focus our inquiry on *how* youth age-out of services (i.e., How do youth experience aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth services in Chicago?). We wanted to know the processes in place at various youth programs related to service delivery and aging-out. We also wanted to know how young people prepare for aging-out what it is like to go through the aging-out process (their experience), and what happens *after* aging-out. The following sections will detail the data collection processes which guided our inquiry.

3.3.2 Focus Groups

The youth researchers and I decided at the beginning of our project that we wanted to collect “stories”, or, qualitative data, about young people’s experiences utilizing LGBTQ-specific services in the in Boystown and the rest of the city. After much deliberation of how we would gather those stories, we elected to utilize focus group methodology, rather than individual interviews (a close second choice) for two key reasons. First, we determined that focus groups would be cost and time-efficient -- we could talk to up to 10 participants at one time. This was an important factor given our short project timeline (about five months) and limited budget. Second, we hoped that focus groups would allow us to generate a collective understanding of our phenomena of interest (Kieffer et al., 2005; Morgan, 1997) and allow us to observe “the jokes, insults, innuendoes, responses, sensitivities and dynamics of the group, as group members interact with one another [...] offer[ing] new insights” into our research questions (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005, p. 2588-9). Despite common concerns that focus groups are only appropriate for topics that are not sensitive in nature (e.g., cigarette use as opposed to sex work), Överlien, Aronsson, & Hydén (2005) found that focus group methodology can allow for

participants to avoid questions which they deem too sensitive and respond to questions by speaking from a third person perspective.

Beginning in late November 2016, we engaged in convenience and purposive sampling recruitment strategies for several weeks. We placed fliers in strategic locations across Chicago where queer young people may gather (e.g., coffee shops and community spaces in Boystown, college student unions). Participants were invited to contact me via phone or email to discuss the study and determine eligibility. I then invited participants to join one of the scheduled groups.

Between December 2016 and January 7, 2017, we conducted four focus groups with between 4 and 10 youth (ages 20 to 29) in each group (n=26), who had, at any point, used LGBTQ “youth” services in the city of Chicago (or surrounding suburbs). We recruited more than 35 participants to join the groups, though many did not attend. Each of the focus groups occurred on extremely cold days in Chicago, likely contributing non-participation. We stopped recruiting participants following our fourth focus group, as the final two groups were not yielding substantively different information from the first two (i.e., we had reached data saturation; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and because we wished to devote available funds to engage social service providers in interviews -- something we decide *after* we began focus group data collection as we began to realize that our data were “one-sided”.

Two or three of the youth researchers moderated each focus group in a private area on the campuses of two local universities. The moderators consented all participants prior to beginning the group discussions, each lasting between 54 and 70 minutes. Moderators used a semi-structured focused group guide to elicit conversation about the benefits and draw-backs of “LGBTQ youth social services”, participants’ experiences with services, including racism and cisgenderism, and ways that services can be improved to better serve young people. For

example, the discussions began with general questions to gather participants' perceptions of LGBTQ- "friendly" or -specific social services and their "aging-out" experiences,

- How do you feel about LGBTQ-friendly or LGBTQ-specific services for youth?

Probes:

- Which services do you have positive opinions about? Why?
- Which ones do you have less than positive opinions about? Why?

The conversations then focused on issues of "aging-out", as many of the participants had already experienced aging-out of services at 25,

- How was it for you when you aged-out of services?

Probes:

- How did you prepare for aging-out, if at all?
- How did the programs or services support you in aging-out?

Partway through the group discussion, moderators asked participants the following series of questions/probes specifically about discrimination,

- Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination when you were accessing youth or adult LGBTQ-friendly services? What was that experience like?

Probes:

- What is the role of racial/ethnic discrimination in these experiences?
- What is the role of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in these experiences?
- Have you experienced any form of discrimination when accessing services that were not specifically "LGBTQ-friendly"?

The moderators provided focus group participants with \$20 cash as a token of our appreciation for their time. We used two digital recorders to capture the audio from each focus group; these audio files were then transcribed verbatim -- two by me and two by a professional transcription agency. I “cleaned” all transcripts by comparing them against the audio recordings and fixing any errors.

3.3.3 Individual Interviews

Once our focus groups were underway, we elected to add individual interview methodology to our study to allow us to engage in in-depth conversations with service providers -- to help us get the full “picture” LGBTQ social services and experiences in Boystown. We selected interviews rather than focus groups because we knew that participants would be social service providers for different organizations and have different jobs titles and associated responsibilities, which we thought would make a group-level discussion less productive. Interviews were also logistically simpler than focus groups, as we could meet the interviewees at their office or somewhere nearby, often during their workday.

We began recruiting interviewees in January 2017, inviting those service providers who worked for the LGBTQ-specific or LGBTQ- “friendly” (i.e., they served a large proportion of LGBTQ clients) programs most discussed by focus group participants. We used a recruitment script to invite interviewees via email, phone, or in-person to participate. Only one of the 11 social service providers invited to participate declined our invitation.

We conducted interviews with 10 current social service providers, across seven agencies/organizations, from January 31 and February 20, 2017. Nine of the 10 interviewees worked or volunteered at an organization situated in Boystown or the larger community area of Lakeview. The other interviewee worked for an organization that was not in

Boystown/Lakeview, but is frequented by many of the youth who utilize LGBTQ services in Boystown/Lakeview. Eight of the interviewees were paid staff at their organization, one interviewee was a volunteer, and one interviewee was a former staff member who had left their job at an LGBTQ youth-serving program in the previous six months. After 10 interviews, we ceased recruiting new participants as we believed we had reached data saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and because it became financially infeasible to continue to provide financial incentives to participants.

Eight of the 10 interviews were co-facilitated by a youth researcher from our Collective and me. One interview was facilitated by a youth researcher independently and one was facilitated by me independently. We consented each interviewee prior to beginning the interview. We used a semi-structured interview guide with questions nearly identical to those of the focus group guide, but with language altered (when necessary) to reflect the current position of the interviewees (service providers) as opposed to those of the focus group participants (current/former service recipients). We did ask interviewees to describe their organization's age-out policy and protocols, something that was largely absent from our focus group discussions as participants were generally unfamiliar with organizational policies and processes. We also asked interviewees to give us insight into their background -- work history, education, interest in social service -- to help contextualize their interview and point of view.

The interviews took place at a location of the interviewee's choosing, typically at their place of work or a nearby coffee shop, each lasting between 39 minutes and 73 minutes. Interview participants were provided with \$20 cash as a token of our appreciation for their time. A few the interviewees asked that we use the money for another purpose (e.g., buying snacks for a local youth social service program). Each interview was recorded using two digital audio

recorders; the audio files were then transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription agency. I “cleaned” the transcripts by comparing them against the audio recordings and fixing any errors.

3.3.4 Ethnography and Participant-Observation

An ethnographic approach is one in which the researcher is immersed in a culture or among a group for an extended period of time, during which he/she engages in a systematic, inductive approach to understanding the social order and processes of the culture/group. For this study the youth and I were “ethnographers” of ourselves (“autoethnography”), of our setting, and of the process of our Collective. As ethnographers, we gathered whatever data were available to “throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). These data were in the form of audio recordings of each of our meetings as a Collective, hand-written or typed notes from our various conversations/discussions, lists of ideas, rules, suggestions, and maps or flow charts of specific processes (e.g., how racism affects service utilization in Boystown). One of the key ways that we engaged in autoethnographic inquiry, was during focus group-like conversation in which I asked the youth researchers specific discussion questions about their experiences growing up, utilizing LGBTQ services, leaving home (if applicable), and what it means to become an “adult”.

A key component of ethnography is that of participant-observation,

“[A] method in which an observer takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of the people being studied as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their culture” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 260).

The youth and I were both *participants* in our Collective and in the community of LGBTQ social services (as “service recipients” and researchers) as well as *observers* of our own experiences and the process of engaging in a youth participatory action research study.

In addition to the data we gathered as a Collective, I took regular field notes and wrote analytic memos to document what I learned as a participant-observer. These field notes and memos were characterized by “short, fragmented narratives” which Cruz (2011, p. 550) calls “ethnographic snapshots” -- “intense bursts of information that in very few words tell us so much about the daily conditions of LGBTQ youth”. These notes, or “snapshots”, allowed me to capture my observations throughout the project of both our process and the issues emerging within our group and in the spaces I frequented in Boystown, such as the Agency, or in nearby businesses. Taken together, my ethnographic snapshots and our group-produced ethnographic data helped to contextualize our focus group and interview data.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

We engaged in a participatory, iterative, eclectic qualitative analysis process with two “rounds” of analysis. The first round was characterized by group-level discussions -- “analytical debriefs” and “analytical mapping exercises” -- toward the identification of initial codes to assist in the categorization of our textual and audio-recorded data (focus group and interview transcripts, and ethnographic, participant-observation data). We used these discussions towards the identification of a list of deductive and inductive initial codes to help us systematically categorize our data (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; LeCompte & Schensul, 2013; Mason, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2004; Saldaña, 2013). We utilized three key “types” of codes -- *descriptive* codes (nouns summarizing the topic of a passage), *in vivo* codes (those which maintain participants’ language; Saldaña, 2013), and a code we named “great quotes” to capture instances when our data provided an especially rich description of an issue or process and/or were emotionally provocative. We also applied the “great quotes” code any time a text segment made one or more of the researchers, for any other reason, say “Wow, *that’s* a great quote!!”. We

manually coded our textual data using an initial set of 12 codes.¹⁸ We added seven codes during the coding for issues that were not sufficiently captured under our original 12 codes. Once our data were coded, we engaged in group discussion about the coded segments toward the identification of high-level “themes” (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013; Ryan & Bernard, 2004), or issues/topics which cut across our codes and provided insight into our research questions.

The first round of analysis informed our second round which allowed me (with assistance from one of the youth researchers) to do a “deeper dive” into our data. For this round, I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (“CAQDAS”) Dedoose (Dedoose.com, 2017) to conduct a second round of coding using an updated, more nuanced list of codes. As I coded, I also engaged in *memoing* of the data, allowing me to capture, in narrative form, my analytic questions and nascent interpretations (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2013). Once the data had been coded and memoed during this second round, I exported all excerpts and their associated memos for each code. I created “code summaries” for each code, which provided an overview, in narrative form, of what those excerpts as a group indicated. I did this for each code while also allowing the memos to remind me of my initial analytical insights or hunches. As I was creating these summaries, I began to “code-weave”. Code-weaving is “the actual integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 248). Through code-weaving, the connections between codes, and the ultimate emergence of high-level themes began to take place. I then engaged in composing a set of overall themes from the data from the data. I then crafted the “story” of the data in narrative form. The findings presented in this chapter are thus a triangulation of the two rounds of data analysis, each with varying degrees of youth researcher participation.

¹⁸ See Appendix F for list of final codes.

3.3.6 Participant Demographics

We collected demographics on 24 of our 26 focus group participants (two participants left the group before completing the demographic survey). As we designed our study, the youth researchers and I agreed that it was important to be able to describe our focus group participants in order to provide insight into the types of young people who shared their experiences accessing services in Boystown. Though we had intended to recruit participants with a wide range of ages (20 years and older), our participants were on average 25, with the oldest participant being only 29. More than three quarters of participants who completed our short, demographic survey (n=24), identified as Black/African American (80%, n=19); the remainder identified as biracial (8%, n=2, Black/White and Black/Native American), multiracial (8%, n= 2, Latinx/Black/White, Latinx/White/Native American), and Jamaican (4%, n=1).

We allowed for an open-ended response to participants' gender identity and sexual orientation. Majority of participants identified as male (58%, n=14), with the next largest groups identifying as Female (25% n = 6), transgender 13% (n=3), and gender fluid (n=1, 4%). Of the 22 participants who responded to the sexual identity question, eight (36%) identified as bisexual, 5 (23%) as straight, 4 (18%) as gay, 3 (14%) as pansexual, 1 (4.5%) as queer, and 1 (4.5%) as sexually fluid. More than half of the participants had attended some college (n=13, 54%), one-third (n=8, 33%) had completed high school, and remainder (n=3, 13%) had not completed high school.

We elected to not collect demographics from the 10 social service provider interviewees, though we know through our personal and professional relationships with the interviewees that as a group they are racially and ethnically diverse with some interviewees identifying as members of the "LGBTQ community" or as queer and others as straight and/or cisgender allies. We elected not to collect this information because we felt that it was most important to understand the demographics of the focus of our study – young people who had aged-out or who

would soon age-out – rather than on the providers, as the original point of those interviews were to learn more about how young people experience aging-out. We also did not systematically collect the demographics of the 12 members of our Collective (11 youth and me), however, our group had a mix of youth identifying as White, Black, biracial, multiracial, gay, straight, transgender, gender fluid, and queer. All the youth were between the ages of 18 and 24 at the time of the research. I am White, straight, cisgender, and in my thirties.

3.3.7 Programs Represented in these Data

Our data provide insight into six “LGBTQ youth-serving community-based programs” in Chicago, each serving predominately low-income, queer youth of color. I use quotations to denote that not all market their programs as specifically for LGBTQ-identified patrons. As a Collective, however, we consider these programs to be, at a minimum, “LGBTQ-friendly” meaning that our Collective knew them to serve large numbers of queer-identified youth and to be generally welcoming and affirming to LGBTQ identities.¹⁹ For example, one of the programs - an emergency shelter for youth -- is not part of an LGBTQ-specific organization, though it is widely known as welcoming to LGBTQ-youth, serving the same client base as two LGBTQ-specific youth programs in Chicago. In fact, the programs discussed in this study seem to share clients, with LGBTQ youth getting their various needs met by leveraging the supports available to them.

Five of the six programs are located on the Northside of the city in the Boystown neighborhood (or the larger Lakeview community area housing Boystown). The seventh program is located on the Southside of the Chicago. Two of the programs provide emergency shelter

¹⁹ Throughout the remainder of this chapter I will refer to these agencies/programs, and agencies/programs like them, as “LGBTQ youth social service agencies”, “LGBTQ youth programs”, etc. I will not differentiate between those agencies/programs which specifically serve queer-identified patrons and those which serve large numbers of queer youth but do not market themselves as queer youth-serving organizations.

services. One program provides health and wellness education with a focus on HIV prevention and sexual health. Five of the programs provide drop-in services -- time for young people to “hang-out” and participate in various activities (e.g., engage in discussions groups, create art, and watch movies). Five of the six programs allow youth from 12 or 13 to 24 to participate. One of the programs services young people ages 18 to 29. All of the programs restrict programming to those who are outside of the specified age-range.

3.4 Findings

3.4.1 Aging-Out: Policy and Practice

Focus group and interview participants were eager to share their thoughts about and experiences with aging-out of LGBTQ youth services. Like the members of our Collective, and those with whom I spoke at the Agency, participants believed aging-out to be an under-discussed issue that many organizations do not effectively address. Our focus group participants were especially eager to share their thoughts about how aging-out *really* works (versus how it is *supposed* to work) and how current processes can be changed to better support young people as they transition into adulthood.

We learned about programmatic policies and practices exclusively through the interviews with social service providers. While focus group participants and the youth researchers of our Collective shared their experiences with the aging-out process, they were generally unfamiliar with official policies and current practices. Unfortunately, our conversations with interviewees provided little insight into *why* youth programming is restricted to certain age ranges, though funding was mentioned by several interviewees a key driver of age restrictions. Interviewees criticized funding-driven programmatic policies, noting that vulnerable young people who are 25

and older are often left out of programming because of funding restrictions. Two interviewees explained the funding-related programmatic constraints,

Once they age out [at 25], because of the way that we're funded we can't house people anymore and then there's just really not much to do [to help them after that].

[Social Service Provider, Interview 6]

So, the CDC --for HIV-related funding -- they're wanting to really be emphasizing this [youth] age range. What ends up happening, is that a lot of people end up getting left out of that. So, somebody who is 26 years old can be just as, if not more, vulnerable as somebody who is 19.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 8]

3.4.1.1 How Young People are “Aged-Out”

Because aging-out is often associated with a complete loss of services and supports that young people have come to depend on, we believed it was paramount that we document the age-out policies in place at LGBTQ youth serving organizations. We specifically probed interviewees for any information about when young people begin an “age-out” process and what actions occur to help them prepare for service termination.

Interviewees working for the five programs serving youth up to their 25th birthday all expressed a clear need to help young people age-out, which they described as connecting them to “adult” resources, helping them secure housing and employment and transitioning out of the the social support provided by youth programming. Some interviewees described clear procedures for pre-paring soon-to-be 25 year olds, such as querying a databased six months before a young person's birthday. Interviewees for two different programs each explained a team approach to beginning to address the resources needs of youth patrons who will soon age-out,

[T]wo to three years before [they turn 25] when they're like 23, 24, or 23 and a half, almost 24. I'm like, “Let's sit down, figure this out for them. Everybody, team, go out let's find some resources for the youth.” Because when I was a supervisor [at the organization], I used to like to hire people, especially part-time workers, with different, diverse backgrounds [...] so we were bringing to the table outside resources.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 7]

There is a conversation that's had with the case managers. Where we actually have a case management meeting. We bring particular cases. Maybe they'll be "okay, this person's aging out. What's the plan?" So, we get together often with each other and have that conversation.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 9]

Some interviewees indicated that, even with clear policies in place, the intended age-out strategies are rarely fully executed. For example, a case manager explained,

If someone has been meeting with me regularly, we are working on an individual action plan and, six months before they turn 25, if they're meeting with me regularly, and this has only happened maybe, like, less than a dozen times in two years I've been here...we take a look at all of the goals they've set up in the action plan and see what's left lingering. Yeah a lot of people don't know this, too, because a lot of people, they'll pop in for a quick 'help me get a Link card' thing or something.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 3]

As the quote indicates, many youth patrons are not actively engaged in a case management relationship which would position them to receive targeted guidance before aging-out. Several interviewees echoed this sentiment, explaining because many youth patrons are "transient" -- infrequently accessing services and not engaging in regular case management -- it is difficult to proactively help them preparing for service termination. One interviewee explains that even with "transient" youth, there is still a commitment to helping them, even after they age-out,

Some of those are the transient folks -- Hey, you've got a phone. Every now and again we'll text or we'll send an email just checking in. Phone numbers change. Emails, we may not get a response. But the commitment is the same. If they walk through the door, it's hey, what do you need? And I think that's it. But I don't see that necessarily as an issue so much that that's the climate.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 9]

For the single program serving those 18 to 29, there is little need to help young people "age-out" and thus there is no formal policy in place to help them prepare for services termination. This is largely because there is a less clear boundary between eligible "youth" and "adults" and as the interviewee explained, "you were our client and you'll always be our client",

[Because] our scopes are 18 to 29, there is no age out process. I think people just probably get tired of coming, honestly. But, I don't necessarily think we have a, "This is what aging out looks like," for our particular program. We've been pretty open for people who do return, so people I've never met who were here before come, who are like 28, 29, 30. They still come, pop back in [to our building], "Hey, how are you doing? How was the party?" And, we still keep the doors open. At least in our department, you were [our] client and you'll always be our client.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

For one of the programs, we learned that the aging-out policies and strategies that were once thoroughly implemented are now loose guides for helping young people prepare for service termination. Often, young people who are aging-out are not identified until just before they turn 25. An interviewee working for this program explained,

There used to be like a spreadsheet we ran. We would go in and enter who in the next three months or next six months had a 25th birthday coming up so that we could keep that sort of in the forefront of our mind. We'd review it weekly or monthly in our staff meeting. So, then someone would be like I'm going to check in with that person since we're 30 days out from their birthday. That has stopped happening.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

The same program provides youth who are aging-out with a resource guide for adult services. This guide used to be regularly updated by interns, but due to high staff turnover and severe understaffing, updating the guide, among other aging-out assistance practices, has fallen by the wayside,

There's a packet of resources that we are supposed to hand out at the time of your 25th birthday that include places you can go for some of the things that we offer here on a nightly basis for folks older than 25 or 25 and up...I can find that one and print that one. Whether or not is up-to-date. It may or may not be accurate. I know it was up to date almost a year ... like last spring.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

Interviewees from other programs also admitted that for young people who do not actively seek-out assistance, there may be little done to help them with the process of aging-out,

Our [staff] can't be 'oh we have 300 kids who [are about to age-out]' – they can't keep track of who is about to age-out. So, it's usually about as services are needed with youth.

So, if a youth needs to see a [staff member] the [staff member] can look into the records and see 'oh it looks like you're going to age-out real soon.'

[Social Service Provider, Interview 5]

There's not a one-size-fits-all way to prepare somebody [to age-out], it needs to be individualized. So, I think what has often happened [is that staff are] asked to do more than one person should be expected to do....you know 'we don't have the person who's supposed to be doing this, so, in the interim we need you to pick this up', even when that person does come in.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 8]

Like the social service provider interviewees, focus group participants expressed frustrations with the lack of aging-out assistance provided to them. Two participants explained bluntly explained,

[L]ike unless you ask for their help, they're not going to help you. They're going to say, 'Okay, like you're about to age-out tomorrow. You want a cake while we kick you the fuck out?'

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 4]

There were no resources to help you get on your feet, it was just a place for you to lay your head until you turn 25 and they they kick you out on your birthday, I promise you they will. On your birthday, "uh, this is the last night here, OK?" they don't give you nothin'.

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

Participants also shared that they learned about resources through "word of mouth" rather than from staff members at the youth programs,

Youth Researcher Moderator: Like were there any ever like programs y'all can remember that like specifically talked about like, "This is what you do when you don't have access to us." Like did that ever exist in any capacity for anything?

Participant 1: Hell no.

Participant 2: Hell no.

Participant 1: I feel like it was all word of mouth.

Participant 2: Yeah. It was always like you start talking to everyone and they're like, "Oh, well, I went to [program name] and they were able to help me do this." So then you go to [program name] and then you find someone to help you. It's just word of mouth between ourselves within our own experiences that we had.

[Youth/Young Adult Participants, Focus Group 4]

3.4.1.2 Age-Out Loopholes and Bending Policy

Despite age restrictions on patronage at youth programs, interviewees described strategies for allowing young people who have *technically* aged-out to continue to access youth services. For example, some programs provide 30 or 90-day “grace periods” where aged-out young people can continue to access services as they did prior to their birthday,

At time of 25th birthday, there’s supposed to be a 30-day period where you continue to be able to access services like you did prior. So, almost like that age out didn’t happen.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

Our grace period could be anywhere from 30 to 90 days. That's really dependent upon the [program] coordinator. We talk about it and we say, "Hey, this person hasn't been a problem. There haven't been any issues so much as they just need more time."

[Social Service Provider, Interview 9]

One program hosts a monthly “alumni night” where aged-out former patrons can access youth programming and engage with their former youth community. An interviewee explained to us that while hosting a monthly alumni night is helpful, it is still not ideal, as that night might not always work with a former patron’s schedule. This interviewee, and other staff members at the program, often make exceptions to the rule in order to meet the needs of aged-out young people, allowing them to access programming on another night if they could not attend the scheduled event,

So, they missed their alumni event that month. Today is their alumni event. Right?...A lot of times the [staff member] who makes the call is then like, ‘it’s on me’.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

Other interviewees also described ways in which they circumvent program policy to assist aged-out former patrons,

And I still work with people when they age out. So if they still want help finding housing I would do that...I don’t know if the agency wants that to happen, but I say yes.”

[Social Service Provider, Interview 6]

I bend [the] rules on aging-out because I think that's ridiculous. If I know that kid is 30 but that kid's writing on the sign-in sheet that they're 25, they're 25 to me. That just how I look at it, I don't care...just write that you're 25 and I'm good.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 10]

To these interviewees, it was more important to help those young people who had aged-out than to abide by strict policies which they often felt were guided by false ideas of what it means to be a “youth” versus an “adult. For one of the programs, however, strategies to include aged-out patrons in youth services were discontinued because those under 25 were uncomfortable being with “adults”,

One of things we use to do is for youth that reached the age of 25 they would be able to come in at least once a week for services. They won't be able to be a part of the drop-in program but they can access resource advocacy, GED, and help clinical services, walk-in services. I don't think we are going to bring that back because once a person turns 25 they're no longer a youth and some youth felt uncomfortable in the space, “this person is 25 they're an adult why are they still receiving services?”.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 5]

3.4.1.3 Adult Social Services: Inappropriate Alternatives

There are limited LGBTQ-specific adult services, or even general adult social services, which are able to effectively meet the needs of young people who have aged-out. The social service provider interviewees consistently discussed this problem, explaining that even if there is time to “prepare” a young person to age-out, there are not many options for resources for “adults”. The following quotes highlight the lack of holistic services, including communities of social support, for LGBTQ adults in Chicago,

We were really limited, in terms of [where] we could refer people [after they turned 25]. That's also the case for housing, that's the case for a lot of different services. If I am not a young person, or if I'm not a parent, or if I'm not HIV-positive, I don't have very many options. There's really nothing in terms of social services that are comprehensive. So, if someone were like, ‘I need you to connect me to a primary care physician whose culturally competent, then, of course, I would have plenty of places for them to [go]– if they want behavioral health or if they want to get connected to a GED program, there are certainly resources that exist, but nothing in the way of a community safe space.”

[Social Service Provider, Interview 8]

[For someone who is over 25, we can give them information on] where to go to get this, [or] ‘Here’s where to go to get your link card, here’s where to go if you need some food, here’s where to go for that.’ But, [we can’t say], ‘Here’s where you can go to bounce ideas off of people about what your next job move should be,’ or, ‘Here’s a place to go to talk about people who are in similar situations and how they’re dealing with things.’ Because, that’s what, technically, a support system is. Like, do you have someone you can say, “Let me borrow \$5.00 until I get paid,” from? That’s how youth support each other?

[Social Service Provider, Interview 3]

Adult emergency shelters were rarely discussed as viable options for homeless queer young people who had aged-out of youth shelters. Focus group participants described instances of discrimination by adult shelter staff, such forcing transgender patrons to be housed by their sex assigned at birth, rather than with their identified gender. One participant explained,

I’m banned from [the adult shelter] because I refused to use the men’s restroom and I refused to sleep around men [...] and because I openly told them that I disagreed with the sermon.

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

Adult shelters were consistently described as unsafe, as evidenced in the following quotes from both a focus group and interview participant,

Some of these kids [at the shelter] range from 16 years old [staying] with 58, 35, 45-year-old men. Thirty-five, 50-year-old women that’s been to jail [staying in the same place as] a kid that’s been raped.

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

I’ve asked kids the kids that have aged-out, why they don’t like going to adult shelters and they have told me that they are scary, that they are not safe. My question has always been, ‘why won’t you go to that shelter? I know that you can get in there’. They’re like, ‘No way. There’s no way. I’d rather sleep at the beach’.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 10]

3.4.1.4 Social Connections and Aging-Out

For many young people, aging-out means losing relationships with staff and other participants of an LGBTQ youth community. Some of the young people in our focus groups and in our Collective, had been using services since they were in middle school or high school,

meaning that they have built relationships over many years. With aging-out came great sadness for many participants,

As a person that been there since 8th grade, I wasn't really prepared to leave at all. I aged-out this summer, it's like, [I knew] it would not be the same....And my thing is, you know the staff and, once you age-out, you can't even go back.

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 1]

When you start a relationship with people and then it's time for you to move to the next level, you kinda get that sadness because you're like, 'Man, I didn't know, I grew a relationship with them for so long, what I'm finna do now?'

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

Despite participants and our youth researchers' qualms with the ways in which young people are age-out of services, young people described a close bond to many of the social service providers and acknowledged that they often break rules to meet young people's needs. One focus group participant even explained that they were happy to age-out because it allowed them to build a different, closer relationship with staff members,

[I] was happy once I aged-out because [...] I was able to like now have a closer, intimate relationship with people who were [previously] helping me get on my feet, like service providers [be]cause before then, like you can't have their cell phone numbers, you have to talk to them during this time or they'll get fired and things. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

Some focus group participants admitted that when they first began seeking resources from LGBTQ youth services, they were unfamiliar, or even uncomfortable, being around people who openly identified as LGBTQ. One focus group participant described how a staff member helped them get comfortable in an LGBTQ youth service community, which eventually allowed them to get their individual needs met.

[W]hen I first came to [the organization], I sat myself in a corner because when I first walked in there] I seen a couple of ho - I mean a couple of men walk through there....and then, I'm thinking 'ok this a all boys shelter, what the hell goin'on?' and then, I seen all these transgenders come through there saying 'yeah girl!', voguing and stuff, you know, and I was just in the corner like 'man, hold on, what it, what did I step in to?' and I didn't really open up until a major staff in there spoke to me on the steps and she was like

‘um, you know it’s ok to open up’ you know what I’m sayin, ‘ain’t nobody gonna do nothing to you in here and you know, what’s goin’ on , what’s up with you?’. And... it took her like 3 days to break me down so I could talk to her, but, I got to talkin’, I got to gettin’ so well-known with the staff in there that there was times that the staff would do what we call a favoritism move? And they would let me go sleep in the hallway, in the bathroom, or somethin’. Or they let me go up in the church and sleep [...] every staff in there knew I was 25 at that time, every staff, but, I was so cool and, I had grew a bigger relationship with them. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 2]

3.4.1.5 Section Summary

Because aging-out policies and practices vary across the six programs in our study, we cannot explain one clear “age-out” process or policy. We did learn, however, that staff across programs utilize some of the same strategies (even those which are “off-book”) and encounter similar challenges. Whereas some programs employ a team approach to helping young people find “adult” resources others utilize a one-on-one case management approach to aging-out young people. Even with specific practices to assist young people age-out, interviewees explained that it is difficult to who will soon age-out because there are not enough staff or because youth intermittently engage with programs.

Interviewees explained to us that, despite age-based service provision, they employ various strategies to provide access to programming for young people who have aged-out, such as 30 to 90-day “grace periods”, monthly “alumni nights”, and allowing young people to access services as if they were under age 25. Even with the various ways that staff employ “work arounds” to meet young people’s needs, most of our focus group participants considered the programs to be overly strict with service provision and believed that staff are unhelpful. Focus group participants generally agreed that they had received little formal staff assistance with aging-out, instead learning about alternative adult services and survival strategies from their peers.

Both focus group and interview participants explained that a key challenge with helping a young person to transition into “adult” services is the lack of options. Housing/shelter were key examples of where LGBTQ-affirming adult services are lacking. Participants explained that young people will sometimes forgo shelter altogether if there is not an LGBTQ-specific option.

The relationships between youth patrons and between youth and staff were important elements of program engagement, often making aging-out even more difficult for young people. At least one focus group participant, however, indicated that aging-out was a positive experience because it allowed for new and different relationships with staff members.

3.4.2 Challenging the Social Construction of “Youth”, “Adult”, and “Independence”

I won't say it's wrong that programs like have an age limit. But, I think at the same time, that's kind of like [saying] 'once you hit a certain age you're supposed to be a certain way', but the reality is shit happens. Anybody can be homeless. Now, you can be working a fuckin [...] six-figure job and lose that shit and be homeless. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 3]

Age-based LGBTQ youth service eligibility policies -- particularly those which restrict service delivery to “youth” patrons under 25 years old -- were widely contested among our participants (and our Collective). While a few of the interviewees and focus group participants did voice support for the logic behind age-based programming (i.e., “I don’t think the 25 is a terrible age [to age-out]; old guys comin’ in the rooms with youth is kinda like -- it’s a little bit creepy” [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 1]), almost all believed that age alone should not dictate service eligibility. Participants also expressed concerns that few patrons of LGBTQ youth services meet traditional markers of “adulthood” by their 25th birthday, chiefly financial independence. For these young people, who are overwhelmingly queer, low-income, Black and Brown, the fight for financial independence is fraught with experiences of institutional racism and queerphobia, blocking their opportunities to become “adults” and rendering them unprepared for youth service termination. As one interviewee explained,

The expectation is that [once turn 25] you've already gained all of the resources that you need -- you should be good. You've magically used all the resources and have defied all systems that are against you and have a well-paying job and have a house and you're able to pay your bills.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 4]

At age 25, some young people who are utilizing LGBTQ services are just beginning to become financially independent while others are no closer to "adulthood" than they were at 20. They also are losing access to a family of support that has been fostered by youth programming,

Just looking at the individuals I've spoken with who don't have a family, who don't have friends, who don't have somewhere to lay their head. And then you enter this [youth] program where you do find these things, where you do find friends, where you do find a family - it may be unconventional, but it's still your family - and you do find the potential or the prospect of finding a place or getting a job to better your life, and then those circumstances are changed directly when you age-out...you're losing all of those things, you're going back to square one.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

The youth researchers in our Collective, like our focus group and interview participants, consistently challenged the social construction of age and, most importantly, the predetermined developmental stages of "youth" and "adult". Together, we understood LGBTQ youth service delivery to be predicated on an idea that 25 year olds are financially independent adults -- something we knew to be untrue. The youth in our Collective ranged from 18 to 24 years old, most whom were over 21. Only one of the youth researchers had a full-time job; and while some had stable housing at the time of our project, most had been homeless at some point in their lives. For those youth researchers who were experiencing homelessness at the time of the project, their inability to obtain a full-time job was in part related to their housing instability. For example, prior to beginning our project, one of the youth researchers had been accepted into a youth housing program where they would have their own apartment paid for. This was a perfect time for the young person to focus on finding employment, something that is difficult to do while homeless. Just before we started our project, however, the young person lost their housing after

failing to comply with one of the many rules for program participants (e.g., attending regular case management meetings, passing random drug tests, and refraining from hosting overnight guests). Their focus thus shifted from finding work, to finding housing so that they could resume the focus on finding work. This example demonstrates the multiple makers of independence that young people are striving to reach simultaneously, all while trying to “beat the clock” before they turn 25.

Hans, a 24-year-old youth researcher in our Collective, had achieved many of the traditional markers of adulthood -- a college degree, stable housing, and a fully time job. As someone who was from an insular, Jewish Orthodox community, Hans had never spent time around queer-identified youth until he discovered the Agency’s program at 24 years old -- just a year before he would soon age-out. In a group discussion, he explained to our Collective,

I went to adult therapy for a few weeks and then realized I was more comfortable in youth groups...I feel better knowing that I will be able to utilize youth resources in the 8 months I have left. What happens someone comes in at 24 like I did?

[Hans, Youth Researcher]

Despite his positive comment about using services in the eight months before his 25th birthday, Hans consistently expressed being deeply troubled by his impending age-out. In an email to me at the beginning of our project, Hans lamented,

The cruel and ever-so-painful truth is that the first time in my life that I ever received any social services of any kind was on March 24th, 2016, when I had my intake meeting at the Agency at 24 years old. You want to study the process of leaving social services and becoming an adult? I've barely had any social services to age out of.

[Hans, youth researcher]

We regularly discussed his concerns about aging-out before he had fully utilized the supports provided through youth programming -- especially the aspect of “community”. He explained that, as someone who only come to identify as queer at the end of his youth, he felt like he

missed out on being a “youth” altogether. To Hans, his youth was just beginning when he entered a community of LGBTQ people and allies.

3.4.2.1 Service Gaps: “You're good up until 25 and then we don't give a fuck until you turn 75”

Across focus groups, participants questioned how and why people of a certain age range deserved service access while others did not,

But things -- situations change. People move on, family -- like deaths in the family happen, and that could have been your support. And now you're 36 years old, but now you need help. And they're looking at you like, "You're 36. What you want?"

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 4]

Participants also noted the gap in services who are neither “youth” nor “seniors”,

But, they're not ready and some of them need more time, more motivation. The youth that's out here are going through a lot, but once 25 hits, they don't really get it yet cause 25 is not a real breaking point “uh oh I really need to get my shit together”. Some people may have had it together up to 25 or up to 30 or either up to 35, and then shit happens. And then, what do they have? They have nothing and then the sad part is, they know they gotta wait to 55 to get access to other services.

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 1]

[W]hy is it that the age stops at 25? [...] You can surely tell me why these services are geared towards people who are fifty-five and up, but younger people may need it too. So, if you're endorsing this, the least you can tell is, what do you have against offering this same service between the ages of 25 and 54?"

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 1]

Interviewees, too, acknowledged this service gap. In the following excerpt, the interviewee expresses a need to directly challenge the social construction of age,

I just hope we continue to challenge what “youth” means and understanding that like ... we talk about youth services needing to be specific because the experience of a 22-year-old is different than of a 55-year-old. But also, the experience of a 28-year-old is different than a 55-year-old. A 30-year-old is different than a 55-year-old. So, what happens for the rest of that window for 25 to 55? What are we doing there? [...] All of a sudden, there's specific services again if you're like 55 and up.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

3.4.2.2 Section Summary

As a Collective, we understand age and life stages to be socially constructed. Our participants shared this thinking and often noted that age alone should not dictate service delivery for this reason. This is especially important for young people who have experienced social marginalization and may not be ready to be “independent” by 25, as systems of oppression have been working against them leading up to the point of aging-out (and beyond).

An important finding is a perceived lack of programming and resources for those who are neither youth nor seniors, namely “adults” over 25 and under 55 years old. Focus Group participants expressed feeling unworthy of assistance simply because they were no longer youth but not yet older adults.

3.4.3 Improving a Broken System: Recommendations for Amending Current Age-Based Policies

[Following organization policies is] just like following laws. All the laws aren't necessarily the most helpful, but that does mean we can't change [them] now.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 1]

We walk away from this study with several ideas about how service delivery and age-based restrictions for patronage could change to better meet the needs of young people accessing LGBTQ “youth” services. The social construction of age and “adulthood” are clearly affecting young people’s ability to access social services, often cutting them off by age 25. Society, and sometimes funding mechanisms, dictate that by 25 a person has reached adulthood and is no longer “vulnerable or “at risk” and thus should be ineligible for youth services. Our participants vehemently disagreed with this rationale and acknowledged that the “fine line” between being a youth and an adult is less clear than program policies imply. While some young people may be ready to discontinue LGBTQ youth social services upon their 25th birthday, others will not. As

two participants explained, aging-out *can* act as the motivator a young person needs to become more independent,

I think the best exit plan is when the youth goes ‘Oh my god, I’m 23.’ And then something clicks and they become this force of nature that they had no idea that they could be. I’ve seen it every single time, when that person has gone, ‘oh, I’ve had a lot of fun, but I have a lot of responsibility – I’ve got to find housing’ and working with them is almost just like a conversation because they’re actually embarking on stuff we may have talked about for months.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 9]

At first...like maybe [services] are a crutch because they stay on it until they age out...when I was there, I needed them, and then I aged-out and it was like, ‘alright, get it together’.

[Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 3]

This notion of aging-out-induced motivation, however, was contested among other participants. Several interviewees indicated that while some young people approaching 25 may be motivated to become independent from social services, others will remove themselves from needed support prematurely,

I think it’s so individual...there’s sort of a spectrum of reactions [to aging-out]. I think that there are some folks who are very much excited about next steps who get to a place and they’re like ‘I don’t need this anymore’. [Others] just stop engaging in services because I think there is this concept of ‘why would I keep coming there is you’re just going to tell me I can’t be there anymore in two months anyway’. I mean, what a shitty birthday present. [Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

We have multiple suggestions based on our findings for how current LGBTQ youth services could be changed to better support young people. We do not believe there is one clear solution; rather, programs must serve young people in the best way they can, given various programmatic, particularly financial, constraints. The following are four potential “suggestions” for change, which, for the most part, are mutually exclusive:

Suggestion 1: Offer multiple programs for “young people”, rather than for a large group of “youth”. This could mean that agencies offer two programs, each with different foci. One may be more focused on building community and providing social support for teenagers up to age 18.

Another program, for those 19 to 29, would focus more on achieving traditional markers of adulthood, including financial independence.

Suggestion 2: Agencies continue to provide a single “youth” program, but create staff roles which more strategically help young people prepare for aging-out. These staff can work with youth who are about to age-out by create agreed upon goals; as goals are reached, additional services become available, such as services after one has technically aged-out.

Suggestion 3: Extend the age-range for youth services, allowing young people more time to reach traditional markers of adulthood. Twenty-eight or 29 were often suggested by participants as the appropriate ages at which to terminate service access.

Suggestion 4: Remove age-based service restrictions altogether. As one participant explained,

I say 65 [should be the age-out age, because] things happen to people, things happen no matter how old you are, despondency and tragedy do not take a day off just because you're 40, just because you're 50, just because you have a good job, just because you have children, just because you're married, they don't take a day off because of that, they don't take a day off the moment you turn 25, you don't have it all together, you're getting it together, but you don't have it all together. You really don't have it all together until you're in your 30's [...] it doesn't end at 25. For some people life begins [at 25] but that doesn't mean that the experiences and the troubling times end, it's just the beginning. [Youth/Young Adult, Focus Group 1]

One interviewee specifically discussed the ways in which the social construction of age and “ageist mentalities” reify generational differences within the queer community, something that programs which are not age-based might address head-on,

How often do we get the opportunity to talk to our elders who have experienced some of the same things we have? Or, how often do we get out of that sometimes pervasive ageist mentality where it's kind of just like, ‘Oh, you're gay and you're old. There's nothing we have to talk about.’? [Social Service Providers, Interview 1]

After considering our multiple data sources, including our own experiences as an intergenerational Collective, the suggestion for opening “youth” programming to all ages, made a lot of sense to us, too. While we do believe that there should be space where people of the

same age-group can interact, as one interviewee suggested, programming type will naturally attract people of certain age-groups or will attract people with similar interests and needs, making it unnecessary to pre-determine what ages are invited to come,

I feel like if you had a very specific topic and a certain theme of a group, then that would determine the population. If we held an anime group, only a certain age group would come. But, if they did come, they would all have a similar understanding, “We’re all here to watch anime.” I feel like if there were specific topics and specific themes, and I feel like anybody who’s 25 – we’re doing it right now – 25 and 40 can have a conversation. You know what I mean? But, it wouldn’t necessarily have to be, like, “You’re too young to have this conversation,” or, “You’re too old to have this conversation.” We can all have this conversation. We can all enjoy similar interests and tastes.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 3]

Another interviewee explains further how a program open to all ages can support young people as they enter “adulthood”,

I think there’s a fear that folks have that having a 13-year-old and a 35-year-old in the same room is like terrifying. But why? I actually think it’s really important. When we think about intergenerational relationships, for a lot of folks, I think the assumption is that happens in your home.... that happens in your family. You get those intergenerational relationships, knowledge, wisdom like organically. That’s just not true for a lot of us. For a lot of us, our chosen family may be intergenerational, but it also may not. Our chosen family may be all within five years within my age.

[Social Service Provider, Interview 2]

3.4.3.1 Section Summary

Aging-out as a “motivator” to becoming independent of social services was both accepted and contested among our participants. Interviewees described instances where a young person who aged-out became motivated to achieve goals, such as securing employment or housing, as well as times when aging-out deflated a young person’s internal motivation to achieve specific goals.

We identified several “options” for improving current age-based youth program provision, including offering more variation in age-ranges for youth programming, such as programming for teens 13 to 18 and for young adults ages 19 to 29. We also suggest increasing

the overall age range for service provision up to 29, changing or adding staff roles to more explicitly support young people as they age-out, and/or remove age-based service provision restrictions altogether. Removing age restrictions was popular among both interview and focus group participants, as most acknowledged that there is value in people of different age groups interacting with and supporting one another. Participants also suggested that programming would attract people based on similar interests (e.g., watching anime), rather than age, which may be more important for finding commonality and building community. This does not mean that certain groups or activities could not be age-restricted, but that general programming and the resources offered therein would be open to all in need, regardless of age.

3.5 Discussion

We assert that, based on the data in this study, young people who are accessing LGBTQ community-based youth services in Chicago are not ready to have their service access terminated upon turning 25. They are not ready for a variety of reasons, including that, by age 25, many have yet to attain normative developmental milestones of adulthood, such as financial independence. Youth patrons are often unprepared for LGBTQ youth service termination and have few viable “adult” alternatives. Moreover, young people who age-out are abruptly stripped from the LGBTQ social support networks that many have been participating in since their early adolescence. We acknowledge that it is unlikely programs will remove service provision age restrictions and open their services up to everyone. LGBTQ community-based youth programs may, however, consider extending the age-range by a few years to allow young people more time to support themselves as “adults” or open *some* service provision to all ages.

Scholarship on this time period appears to support the findings of our study. Indeed, Arnett (2000, 2007), who originally proposed and expanded upon the theory of “emerging

adulthood”, posits that emerging adulthood is not a discrete time-period after adolescence and before adulthood. Rather, it is entered into and exited out of *gradually*, as are the key indicators of reaching adulthood -- “accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent” (Arnett, 2007, p. 69). Hendry & Kloep (2007, p. 83), however, argue that all “age-bound theories are obsolete” and that rather than focusing on life stages, scholars should be focusing on the *processes* and *mechanisms of change* that people experience. They further explain the need to focus on context-dependent conceptualizations of the lifecourse, rather than on normative constructions,

It is impossible to devise a description of normative developmental pathways that is valid for all human beings independent of culture, gender, and class.

The notions of a gradual end to youth-service provision, rather than an abrupt stripping of access, and that “adulthood” is a culturally-bound phenomenon are, however, supported among dissenting views.

Some have found that young people typically “thrive” during emerging adulthood (e.g., decreased depression, increased self-esteem, freedom to focus on oneself; Arnett, 2007), while others disagree, finding that that happiest emerging adults as those who have achieved at least some traditional markers of adulthood (e.g., Hendry & Kloep, 2007). “Vulnerable” young people (e.g., those aging-out of foster care, exiting the juvenile or criminal justice system, and who are homeless) often find this time period to be fraught with setbacks in achieving certain “adult” goals (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2010; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010).). Those who are aging-out of LGBTQ community-based youth services -- especially with multiple marginalized identities and lacking in sufficient material conditions -- certainly fit within this “vulnerable” group, making it imperative that they are maximally supported, rather than abandoned, during their *gradual* transition into adulthood.

3.5.1 Queer Time and Space

“Queer time and space” eschews heteronormative and cisnormative constructions of the lifecourse, placing primacy on the present, the role of nontraditional families, and counterpublics (Brown, 2009; Robinson-Wood & Weber, 2016). For many queer youth of color, the LGBTQ community-based youth services allow them this time and space. There are limited opportunities to build community and engage in counterpublics outside of LGBTQ youth-specific services. While some major LGBTQ community-based service agencies do coordinate/offer community events and resources for LGBTQ adults, we understand them to be overwhelmingly catered to and attended by middle-class, White gay men. Our participants consistently noted that the lack of queer time and space for LGBTQ young people and adults who are ineligible for “youth” services because they are 25 or older.

Removing or changing age-based service provision policies and fostering intergenerational relationship building are key ways to allow for more queer time and space for LGBTQ people of color after they age-out of youth services. At the Agency, some attempts have been made to engage the organization’s “senior” and “youth” program participants. These attempts, however, have often resulted in youth and seniors sharing space, but not meaningfully interacting with one another. That the groups did not meaningfully interact does not render such attempts futile, but rather points to the need for thoughtful, reoccurring intergenerational opportunities.

3.5.2 “Society is saying, ‘You’re 25. These are the Rules’”

It is important to note that, even if LGBTQ youth serving programs change their age restrictions for service delivery, the social construction of age remains, as described by one of our interviewees,

Society is saying, ‘You're 25. These are the rules. That's it. That's all. You either follow them or you're just not a part of society at this rate.’

[Social Service Provider, Interview 9]

This comment, though potentially unpopular with other participants, underscores that a 25-year-old *is* generally expected to be independent within U.S. society. Even if there were changes to the age restrictions for service delivery, it is unlikely that the societal construction of what it means to be a “young person” versus an “adult” will change accordingly. Thus, social service providers must be cognizant of the ways in which their definitions of “youth” match society’s constructions and how a lack of congruence between these definitions *may* position young people as unprepared for the “adult” world and its associated expectations, such as financial independence and general self-sufficiency.

3.5.3 Limitations

A key limitation in this study lies in the sources of data collected. We collected data from both current and former youth patrons as well as from staff and volunteers at LGBTQ youth service agencies. We did not, however, collect additional sources of data which would allow for further triangulation of our findings. Additional data sources which may have furthered our understanding of the aging-out process and young people’s transition to adulthood include organizational documents, such as written policies related to aging-out and service provision, and interviews with organization leaders would likely have provided further insight into how and why policies were enacted. We also collected qualitative data only, which is not generalizable to a larger group of youth-serving organizations or LGBTQ youth. We do believe, however, that these data are highly transferable to other geographical and organizational settings given that many of the issues highlighted in our study are likely experienced for other agencies which offer age-based services to youth -- both queer-identified and not.

We also did not attempt to gather information about every organization in Chicago with services for LGBTQ youth, instead focusing on the organizations known to our Research Collective and/or discussed among our focus group participants. This means that we may be missing key information from other organizations, particularly those which may provide services to LGBTQ youth or young people based on factors other than age.

3.6 Conclusion

This study contributes to both the literature of queer emerging adulthood and the nascent scholarship on the ways in which young people “age-out” of LGBTQ community-based services and the policies to which they are subjected. Our findings highlight the importance of queer counterpublics for LGBTQ young people and moving away from normative constructions of the life course in providing age-based programming. By focusing on hetero and cisnormative conceptualizations of “adulthood”, programs may be removing service access to queer young people much too soon because they are supposed to be “adults” and “independent”. Future research should be devoted to understanding the non-normative lifecourse of LGBTQ people, especially those in the youth/young adult stages who utilize community-based services. Scholarship is also needed in assessing the potential for LGBTQ-specific programming which is accessible and useful to “young people” but is not restricted to specific age-ranges.

For our study, an intersectional approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation were non-negotiable. The young people who utilize the LGBTQ community-based youth services in our study were overwhelmingly grappling with intersecting identities and subsequent marginalizations which could not be disentangled. We recommend that other scholars and practitioners approach issues of aging-out of community-based services and the transition to

adulthood through an intersectional lens, as a way to focus on the intersecting systems of oppression which shape the experiences of marginalized young people.

4 ***“JUST TELL US WHAT YOU WANT US TO DO”: A WINDING ROAD TO PARTNERSHIP AND OTHER LESSONS IN PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH***

4.1 **Introduction**

I began volunteering in a youth program run by the Agency, a community-based LGBTQ social service organization, in the summer of 2014. After identifying an issue of interest to the youth patrons and program staff -- aging-out of queer youth services prematurely -- I initiated a research collaborative of 11 youth program participants who were interested in study aging-out through youth participatory action research (YPAR). These youth became my research partners and, over the course of approximately five months, we designed and carried out a study intended to elucidate how young people experience aging-out of the LGBTQ youth programs that many of them frequented. As part of our project, we co-collected and analyzed qualitative data from multiple sources, presented our findings back to the community of youth patrons, staff, and volunteers, and engaged in other action-oriented opportunities related to our work and/or in our communities.

Like others who have attempted to incorporate participatory processes into their dissertation research (e.g., Cahill, 2004, 2005; Fox, 2013; Nygreen, 2005), I experienced some “hits” and “misses” in facilitating a YPAR project, but also some successes and “wins” along the way. One of the biggest misses may have been my naïve conceptualization of what it means to engage in full-blown participatory action research and the extent to which the process -- in the context of a dissertation research study “housed” in the academy -- can adhere to the principles of the approach. I also believed that if I told the youth with whom I partnered that they were not research subjects, but rather partners, they would see themselves that way, too. This was not

necessarily true and our path to partnership was a learning experience for me in terms of what it means to engage in YPAR as an academic researcher committed to facilitating and lifting youth voice and social justice research. One of the biggest “wins” was the growth and action that the project engendered – the youth researchers emerged from this project experienced researchers (i.e., data collectors, qualitative analysts, and change agents) who have used their newly acquired skills in their professional work and their individual advocacy efforts. In this chapter, I describe our process, including some of the most challenging and rewarding aspects, in an effort to add to the developing literature on the complex process of engaging in participatory action research. Within this description, I critically examine the ways in which our process adhered to, or strayed from, the theoretical underpinnings of PAR as a worldview about the conduct of research and generation of knowledge in partnership with young people.

4.2 **Background**

Participatory Research (PR) and the social justice, action-oriented iterations Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) are not research *methods* (though they have been conceptualized and utilized that way), but rather *approaches* to conducting research. PAR and CBPR²⁰ challenge traditional constructions of knowledge production, repositioning community members as “experts” (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Wallerstein & Duran, 2003) and “blur[ing] the lines between ‘researchers’ and the ‘researched’ (Minkler et al., 2002, p. 14-15). Indeed, *who* is involved and *how* they are involved are arguably the most important aspects of participatory

²⁰ Participatory Action Research and CBPR have very similar goals, though CBPR is more commonly invoked in study design and in writing in the health sciences, than is PAR. I will primarily use “PAR” rather than “CBPR” -- despite referring to basically the same approach -- because much of the literature about research in partnership with young people is described as PAR. I will use “CBPR” when the primary source has utilized that terminology.

research and its potential to generate socially relevant, community transforming findings.

Drawing on their own experiences, Fox and Fine (2015, p. 45-46) explain,

We have found in our own research that a participatory approach, emphasizing collectivity and shared expertise, produces rigorous and politically powerful results. In other words, how we go about conducting research, and who gets included as knowledge producers, matters.

Participatory Action Research and CBPR (popular in health sciences research) share similar goals, involving research in collaboration *with* (rather than *on*) local communities and collective action towards social change. These goals are achieved through shared control between academics/professional researchers and community members/lay researchers, trust-building, co-learning, mutual capacity building, critical dialogue/reflection, and respecting the unique expertise of community and academic partners (Guba, Egon, & Lincoln, 1994; Israel et al., 1998; Muhammad et al., 2015; Swantz, 2008). At PAR/CBPR's core is a collective, self-reflective inquiry tied to action for change (Baum, Macdougall, & Smith, 2006; Fine & Barrerras, 2001; Park, 1993).

Youth Participatory Action Research is the youth-centered iteration of PAR, aiming to facilitate youth's inquiry of social problems affecting their lives and identification of action-oriented responses (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Powers & Allaman, 2012). Youth Participatory Action Research aims to "contest and transform systems and institutions to produce greater justice - distributive justice, procedural justice, and [...] justice of recognition, or respect", as well as catalyze youth to social action (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 2). Youth Participatory Action Research is popular in both educational and community-based settings with poor or low-income youth of color (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009).

Participatory Action Research is thought to broadly rest on "two pillars" -- ethics and community empowerment (Baum et al., 2006). *Ethics* is rooted in addressing the historical

exploitation of communities of color and low-income people (e.g., the Tuskegee Study).

Community empowerment is linked to social action and based upon Paulo Freire's theory of co-education towards the development of "critical consciousness" among oppressed populations.

Rodriguez and Brown (2009), building upon these basics of ethics and empowerment, present three "guiding principles" for YPAR as both a method and a pedagogical process with young people:

1. A commitment to engaging in research which focuses on youth's "real-life problems, needs, desires and experiences" (p. 25).
2. A commitment to "genuine" collaboration which "build[s] on the knowledge and skills of the youth researchers and support[s] critical and creative engagement in research and learning" (p. 27).
3. A commitment to improving the lives of marginalized young people through action and knowledge and practice transformation (p. 30).

Through these guiding principles, YPAR can facilitate young people harnessing power against social injustice and "counter [the] social and intellectual assaults on marginalized youth" (p. 32).

Rodriguez and Brown encourage academics and educators who wish to engage in PAR to consider how they are "complicit in oppression" of marginalized communities and how PAR can be used to confront that oppression head-on. Fox and Fine (2015, p. 50) also make clear the ethical obligation of PAR with youth (and others) in contesting social oppression, contending that researcher should adhere to an ethic of "no research on us without us".

Despite the social-justice allure of participatory approaches to research, claims of ethical superiority, "community empowerment", potential for collective action and community transformation have been questioned. Some have suggested that "participation" may uphold, rather than counter, the research status quo (i.e., by involving the community only to meet the goals pre-determined by an academic research). Skeptics have also questioned the extent to which "power" is *actually* transferred to the community members during participatory processes (e.g., Cahill, 2007; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Fox, 2013; Jupp, 2007; Rahnema, 1990). Guishard

(2009) warns that among the obstacles involved in participatory research, commodification may be the most dangerous, explaining,

Action research methods are commodified when they are romanticized and touted as panaceas to institutional racism and structural injustice and when members of disempowered groups are superficially included in research. (Guishard, 2009, p. 88)

In a seminal paper on PR, Rahnema (1990, p. 207) challenges PR's claim to engendering dialogic interactions in which researchers and community members engage in a co-learning, consciousness-raising, transformative process, stating,

It is hard to imagine that this kind of dialogue or participation will ever allow the parties involved to discover each other as human beings, or to learn from each other. The participants may eventually learn only how to present their petrified beliefs in more fashionable ways.

Another challenge levied against PR is the neoliberal cooptation of "participation" to achieve state-sanctioned agendas (Rahnema, 1990; Rose, 2007). Leal (2010, p. 95-98) too raises cooptation as a concern, asserting that participation *as a concept* is not in question, but rather the ways in which it has been *enacted* may be problematic,

For participation to become part of dominant development practice, it first had to be modified, sanitized, and depoliticized. Once purged of all the threatening elements, participation could be re-engineered as an instrument that could play a role within the status quo, rather than one that defied it. Co-optation of the concept depended, in large measure, on the omission of class and larger social contradictions. As such, participation became another ingredient in the prevailing modernization paradigm.

Rather than avoid participatory research altogether, Lee encourages scholars to consider the ways in which participation can adhere (or return) to its social transformative roots through "reconstruct[ing] the spaces and culture for participation and the exercise of popular power".

4.2.1 The Complex Process of Participatory Action Research – Challenges and Potential Solutions

Turning traditional, academic-controlled inquiry on its head and re-negotiating power and control in research does not come easily. Consequently, many find it difficult to adhere to the key processes involved in a PAR approach, such as involving community members in *all* aspects of the research process (including data analysis, interpretation, and dissemination), sharing control of the study design (Blumenthal, 2011; Flicker & Nixon, 2015; Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013; Stoecker, 2009), and promoting ownership of the process among lay researchers (Ozer, Rittnerman, & Wanis, 2010). Others claim a “participatory” study despite a failure to involve any significant participatory processes -- something Stoecker (2009) calls *talking*, but not *walking*, the walk of participatory research.

There are several common “tensions” in PAR which may contribute to the inability of some to engage in a fully community-driven, participatory process. Minkler et al. (2002) and Chavez, Duran, Baker, Avilia, & Wallerstien (2003), highlight “insider/outsider” tensions and the potential for unaddressed issues between community members and academic researchers to affect CBPR studies. These tensions often stem from differing priorities and timelines and the extent to which community members and academics tangibly benefit from research. For example, whereas community members (insiders) may bring resources or actionable information to their community, academics (outsiders) are usually better positioned to gain financially (in the form of salary support from grants) and professionally (in the form of article publications and promotions; Jacobs, 2010; Minkler, 2004). In order to address insider/outsider tensions, Chavez et al., and Minkler explain that academics must be aware of and attend to the history of trauma in

communities, compounded by issues of internalized, institutional, and personally-mediated racism.

Organizational and institutional barriers also serve to challenge a PAR process. In the context of educational and community-based organizations, PAR with young people can uphold the traditions of the classroom, reproducing the power dynamics of adult/youth and teacher/student relationships (Fox, 2013, Jupp, 2007; Ozer, Ritterman, & Wanis, 2010). Participatory Action Research in schools is especially susceptible barriers based on intuitional politics (e.g., teacher blocking of student-led action; Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace, & Langhout's, 2010) and a lack of continuity in engagement given "black-out" periods of the academic calendar (i.e., holidays, summer break; Ozer et al., 2010). To address these barriers (and others) Ozer et al. suggest creating increased opportunities for youth to *own* the PAR process and its outcomes, creating a vested interest and commitment to PAR work. This may be achieved, even within multi-year project focused on long-term, social change, through identifying and facilitating youth's achievement of short-term, practical goals, or "wins", allowing youth the opportunity to see real results from their efforts. Though "wins" can be in the form of direct action and clear change, the engagement in the process of PAR in and of itself, as well as the identification of research-based recommendations, may feel like a win to young people and facilitate personal development (Ozer et al., 2010).

At the university level, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) have been cited as a barrier to the PAR process, given the often lag in understanding and supporting PAR and community-driven scholarship (Muhammad et al., 2015). An uneducated IRB board may delay or even altogether block an academic's ability to engage in important aspects of a PAR study on the grounds of upholding the ethical principles of beneficence and justice (which may in fact violate

these principles; Brown et al., 2010), something that Malone, Yerger, McGruder, & Froelicher, 2006 likened to “Tuskegee in reverse”. Academic institutions can also prevent faculty who wish to conduct PAR by failing to support the time needed to build relationships and trust, failing to provide financial support for PAR projects, or failing to acknowledge accomplishments related to PAR in a case for promotion or tenure.

In addition to these challenges, there are several “pitfalls” which can occur if a PAR scholar is not attentive to issues of historical community trauma, ethics, and the overall goal of transformative collective action in pursuit of social justice (Chavez et al., 2003; Minkler, 2004; Muhammad et al., 2015). For example, academic researchers may tokenize community members in a PAR process rather than fully engage them as partners (Baum et al., 2006; Hart, 1992) or employ the method “instrumentally” to meet pre-established goals (Trickett, 2011). Scholars also may find themselves reifying the social hierarchy of the “researcher” and the “researched”, leading to a traditional, positivist inquiry rather than one which is transformative and community-driven (Hebert-Beirne et al., 2016; Muhammad et al., 2015; in YPAR this is often the dichotomy of “teacher” and “student”, e.g., Fox, 2013; Jupp, 2007). Hebert-Beirne et al. (2016) and Muhammad et al., (2015) each describe ways in they have attended to or avoided these pitfalls in PAR by centering issues of identity, positionality, and power the process towards equity and a collective action.

4.3 Methods: Documenting and Assessing Our Process

I aimed to document and assess our process by analyzing the experience of engaging in the project, the meanings given to the process by the youth researchers and myself, and “the things unsaid during the project” (Jacobs, 2010). To achieve this goal, I gathered data throughout our work, in the form of written field notes and/or audio-recorded personal reflections after each

event (e.g., Research Collective meetings, focus groups, interviews, community presentation). With the permission of the youth researchers, I audio-recorded each of our Research Collective meetings -- at the beginning of each meeting I asked, “are you all Ok with me turning on the recorder now?”. The youth researchers and I took hand-written notes during many of our discussions and during the focus groups and interviews we conducted with individuals outside of our Collective. Together, these data created the “dataset” which I analyzed to draw the conclusions presented herein.

I employed data analysis informed²¹ by a Holistic-Content approach, which involved memoing, selected high-level coding, and theme identification. In a Holistic-Content approach (which is popular for life history interviews), the analyst engages in several initial reads of the data, aiming to identify the global foci and/or themes of the data, and ultimately, retelling the story of the data (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Rather than focus on individual aspects of the story, the researcher considers the plot and structure of the entire story. This approach was useful in structuring my analytical process given that each event *was* a mini-story - complete with a plot, a climax, and (on good days) a resolution to problems encountered -- with the totality of the data providing the larger story.

I engaged in analysis throughout, and after completion of, data collection. My analysis during data collection was characterized by writing field notes and memoing at the same time or soon after. These memos generally applied to the individual data point -- the field notes for a single event -- rather than on the totality of the dataset. In these memos I asked myself questions

²¹ I was *informed*, rather than explicitly guided, by Lieblich et al. (1998) process of analysis for two key reasons. First, these data are not “life history” data and thus are not as clearly analyzed as an individual life history. Second, I generally find no single approach to analysis meets the needs of a complex dataset and research question(s), making the application of several analytical tools/approaches better than a single approach.

in narrative form (e.g., *Was this an example of a time in which I exerted my power as an adult and academic over the youth researchers?*), captured initial impressions (e.g., *A few of the youth researchers seemed to have a hard time understanding the purpose of qualitative data analysis...*), and documented nascent interpretations of the data (Charmaz, 2014; Mason, 2002; Saldaña, 2013).

The second round of memoing involved the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, Dedoose and was more holistic than the first. I focused on each piece of data (e.g., field notes from a single event) in the context of the larger story (the full data set). I often found that my initial memos lacked the holistic perspective which I had garnered by the end of data collection, making it imperative that I memo again with the full dataset (or, story) in mind.

In addition to memoing, I engaged in high-level coding, or “themeing”, the data (Lieblich et al., 1998; Saldaña, 2013; Ryan & Bernard, 2004). Rather than selecting lines or short segments of text in my field notes, I applied broad codes (e.g., *Power imbalance between youth and Jennifer*) to large paragraphs/sections of text or to an entire document. Often, coding and memoing were completed in tandem, the memos serving as detailed explanations of the code application and situating the codes within the large dataset. After a full round of coding and memoing was complete, I began to “restory” the data (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) by creating a timeline of major events in the process as well as developing short narrative descriptions of key themes, mainly in the form of “pitfalls” and “potential solutions”.

Using a key tenet of ethnography -- thick narrative description (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) -- the findings in this chapter serve as brief re-telling of key points in the story of our process through my eyes. It must be noted that, even in my attempts to engage in these data from a critical perspective (e.g., feminist, critical race, queer, intersectional), the interpretations are my

own and thus shaped by my social position and the privileges afforded to me based on my racial/ethnic identity (White), class (middle-class, doctoral student), and sexual and gender identities (cisgender, heterosexual). These privileges, however, were harder for me to grapple with than they were for the youth in our Collective who consistently identified me as an ally who “gets it” and thus need not be overly concerned with our divergent privilege and power, at least in terms of studying the process of aging-out. In CBPR work with queer young people of color, Mountz (2016, p. 290) highlights the ways in which they considered their social positions and privileges the research process and the ways in which they attempted to address the history of racism and centering of Whiteness in queer communities early on in the research process,

Given the extent to which whiteness and class privilege continue to be centered in queer and trans communities, I was particularly aware of my symbolic presence as a white researcher of middle-class upbringing interviewing participants who identified as predominantly as people of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. [...] Cognizant of research legacies within communities of color as well as the fact that we continue to live in a white supremacist culture, I tried early on in the interviews to name the historical legacies and contemporary context in which our relationship and conversation were taking place and the ways in which this might inform our interpersonal dynamics.

Keeping with Mountz’s focus on the need to consider my “symbolic presences”, despite the young people’s lack of concern for the ways in which our differing social positions and material conditions mattered in the work, I pushed myself and our Collective to interrogate these positionalities and the ways in which they were influencing the research process and my/our interpretations. I also encouraged our Collective – throughout our process – to consider the history of racism in our/their communities.

4.4 Our Project Setting and Timeline

The Agency is said to be the largest LGBTQ community-based organization in the Midwestern U.S. Because of its prominence in the queer community (and across the city), it was

one of the first places I learned about after moving to Chicago from Atlanta in the fall of 2012. I came to the Agency with an interest in volunteering with young people. Having heard good things about its youth program, I hoped that, beyond volunteering, it might be a place in which to engage in a YPAR project for my (eventual) dissertation.

In the summer of 2013, I attended a volunteer training at the Agency in the hopes of becoming a regular volunteer. During my volunteer training (and later youth program-specific training) I was consistently forthcoming with the fact that, as a doctoral student, I had an interest in a potential research partnership with youth at The Agency. I made clear, however, that I would only attempt such a partnership if it was welcomed by the staff and youth patrons. After about eight months of cooking dinner on Monday nights for The Agency's youth patrons, I began to discuss with the program director the possibility of conducting a YPAR project. To my surprise, the director was extremely supportive of the idea.

In late August, 2016, I began recruiting young people from the Agency to join a research collective. As partners, I explained, they would be engaged in all aspects of the project, including driving our work and helping identify opportunities to act upon the issues we identified. I also explained that we would meet weekly for approximately 15 weeks and they would be paid \$20 in cash for each meeting they attended. My only requirement was that they attend 80% of the scheduled meetings and be "committed to our process".

I recruited a total of 11 young people to the project and we held our first meeting as the Research Collective on September 20th at a conference room in the Agency. We continued to meet for approximately five months, holding more than 23 meetings (both "regularly scheduled" and "supplementary"). In addition to paying the youth for meeting attendance, I paid the youth researchers \$20 for each additional engagement in a component of our research, such as

acting as a data collector or presenting our findings. Over the course of the project, the youth researchers were certified in conducting ethical research with human subjects, facilitated focus groups and individual interviews, and engaged in analysis of qualitative data and dissemination of our findings.

We had our last meeting as a Collective on March 14, 2017 and the following day hosted a “member-checking” and findings dissemination event at the Agency where we presented what we learned to Agency staff and current/former youth patrons. On May 5th Terry (a youth researcher) and I presented our findings at the Impact Youth Conference in Chicago (we held two sessions - the first had two youth in attendance, the second had one youth and one adult present). The timeline of our process, from my initial engagement in the Agency’s youth program, through the conference in May, is outlined in Table 2.

4.5 The Path to Partnership – Long and Winding

From the outset of the project, I was very intentional about the language I used, both when describing the study to potential youth research partners and to others. According to Wallerstein and Duran (2010), PAR/CBPR addresses the challenge of knowledge dominance in traditional research by shifting discourse away from a traditional research dichotomy of subject/researcher to that which signifies a shared power and ongoing partnership between community members and academics. As such, I paid close attention to how I referred to the young people with whom I planned to collaborate, specifically calling the youth my *partners* (not, “subjects” or even “participants”) and explaining that the project was not mine, but *ours*. The screening interviews for inviting the youth to join the project was an early opportunity to use language to make clear my intentions and to engage the young people in a dialogue about what partnership might look like between us. I explained that as a partner, their engagement in the

project would likely be different than other research in which many had engaged. I further stressed that we would figure out together how to co-explore the issue of aging-out. To most of the youth who participated in the screening interviews, this was not new information – I had been talking about the upcoming project for many months and most were familiar with my planned participatory research approach.

Actually achieving what I initially conceptualized as “partnership” in participatory action research took time. There were several points in our process when I was certain that we would never reach a point where the young people would see themselves as I did –legitimate researchers, partners, and scholars of their own communities. I was also concerned – and to some extent am still today – that a truly equitable partnership between a group of marginalized young people and an adult academic may not be possible. As I reflect back on our process, I see that while our path to “partnership” was for the most part linear, there were critical instances in our process which pushed us further apart – less “partners” and more “researcher (me) and participants (the youth)” – and others which brought us together, on more equal footing in the research process.

Our process started as a tentative partnership, one characterized by somewhat divergent goals and plans for our work, later becoming more established and growing stronger with shared goals and expectations. The following sections will detail some of the critical points in our process and how these experiences changed and/or supported our path to partnership as members of the Collective.

4.5.1 I’m Not Your Boss, I’m Your Partner

In our first meeting as a Collective, I again was intentional about my language stressing partnership characterized by shared decision-making in “our project” – stating that I was not the

TABLE II
A ROADMAP OF YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH:
FROM INITIAL ENGAGEMENT TO ACTION

Date	Activity	Location
07/14/14	Initial engagement - Jennifer's first experience volunteering in the youth space	The Agency
08/08/16	IRB approval for Youth Research Collective (Research phase 1)	UIC
8/24/16	Recruitment presentation during community meeting	The Agency
8/29/16 - 8/31/16	Screening interviews for Youth Research Collective	The Agency
9/20/16	First research team meeting	The Agency
10/04/16	Youth researcher team members are training in human subjects research ('CIRTification' training)	The Agency
10/11/16	Initial planning for youth-driven data collection	The Agency
11/29/16	IRB Approval for youth-driven focus groups (Research phase 2)	UIC
12/16/16	Focus Group 1	UIC SPH
12/17/16	Focus Group 2	UIC SPH
12/20/16	Focus Group 3	DePaul Student Center
01/07/17	Focus Group 4	DePaul Student Center
01/26/17	IRB approval for social service provider interviews (Research phase 3)	UIC
01/31/17 - 02/20/17	Interviews (1 - 10)	<i>Various</i>
03/14/17	Final Youth Research Collective meeting	The Agency
03/15/17	Youth researchers present focus group findings during community meeting (alumni night; member checking opportunity)	The Agency
05/06/17	Jennifer and Terry present aging-out findings at Impact Youth Conference (member checking opportunity)	Gary Comer Youth Center, Chicago

one “in charge” but that we were “in it together” (though I did consistently acknowledge that the project was for my dissertation and that I was aware of that large personal benefit). If one of the youth members of the Collective used language that framed the project as mine (rather than theirs) – e.g., “How many weeks do you plan for your project to last” – I would counter with, “remember, this is *our* project. This is a *collective* effort.”

My emphasis on language was in part a reflection of my fear that the project would not actually be participatory and would instead be driven by me. I was concerned that the youth might label me as “the expert” or “the boss”, both of which I believed might create a power imbalance between us. Ironically, from the start of the project, the youth researchers regarded me as both an expert and their boss. For example, a young person might respond to a discussion about how we should shape our inquiry with, “Jenn, you’re the boss, you tell us what you think we should do about aging-out”. I would often respond to these comments with, “I’m not the expert or the boss, *you all* are the expert in your lives and we are partners”. This response, I hoped, would get us on track with what I believed to be the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of PAR – specifically that local knowledge is valued and constitutes contextual-based “truth” (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) and that we were partners in the work. Even when a young person countered with, “But you are an expert in research, you are the one getting your PhD” I would reply with “I do not want to be the expert in this situation. This is *our* project and your experiences and opinions matter”. Despite my protests, the youth researchers would apply these labels, especially “boss”, throughout the course of our project (though they did diminish over time, especially the idea that I was the expert).

Of all of the labels that youth might apply to me, “boss” made me the most uncomfortable. I believed it implied that I was in charge and that they would therefore have to do

what I said – the opposite of us engaging in the project partners. Though at the time, I asked repeatedly not to be called “boss” (always in a kind “y’all I’m not the boss!” way), I have now begun to see why and how being the “boss” in the context of our work was not necessarily antithetical to being research partners. For many of the youth researchers, our project was the most professional work they had every done. It was also one of the few times some had an opportunity to voice opinions about their work and have those opinions valued by a person who was older and more professionally experienced. Because of this, having a boss who treated them as experts in their work, who trusted their judgement, and who followed their suggestions likely engendered a sense of pride in their work. As the “boss” of this work, I validated that they were indeed integral to getting our work done. Though I still do not like the idea of being the “boss” in our process, I can now appreciate why that label (and maybe others) were useful and important to the young people and was not an indication of a lack of equity in our partnership.

4.5.2 “We’re Subjects. We’re not Researchers”

Another challenge to developing our partnership were the youth researchers’ differing levels of ownership of the project and its associated processes (e.g., methods selection), especially at the beginning of our process. Some of the youth immediately embraced their position as emerging partners and scholars of their communities. Others were confused by their subject position as a “partner” in a research study, particularly because they were usually the focus of research, not active participants in its conduct. This lack of uniformity in the understanding of their place in the project may have occurred because I did not take the time for us to critically examine how PAR is intentionally different from other research approaches. It may have also occurred because young people were coming to our project from very different life experiences – several had had no opportunities to lead in meaningful ways, especially in the

context of youth services where they were often told what to do and not do, rather than asked what they would like to do. Therefore, the process of a shifting from a research subject identity to research partner identity took time. Those who elected to discontinue their participation partway through our process may never have shifted their identity from subject to partner. I do believe that those who engaged for the majority of the project, however, did fully embrace the identity of a research partner by the end of our work. The following “scene” from our process elucidates some of the divergent subject position identities among the youth researchers.

Date: September 27, 2016

Time: 5:15 p.m.

Setting: Conference room – 2nd floor of the Agency, 11 youth researchers and Jennifer sit around a long rectangular table

[Begin scene]

It is our second meeting as a Collective and the room is bustling with energy – the youth are engaging in conversations with one another about different ideas for our work. I ask that the group come together and begin one large conversation. Terry asks if he can speak first and I encourage him to take the lead. He begins,

Can I just say something? I really want this project to be different and I think it can be. Even if we just go and talk to people on the street about aging-out, let's just do *something*. I'm sick of saying we are going to do something, but not doing anything. All these other projects and little groups here claim to be about something but they never are.

I am energized by his suggestion and other young people seem to be too – they nod along and shout “yes!” and “that’s right!”. Several youth begin talking at once and the conversation breaks into smaller one-on-one discussions. I interrupt the group and ask them to come back to the conversation together, “let’s try and remember our agreements from last week and respect ‘one diva, one mic’” – meaning that only one person talks at a time. The group reconvenes and several of the young people begin sharing their ideas

about how we can “do something”. One young person, Harper, suggests that we hand out surveys about homelessness and aging-out. Damian counters with “surveys are too impersonal, we need to hear people’s stories to understand what it’s like to age-out”. Others begin building on these ideas, sharing options for other data collection methods. Kendra, who is sitting at the other end of our long table from me, tries to interject a few different times, saying that she is confused and asks, “can we go back and start at the beginning?”. The other youth ignore Kendra’s requests and continue with the direction of the discussion. Kendra is getting visibly upset that she cannot speak – she is sighing loudly and attempting to interject repeatedly to no avail. She rolls her eyes and continues to try and interject, “Can I PLEASE say something?”. I become increasingly anxious as I watch Kendra struggle to speak – I do not want to be the “teacher” of the group, but I also believe that if I do not intervene, Kendra may become more agitated and possibly disengage from the group altogether. I speak loudly over the youth’s voices, interrupting the discussion, “y’all, we agreed to give everyone a chance to speak. Can we please listen to what Kendra has to say?”. The group agrees and we turn to look at her. She begins,²²

Kendra - I kinda was listening to everything that was going on, and it’s, I really don’t agree with the way we’re going right now. **I think that Jenn kind of came up of all this while she was trying to make her project -- she came up with the ideas on how this was going to go and now we are kinda making our own ideas about how we’re going to do a little research project within a research project.** And it just doesn’t sound like it’s going to be any -- we’re not going in any one direction; these are all just ideas.

Terry – This is the research project, like this is Jenn’s research project.

Kendra - I just wanted to say what I wanted to say -- these are all like little sub-ideas, we don’t have a --you know, a question, a direction -- **she [Jenn] has a question, but you know there’s no real point as to what it is that we’re supposed to do.**

²² I have highlighted the most crucial language pointing to Kendra’s subject position and her concerns about our process, though these words are best understood within the context of the full transcription provided.

[A few youth researchers begin to talk over one another]

Kendra - [Annoyed] I wasn't done talking.

Harper – I would actually like to give a resolution to this...

Jenn – Kendra, are you done saying what you had to say? And just, for full disclosure, my question is 'how can we work together to make this move forward' so I'm open to -- my goal in this -- if I wanted to go do this by myself I could go interview people by myself, but I don't want to. But I hear you and I appreciate you.

Kendra - That's what I'm saying, I thought that you didn't want to go that way so why are we going that way?

Jenn – [Nervously] No, no, no, I just mean, I think it's more important for y'all to own this and drive it the way you want, 'cause you are living it, I'm not, you know what I'm saying?

Kendra – I know, like what I, **the point I'm trying to make is you contracted out to us, you're using us to see what the aging-out process does. We are your subjects. We're not researchers.**

Jenn – **Well, you're my research partners.**

Terry – [Emphatically] **We are researchers!**

Kendra - OK.

Jenn – **You are technically "subjects", but I see you as my partners and my intention is to treat you that way.**

Kendra – [Very annoyed] **So is this project supposed to be just creating a bunch of little you?**

Jenn – [Stumbling over my words] **Not a bunch of little me, I'm trying to hopefully share knowledge with y'all and learn knowledge from y'all so it's kinda a two-way, I'm learning from you, you're learning from ---**

Kendra - So I didn't understand what was going on because my, what I thought was going on was you wanted like all of us to go out and do kinda what you're doing with us. Is that what's supposed to go on?

Damian – **So I think what is going is kinda like a co-learning process, like no one person**

Jenn – [Relieved] **Co-learning is a great word!**

Damian - --**so no one person knows every single thing, we all teach each other what's going on around with the research project**, and then everybody puts their input on what they feel like would make the research project better, we don't have to take every idea, we don't have to leave every idea, but it's like you put what you want to put in it and then we make something with a foundation of a whole bunch of different questions. You know?

Jenn – Kendra, I appreciate your questions, I think they're very good. I think Damian's speaking to what I was thinking, but again, this is supposed to be collaborative, so I'm not the one with all the answers.

Damian – That's why I'm saying, like I don't, I'm not going to disrespect you and I understand where you're coming from --

Kendra – **I just feel like we don't have any direction.**

Damian - --but it's kinda like, like when you clean up a house it's like, it's gonna get ugly before it gets cute?

[Group laughs, a few 'uh huh's']

Kendra - [Annoyed, frustrated] **All I'm trying to say is that I think that a lot of these things are things that Jenn already thought of so maybe she could clear up for us, like maybe she thought of a lot of this stuff before even, like she has a more precise version of what is going to happen in her mind, so maybe you could help us, kinda if you thought about some of this stuff --**

[Multiple youth try to talk to respond to Kendra's concerns]

[*End scene*]

As evidenced by my responses to Kendra's concerns about our process, this conversation was difficult for me and I was unsure of what to do. I had hoped that our path to partnership would be easier, but her frustration with our process was an important learning point for us as a Collective. Just because I was call the youth partners, implying we were equals, that did not mean we had all reached a point of shared understanding or control over the process.

After that meeting, I talked to Kendra while she ate dinner provided by the Agency, asking how she felt about our meeting. She told me that she felt unheard and disrespected by the

other researchers. I assured her that we would revisit her concerns in the next meeting and that I thought what she had to say was valid and useful in helping us grow as a group. She seemed satisfied with our conversation and my responses to her concerns. After that night, however, Kendra never attended another meeting and I never saw her again (though I did check in with several staff and other youth to ensure she was safe). We did continue to discuss as a group what it meant to be “partners” versus research subjects, though in hindsight, I wish we had discussed that more in our very first meeting, which may have prevented Kendra’s frustrations and kept her engaged in our work.

4.5.3 We Really *are* Researchers!

After much deliberation selecting our methods for data collection, identified several sources of data which we thought would help us explore the experience of aging-out of LGBTQ youth services. We engaged in critical autoethnography (in which we investigated our own relevant experiences) and also conducted focus groups with 26 current and former (i.e., aged-out) patrons of LGBTQ community-based youth programming in Chicago. Near the end of collecting our focus group data, we determined that we were only getting a portion of the story of aging-out with our current methods and elected to conduct individual interviews with LGBTQ social service providers. This data collection lasted from the beginning of our project (September 2016) to just before our final month of meeting as a Collective (February 2017).

As we were completing our interviews, we began the process of systematically analyzing our data using traditional qualitative analysis techniques, such as identifying and applying codes to our textual data. By this time – more than four months into forming the Research Collective -- the number of youth who were consistently engaged in the meetings had decreased from 11 to six. Three to four of those six were regularly attending our meetings in-person while the others

were engaging more passively – sometimes commenting on or “liking” our discussions on our private Facebook page. The youth who had stopped engaging altogether or who were only passively engaging, did so for several reasons. These included starting a job which required the young person to work during our scheduled meetings – something I ensured the young people was more important than our meetings. A couple of the youth either told me outright or implied that they decided to stop coming to our meetings because the group dynamics felt hostile and the process of data collection in a short time frame was stressful. None of the youth, even those who felt the process was stressful, however, asked to officially be removed from the project or our IRB protocol.

The four youth who remained actively engaged were therefor clearly committed to our process, despite its flaws and challenges. Not only did they continue to participate in our weekly meetings, they also volunteered to participate in other additional meetings (in order to meet our data analysis goals and timeline) and attend local events which might be relevant to our work (e.g., a book reading at a local bookstore focused on the experiences of queer aging – the author also happened to be my mentor). Though I was concerned that our now small group might lose momentum because others had stopped participating, the final month of our process was incredibly fruitful in terms of what we produced, the development of the youth researchers, and our growth as partners. It was during this time that these four youth had begun to fully embrace their role as partners in our process. The following excerpt from my field notes describes our first analysis session and how during our manual coding process the young people began to verbally claim their “researcher” status,

*I brought print outs of the focus group transcripts, a list of our “big themes” [codes], and highlighters for us to work with. We each read through the first transcript (e.g., FG4) and applied the codes through group discussion. We added codes as needed to our list of big themes. **During the session, the youth said several things related to their***

status as legitimate researchers, “I’m really a researcher today” or, “wow, we are really doing researcher here”. It was incredibly satisfying for me to hear that and they all seemed to be enjoying the process. They were taking ownership of both the data and the process. We decided we had a lot more work to do as a group to get our findings together for our event at [the Agency] next month.

As the field notes allude to, this time in our process was a major turning point when I believe our path to equitable partnership, characterized by the youth researchers owning the researcher status, was achieved. This may have occurred simply because, by this point, we had been working as a Collective for several months. This may have also occurred because the process had a clear output – findings and associated recommendations from our data. Relatedly, this was one of the points in the process where the youth researchers could contribute to the process in a very meaningful way – they had been the data collectors so they knew the data inside and out. They also shared experiences with many of those people who had provided our data, giving them a nuanced understanding of what the data were saying. Together, we produced recommendations which were locally relevant and of which the youth researchers felt a sense of ownership. When it was time for the youth researchers to share our recommendations with the youth patrons and Agency staff and patrons in our March presentation, there was a demonstrated sense of pride and enthusiasm in what they were presenting.

4.6 Critical Learning Points in the Process

4.6.1 “The IRB Will Never Approve a Documentary as Data”

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the inherent power held by academic institutions (and academic researchers therein) can be a major barrier to achieving *shared* control over the research process. Though I intended to “shift power” from both the academy and myself to the youth researchers, meeting this goal was challenging. Some of the most challenging processes included selecting methods and planning data collection processes which would be achievable in

our short timeline (about five months) and relatedly, which my institution's IRB would approve. Because the process would be short, it was even more imperative that we selected methods which would not require months of back and forth with the IRB, meaning the methods needed to be low-risk and traditional in the social sciences. For this reason, when Antonio, a youth researcher who I had known the longest and with whom I had the closest relationship, suggested we study the aging-out process through creating a documentary, I thought to myself, "a documentary will never get through the IRB". Rather than investigating if others had successfully employed video-based data collection methods in UIC IRB-approved projects, I wrote the idea off as unviable.

Because I believed a documentary-as-data would not be approved by the IRB (at least not quickly enough), I encouraged the youth researchers to consider other, more traditional, data collection methods, such as surveys, various types of individual interviews, and focus groups. Together, we elected to begin with critical autoethnography followed by collecting focus group data. Antonio was involved in selecting these methods, but was clearly disappointed that we did not include the documentary idea as a candidate for our methods. Though he did continue to attend our meetings for the first couple of months of the project, he was clearly unengaged in our process, sitting away from the table, his gaze directly on his phone, rarely engaging in the group discussions. Eventually, he stopped coming to our meetings altogether, until the final few weeks when he dropped by to show his support for our work today. He told us he was impressed with what we had done, but reminded us that the documentary idea "would've been cute" and hoped someone could make one about aging-out one day.

In hindsight, my failure to investigate the feasibility of conducting a documentary with our IRB was a critical misstep in this process. Because I was not willing to take a risk, for fear of

prolonging our timeline or battling with the IRB, I missed the opportunity to further engage Antonio. I also missed an opportunity to present our Collective with a great idea! Though we did collect what we as a Collective believed to be valuable data on aging-out through our selected methods, the documentary may have produced useful and different insight. It also may have been more approachable to the youth researchers and allowed us to engage in a research process which was less structured, more creative, and ultimately, more fun. Had our group engaged in a more critical discussion of both the utility of a documentary and the drawbacks (including the IRB implications), we may have developed a *shared* understanding of the challenges of research. Such a discussion also may have helped us to interrogate the ways in which IRBs and other academic-based challenges can affect the research process.

4.6.2 A Mutually Beneficial Praxis? Nina and the Participation Decline

Table 3 outlines our research team meetings, including the focus/purpose of each meeting and the number of youth in attendance. The table shows the steady decline in youth researcher attendance over the course of the project. We began with 11 youth researchers, six or more regularly attending through the end of our focus group data collection (session 14). This consistent attendance implied to me that the youth researchers were committed to the process and “owning” our project, though I also acknowledged that earning \$20 per session was likely a significant factor in attendance rates. In the final two months of the project (sessions 15 through 23), however, we had no more than four young people in attendance at a single meeting, despite no change in the incentive structure and my offers to change our meeting location, time, or both to better accommodate the group. At the time, I was unsure of why my willingness to be flexible with our meeting schedule and the consistent offer of compensation was insufficient to re-engage those young people who had stopped attending. Now I see, however, that compensation and

meeting flexibility did not address what for some was likely the underlying issue for their disengagement.

I had interacted with Nina a few different times throughout my volunteering at the Agency, but had had few opportunities to engage with her in meaningful ways. Thus, I was surprised and pleased when she approached me during the youth researcher recruitment phase of the study to indicate interest in joining the project. I suspected that her interest was related to her boyfriend Marcos committing to becoming one of the youth researchers. At 19, Nina was one of the youngest researchers in our Collective and from the outset showed less maturity – or potentially, less interest -- than other members. She was often distracted during our meetings, looking at her phone, trying to talk to her boyfriend across the table, or frequently walking in and out of the room. Though she would occasionally engage in discussion and provide her comments or ideas on specific topics, she did not seem particularly interested in our process or goals. I hoped that over time, this would change, and that she would become an active partner in our work, but I also respected her chosen level of engagement and thus did not push her to engage more. Several weeks into the project, Nina approached me at the end of our Collective meeting to ask if we could talk. I welcomed the conversation, which I thought might be related to the project, but instead was about some of the things going on in her personal life. I was pleased that she felt she could confide in me. Talking after our Collective meetings became a regular occurrence for us and, over time, I understood her reluctance to participate. Though I hoped that she might engage more with the group and our work as the project progressed, she did not. I continued to respect her choice to minimally engage.

Around the middle of the project, Nina was attending less frequently and had become even more disengaged in the meetings that she had been previously. One night she walked into

TABLE III
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH COLLECTIVE MEETINGS:
ATTENDANCE, MEETING FOCUS

Session #	Date	Number of Youth in Attendance	Focus of Meeting	Notes
1	09/20/16	10	Consent of youth researchers; team member introductions; ground rules/group agreements; activity- <i>introduction to research</i>	
2	09/27/16	10	Group discussion of research goals and questions; introductory conversation to methods for youth-driven research	Addition of a youth researcher
3	10/04/16	10	Human subjects training - "CIRTification"	
4	10/11/16	9	Planning for youth-driven data collection - selection of research question(s), methods	
4s	10/15/16	5	Supplementary session to create focus group guide, consent form, SDP	Met at Harold Washington Library from 1 - 4 p.m.
5	10/18/16	8	Aging-out "self-study" part 1 - Group discussion	
6	10/25/16	10	Aging-out "self-study" part 2 - Small group discussion	
7	11/01/16	7	Introduction to focus group (FG) facilitation - managing the discussion, asking non-leading questions	Youth-led session while Jennifer was out of town.
8	11/08/16	8	FG facilitation and participant recruitment planning	Election night
9	11/15/16	10	FG facilitation and participant recruitment planning (cont.)	
10	11/22/16	7	FG facilitation - consenting participants; planning for the conduct of FGs (dates/times, location, moderators)	Thanksgiving week
11	12/06/16	9	FG facilitation (cont.); FG planning (cont.); recruitment issues/concerns regarding minimal interest from potential participants	IRB approval for FGs received.
12	12/13/16	7	FG facilitation (cont.); FG planning (cont.); recruitment issues/concerns regarding minimal interest from potential participants (cont.)	FG 1 and 2 conducted this week.

TABLE III (Continued)
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH COLLECTIVE MEETINGS:
ATTENDANCE, MEETING FOCUS

Session #	Date	Number of Youth in Attendance	Focus of Meeting	Notes
13	01/03/17	6	Analytical debrief of FGs 1 - 3 - discussion of initial impressions, our “take-aways” so far	FG 3 conducted previous week; FG 4 conducted this week.
14	01/10/17	6	Analytical debrief of FGs 1 - 4; introduction to qualitative data analysis - code development “organizing our data”	Youth researchers asked to listen to audio for FGs 1 and 2 prior to team meeting.
15	01/17/17	4	Analytical debriefs (cont.), code development (cont.); planning for dissemination	Youth researchers were asked to listen to the audio from FGs 3 and 4 prior to team meeting.
16	01/24/17	4	Analytical puzzles discussion - <i>what do we want to know from our data?</i> Creating of concept maps around themes of “motivation” and “social/physical environment”; planning for interviews - <i>who do we want to interview? Why?</i>	IRB approval for interviews received.
17	01/31/17	3	Analytical puzzles discussion (cont.), planning for interviews (cont.)	Individual interviews began this week.
18	02/07/17	4	Debrief of interviews to-date; planning for dissemination	First presentation of data identified - the Agency 3/15/17, 5 - 6:30 p.m. (alumni night).
19	02/14/17	3	Debrief of interviews (cont); planning for dissemination (cont.); activity - <i>YPAR process cards to evaluate our progress/process</i>	
19s	02/17/17	3	Supplementary meeting to begin coding our FG data	Met in a staff member’s office in Agency youth space.
20	02/21/17	3	Guest from AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) join meeting; youth presented to AFC an overview of our project (“practice” for first presentation of the research at upcoming Agency event); AFC asked youth questions about what a “sexpert” should know (for their Youth HIV prevention campaign)	

TABLE III (Continued)
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH COLLECTIVE MEETINGS:
ATTENDANCE, MEETING FOCUS

Session #	Date	Number of Youth in Attendance	Focus of Meeting	Notes
21	03/02/17	2	Coding FG data (cont.); planning for 3/15 presentation	Jennifer met with staff member at the Agency on 3/3 to discuss the 3/15/17 presentation logistics.
22	03/07/17	4	Analytical discussion of themes from our coded transcripts; planning for 3/15 presentation (cont.) - <i>layout, presenters, key points to emphasize, discussion questions</i>	
22s	03/09/17	2	Analytical discussion of themes (cont).	
23	03/13/17	2	Analytical discussion of themes (cont). - finalizing themes and selecting quotes to share during 3/15 presentation	
23s	03/14/17	3	Presentation preparation - youth presenters practice sections, finalize slide content; final meeting (celebration for one youth going to study abroad in France the following week)	Presentation occurred on 3/15 at the Agency, approx. 25 people (youth, alumni, staff, and guests) in attendance. Three youth team members presented, one additional team member attended presentation.

our meeting 30 minutes late, interrupting the young person who was speaking, and said to me, *“I’m sorry I’m late. I’m in a really bad mood. Can I just go to sleep?”* I told her that I was sorry she was in a bad mood, that she was not required to stay, and that she was welcome to do what she needed to take care of herself. I then said that if she did plan to stay, that I ask that she not sleep because we valued her input and it might feel disrespectful to the other members of the Collective. She stormed out of the room, rejoining the meeting later on, apologizing for her behavior. I told her that she did not need to apologize and again gently encouraged her to engage with us in whatever way she wanted.

Nina was still attending most meetings once data collection ended and analysis began. Despite our now much smaller group of no more than six youth researchers and me, she was continuing to forego active participation in our discussions. Her lack of direct engagement with the Collective members was more obvious now because of our smaller group and some of the other youth researchers were beginning to become frustrated with her off-topic comments or lack of interest in our work. For example, during the meeting in which I was introducing formal qualitative analysis procedures to the youth researchers, she interjected our discussion -- “I don’t get what we are doing or why we are doing this. What is a code? What does this matter” The youth researchers -- most of whom appeared to grasp the basics of analysis and were eager to begin the coding process -- seemed exasperated by her inability to follow our process and started talking over one another to explain to her what we were doing and why. She appeared to regret asking for clarification and told us “never mind”, switching her gaze back to her phone

I was disappointed that she was not following our process and that the other youth researchers were not showing her more empathy. I was also feeling the pressure to follow the pace of other young people and thus did not push us to address Nina’s questions more fully.

Unsurprisingly, shortly after that meeting, Nina reached out to tell me that she needed to focus on her own projects and that she might not attend our meetings for a while. I told her I supported her decisions and invited her to join us again if and when she was ready.

In the last three weeks of our project, after several weeks of not attending meetings, Nina reached out to Terry and a few of the other actively engaged youth researchers to say that she wanted to re-join our process, but was hesitant to re-engage after having missed several weeks. She further explained that she and Marcos had broken up, that she was lonely, and that she wanted to be a part of the Collective again. The other youth researchers were skeptical of her interest in re-engaging, fearing that she was coming back to take credit for work she had not done, i.e. “steal the spotlight”. I encouraged them to give her a chance -- stressing that she was looking for support and that she was a part of our work, even if she had not been as engaged as others. Reluctantly, they welcomed her back and she attended our final two meetings and supported our final presentation. Nina’s re-engagement in our process seemed to stem from her need for social support following her breakup with Marcos. I was fine with that – a goal of our work was to provide support to one another. I was hopeful, however, that she also re-engaged because she saw participation benefits beyond social support, such as research and leadership skill development and helping to improve age-out policies at the organizations she frequented.

After we had presented our findings and stopped our regular meetings, I decided to return to my role as weekly youth program volunteer at the Agency. On my first night back, I was paired with Nina to make dinner. Cooking for twenty or more young people is an involved process, often lasting two or more hours, giving us plenty of time to talk. We started with casual conversation, Nina telling me about the different things she was up to – her new job and enrolling in community college courses. I was excited to hear about the promising things she had

going on. She then turned the conversation to our project – my ears perking up, hoping that she would share feelings about re-engaging in the project near the end. “I’m glad I came back at the end, but I do think the whole thing was kind of stupid. Like we just talked all the time. What were we doing?” she said. I replied calmly and empathetically, “Ok. I hear you. Would you tell me more about why you felt like that? What didn’t you like about the process?” She began to explain that while she “got it”, a lot of what we were doing seemed to go nowhere. I nodded, validating her comments, encouraging her to continue to share. As I was mentally kicking myself for not spending more time making sure we were all “on the same page” throughout our process, she dropped what felt like a bomb,

Also, I’ve been doing some thinking. I’ve done the math. You really don’t get that much money from this project unless you go to every session. Basically, we got 20 bucks a week for like 15 or so weeks and that’s *if* you go to all of the meetings. That’s only a couple hundred dollars. *You* get a PhD and now you’re going to earn lots of money off of this project. We don’t really get anything but a little bit of money. [Paraphrased]

I was shocked and unsure how to respond. The money I provided was partially grant-funded, but for the most part, came out of my own pocket. I could not imagine how I would have paid more than what I did (which was already difficulty to do) or not paying them at all – which I considered before I received the grant. I had been very open with the youth researchers that I was paying what I could afford and that of course I wished I could get more grant money to either increase the incentive or lengthen our work (I attempted additional grants, but was unsuccessful in getting them). Because I had heard from several of the youth researchers that \$20 a session was very fair relative to many of the other jobs they are offered, I had not questioned whether the amount seemed inappropriate relative to my future gains (though, in hindsight, of course it is). I mulled this over in my mind for a few moments, fighting back tears, Nina waiting for me to respond to what she seemed to know would make me upset. After a few minutes, I responded.

What I said is now mostly a blur, but was in the vain of, “I do get a PhD. You’re right. I thought I was doing this project the right way, so that y’all did not feel used or taken advantage of. I had no idea you felt this way. I wish I could have paid you more money. My whole goal as a researcher is to work with young people, not use them. I had no idea. I’m sorry”. She quickly responded, “Are you mad?” (she asked this several times). “No”, I said, “I’m just sad. I’m really, really sad that you feel this way. I’m in shock that you feel used. I don’t know what to do”. I sucked back my tears, attempting a neutral expression and continued to reassure her that I was not mad. We resumed cooking, her asking periodically if I was mad, me reassuring her that I was not and that her candor was appreciated. I kept my composure until I left the building. Once several blocks away from the Agency, I cried.

I tried to explain away Nina’s feelings for a while. “Maybe she doesn’t get it” I thought; “maybe if she had been more engaged in our meetings, she would have seen the value in them”. I knew that at least some of the youth, particularly those who were engaged throughout our process, would disagree with her sentiment – several of them attended every meeting, every “supplementary meeting”, and facilitated focus groups and interviews, each earning them several hundred dollars, adding lines of experience to their resume, and learning how to help other young people who are aging-out in the process. Some indicated that our project was a game-changer in terms of making extra cash in a constructive environment and helping build a path to meaningful employment. Their perceived benefits from our process, however, did not change the fact that Nina perceived few. How could I consider the project even mildly “successful” if one person felt outright used in exchange for a “few hundred bucks”? I was at a loss. Questioning my approach, questioning our process, questioning the utility of YPAR overall. I began to see the entire process as a failure. Everywhere I looked in my field notes, in my memories, all I saw

were the things that went wrong. I decided that I had failed the young people, myself, and PAR in general.

4.7 Conclusion: The False Dichotomy of Failure *or* Success in Youth Participatory Action Research

For several months, I was quite certain of my failure to facilitate a successful project. Eventually, however, I forced myself to dig deeper in my analysis of our process and look more closely and subsequently critically at what had occurred. As I pushed myself to juxtapose the “missteps” with the “wins” – no matter how small – I began to see the overall process not as a failure, but rather one characterized by highs and lows, one with different meaning and utility for different members of our Collective and one which pushed, at a minimum, me to grow as a scholar. I now see the “gray” rather than only the black and white of the process, something that others’ too, have documented in their PAR processes. For example, Guisahrd (2009, p. 86) recounts the “fluid, sometimes incoherent, sometimes harmonious” process of a PAR project. Reframing my critique of the process as a total failure to one which was characterized by various outcomes, some positive and some negative, has allowed me to see it more holistically. The “failures” cannot be considered in isolation, rather, they are part of a larger learning process which occurred among all members of our Collective.

There are processes I plan to attend to more closely in future participatory action research, including pacing our work so that all partners are working toward a shared goal and with similar expectations for how that goal will be achieved. If that means more talking and less “doing”, then I plan to encourage talking. Perhaps more talking in our project would have led to more sustained engagement and a more mutually beneficial praxis. I also plan to be more open to supporting creative and novel methods in PAR projects. That may mean that rather than having

“ownership” of the data, I will be a participant-observer, supporting young people in their work and consulting on research design and data collection, not requiring that those aspects of the study are subject to my institution’s IRB. I also hope to be more responsive to critical points in the process in real-time, rather than hoping they work themselves out so that we can move forward with our other plans.

Several of the issues I address in this chapter have been discussed and avoided (or, addressed) through a lengthy process of co-learning, listening, and attention to the power dynamics inherent in research – even those present in PAR (e.g., Hebert-Beirne et. al., 2016; Muhammad et al., 2015). Integral to scholars’ ability to avoid or overcome these challenges is a clear consideration of the process of developing a mutually beneficial, equitable partnership – something which does not happen overnight – and attention to shared and divergent goals. Indeed, Muhammad et al. explain that what mattered more than the social identities of the academics and the community members in their community-based participatory research was “collective perspective on the work, our cross-cultural communication and proxy trust of relationships”. This rang true for our project as well -- the lack of shared social identities between the youth researchers was rarely a source of tension (despite my concerns that it would be). The biggest divider, it seems, was the lack of “collective perspective on the work”, something which we may have avoided had we spent more time critically discussing our shared goals and our mutual gains.

5 CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I presented three main chapters based on a YPAR project about how young people experience aging-out of queer youth services. To study aging-out, as well as the experience of service utilization, I partnered with 11 youth patrons from the LGBTQ community-based organization, the Agency. I entered this project certain that our participatory action process would be characterized by a mutually beneficial praxis. I hoped, though was nowhere near certain, that the process would also produce “good” data. By “good” I mean that the data and interpretations are credible (we thoroughly attended to issues of validity, reliability, and triangulation in our analysis processes, as did I during independent analysis; Patton, 1999) and that they help answer our researcher questions. I also mean that they not only support, but also provide new insights into issues affecting queer, poor, low-income, and, or homeless, young people of color and how they experience using and aging-out of services.

5.1 **Findings Summary and Future Directions**

The findings presented in this dissertation support and extend others’ work about the marginalization of queer youth of color in gay enclaves and the challenges in participatory action research processes. Chapter 2 provided qualitative insight into the experience of young people who are accessing LGBTQ community-based youth programming in Boystown. The findings highlighted the ways in which young people are subject to community policing -- both by community residents and nonprofits -- in service of maintaining a culture of homonormativity. They also demonstrated how young people are engaging in acts of resistance against a culture which aims to “other” and encourage policing of their behavior and bodies.

Despite similar research on the marginalization of queer people of color (QPOC) (e.g., Daniel-McCarter, 2012; Rek, 2009; Rosenberg, 2017; Kanai & Kenttamaa-Squires, 2015), there

is a need to elucidate the ways in which nonprofits facilitate marginalization and maintain homonormativity. Two examples of studies which might be instructive for scholarship on this topic are Ward (2003, 2008) and Rosenberg's (2016) ethnographic work in gay enclaves.

Through sustained engagement at the Center, including serving as a member of the organization's board of directors, Ward (2003, 2008) witnessed Center leaders' attempts to change the organization's non-inclusive reputation, such as hiring of staff and leadership of color. The Center's failing, Ward determined, was not only in its majority White members but, paradoxically in its efforts to promote diversity, which were viewed as tokenizing and internally criticized as promoting "the culture of 'white corporate America'" (2008, p. 565). Using autoethnography, Rosenberg (2017) documented their experience as a social service provider witnessing the policing of queer youth of color in Chicago's Boystown. Rosenberg recounts being asked by a fellow staff member at a nonprofit "clothing swap" to closely monitor youth patrons for stealing. They also describe witnessing the placement of a "no loitering" on the front of an LGBTQ social service agency in the heart of the neighborhood -- an act directed to keep queer youth of color from "hanging-out" in front of the building.

Both Ward (2003, 2008) and Rosenberg (2017) identified key issues which contribute to a culture of homonormativity and marginalization of QPOC in LGBTQ organizations. Additional studies like these, employing ethnographic methods, may be useful in explicating a path towards organizational-level challenging and eventually dismantling, as opposed to upholding, homonormativity.

Chapter 3 added to an almost non-existent body of literature on how LGBTQ youth program-users move through "emerging adulthood", out of services, and into a mostly unsupported "adulthood". The lack of literature on aging-out of LGBTQ counter-publics,

including community-based services, coupled with our findings about how young people experience aging-out, make a strong case for continued scholarship on the topic. Our study demonstrated that age-based service delivery policy does not align with the needs and developmental stage of youth patrons, who often feel pushed out of services before they are ready and without viable “adult” alternative resources. Therefore, there is a need to explore alternatives to age-based service delivery models. If these alternatives do not exist, perhaps there is an opportunity to implement a policy which delivers services, not on age, but on developmental stage (as suggested by some of our participants), and to assess if outcomes are improved for young people who gradually develop out of services.

Chapter 4 presented my insights into the process of engaging in a participatory action research project with young people, highlighting the complexities of the process and addressing critical points in the work. Though there is a growing body of literature on the process of PAR/CBPR, the pitfalls of the process are often hidden among praises of the approach and exemplars of PAR projects. I do believe that “wins” should be celebrated within the PAR process literature, but after reading dozens of articles on PAR, engaging in other scholars’ PAR projects, and spending more than a year conceptualizing the process for this dissertation, I still was not prepared for the challenges that I would face leading a PAR project. This may mean that doctoral students should not engage in PAR for their dissertation -- the stakes are too high, the timeline too short, and their experience too limited. This may also mean that other scholars should be more forthcoming (or continue to be) with their challenges and discuss the ways in which they found the academy to enact barriers to a mutually beneficial praxis.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A*Youth Researcher Candidate Evaluation Form***CANDIDATE NAME – FIRST, LAST:**

PREFERRED GENDER PRONOUNS				
INTEREST IN POSITION	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	CAN'T DETERMINE
ABLE TO COMMIT TO ATLEAST 80% OF SESSIONS (12)	YES	MAYBE	NO	CAN'T DETERMINE
EXPERIENCE PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH PROJECTS	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	CAN'T DETERMINE
STRENGTHS				
WEAKNESSES				

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Guide

Date of Focus Group:			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
FG location:								
Focus Group Moderator's Name:								
Assistant Moderator's Name:								
Observer/Note Taker's Name:								
Number of Participants:			<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>				
Time of Focus Group:			Start <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>			End <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>		

Thank you for participating in this discussion today. We are talking to groups of people to learn about aging-out of LGBTQ youth services in and around Chicago and what life is like after aging-out.

We are doing this to produce some new information that may be helpful to better understand how people experience aging-out of LGBTQ youth services and how to support youth as they begin the age-out process.

We are interested in knowing about what you think about what it's really like to age out of LGBTQ youth services and how things are for you now that you've aged-out. Please feel free to state your thoughts. We will not share personal information that can identify you. We are interested in your thoughts and perceptions. There are no right or wrong answers.

This is a focus group discussion. A focus group is led by a moderator, or moderators, around a set of questions. I have the set of questions here in front of me to help guide the conversation. We ask your permission to record the conversation so that we can review the recording later and identify themes that emerged within this focus group and across the other focus groups we will be conducting. In addition to the use of digital recorders my colleague(s) here [name(s) of Assistant Moderator(s)] may be taking some notes so that we can remember the conversation better later. As I stated before, we will not use your name or any other identifiers that you share today. We appreciate your interest in being here today.

Guidelines for FG:

For a focus group to go well we ask that:

APPENDIX B (continued)

- ✓ Only one person speaks at the time (best for audio recording quality)
- ✓ We respect all opinions (it's unlikely we will all agree on everything)
- ✓ There is no right or wrong answers or opinions
- ✓ Please respect one's privacy
- ✓ Anything else we should add to our guidelines that I did not mention?

Any questions or comments before we begin? [*wait for questions*]

Great; let's get started. I'm going to turn on the recorder now. I'll let you know when I turn it off at the end of our discussion as well.

Turn digital recorders on.

Ice Breaker

Let's begin by introducing ourselves. Would you please share with the group your first name, your preferred gender pronouns, and one of your favorite features of the city or neighborhood where you grew up?

Questions

1. How do you feel about LGBTQ-friendly or LGBTQ-specific services for youth?

Probes:

- a. Which services do you have positive opinions about? Why?
- b. Which ones do you have less than positive opinions about? Why?

2. How was it for you when you aged-out of services?

Probes:

- a. How did you prepare for aging-out, if at all?
- b. How did the programs or services support you in aging-out?
3. How did your self-motivation change, if at all, after you aged-out of services?
4. How did staff or policies at the organizations help or hinder your aging-out process?
5. How would you feel about recommending LGBTQ-friendly services to your friends or family?

Probes:

- a. Which ones would you recommend? Why or why not?
6. Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination when you were accessing youth or adult LGBTQ-friendly services? What was that experience like?

Probes:

- a. What is the role of racial/ethnic discrimination in these experiences?
- b. What is the role of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in these experiences?
- c. Have you experienced any form of discrimination when accessing services that were not specifically "LGBTQ-friendly"?
7. Imagine that you have a chance to sit down with the executive director of an LGBTQ social service agency in Chicago and they want to know how to update their policies for their youth program. Specifically, they ask for your help decide who can use services and until what age, if any. What are some things you would want to tell them to consider in their new policy?

Probes:

- a. How would age be a factor in usage?
- b. What other elements would be important to consider for the updates in the policies?
8. What else would you like to share with us today about your experience aging-out or your thoughts about life after aging-out?

APPENDIX C

Focus Group Participant Socio-Demographic Survey

This brief survey of 15 questions is intended to help us understand some basic descriptive information about the people who take part in the focus group discussions for our project. Your individual responses will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team and will not be tied to your individual contributions during the focus group discussion.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability by writing in (where appropriate), circling, and/or placing an “X” next to your answers.

1. **What is your gender/gender identity?** _____
2. **What is your sexual orientation?** _____
3. **How old are you?** _____
4. **What is your race and/or ethnicity?** *Check all that apply*

<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Latino	<input type="checkbox"/> South Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Black	<input type="checkbox"/> Jewish
<input type="checkbox"/> African American	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not wish to be identified by race/ethnicity
<input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian	<input type="checkbox"/> Unsure
<input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Listed, <i>Please write-in your response:</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> White	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Polynesian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Native American	
5. **Do you have children?** (Note: children do not have to be living with you or in your care to answer “yes” to this question. “Children” includes both biological and adopted children)
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure
6. **Do you have health insurance of any kind?**
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure
7. **In the past year, have you used any LGBTQ-friendly healthcare services in or near Chicago?**
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Unsure

APPENDIX C (continued)

8. In the past year, have you used any LGBTQ-friendly social services in or near Chicago?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

9. What is the highest grade or level of formal education you have completed?

Select one answer

- ☐ Less than high school graduate
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ College graduate or higher

10. Are you currently?

Select all that apply

- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Out of work for more than 1 year
- ☐ Out of work for less than 1 year
- ☐ A homemaker
- ☐ A Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Unable to work

11. In general, would you say your health is....

Select one answer

- ☐ Excellent,
- ☐ Very Good,
- ☐ Good,
- ☐ Poor, or
- ☐ Very Poor?

12. Compared to other people about your age, how would you describe your health in general?

Select one answer

- ☐ Worse than average
- ☐ About average
- ☐ Better than average

13. Do you identify as religious and/or spiritual?

- ☐ Yes, *please write in what you call your religion and/or spirituality (if anything):* -

- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

14. In a few words, or 1 sentence, how would you describe your gender expression?

(Gender expression can include your physical appearance, style of dress, mannerisms, body language, and/or the way you talk).

APPENDIX C (continued)**15. What government or social services/supports have you used in the past year?***Select all that apply*

- ☐ Medical
- ☐ Mental health
- ☐ Economic/financial
- ☐ Job/employment
- ☐ Phone/computer
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Other, *please specify:*

APPENDIX D

Individual/Key Informant Interview Guide

Date of Interview:		<table border="1"> <tr> <td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </table>												
Interview location:														
Interviewer's Name:														
Assistant Interviewer's Name:														
Time of Interview	Start			_ _ : _ _		End		_ _ : _ _						

[Introduction]

Begin with interviewer(s) providing their names, preferred gender pronouns and their role as youth researchers on a project about aging-out of LGBTQ youth services.

Ask the interviewee for their name, PGPs, and role in providing LGBTQ social services.

Share the following information with the interviewee:

We are / I am an LGBTQ youth going through aging-out experiences, which is why we are / I am interested in collecting information about aging-out of LGBTQ youth services. As someone who has provided services to LGBTQ youth either in a professional or volunteer capacity, we / I believe that you can provide insight on how young people are prepared for and/or supported by social services and how they experience aging-out. This interview is for you to express your thoughts and opinions freely, and we are / I am here to record these - not tell you what to say.

We / I will not share personal information that can identify you. We are / I am interested in your thoughts and perceptions. There are no right or wrong answers.

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin? *[wait for questions]*

[Begin Recording]

Great; so let's get started. I'm going to turn on the recorder now. I'll let you know when I turn it off at the end of our conversation as well.

Turn digital recorders on.

Ask interviewee to again state their name, PGPs, and role as a social service provider, if any.

1. I'd like to start with learning a little bit about you. Can you tell me about your present or former work or volunteer experience within the LGBTQ community?

APPENDIX D (continued)

Now let's move to talking about youth LGBTQ services.

2. What do you think are the benefits of having LGBTQ youth services in Chicago?
3. What are some of the drawbacks?
4. How are youth prepared for “aging-out” of services?
5. What are some of the programs supports, or strategies that you are aware of that help youth prepare for “aging-out”?

Probe/follow up question

- a. How do youth benefit from available services?
- b. How do youth learn about services?
- 6.
7. What needs to change or be available to better support youth as they age-out?
8. How does self-motivation change, if at all, after youth aged-out or prepare for aging-out of services?
9. How do staff or organization policies help or hinder the aging-out process?
3. Do LGBTQ people experience discrimination when they are accessing youth or adult LGBTQ services? If yes, what types of discrimination do they experience?

Probe/follow up question

- a. What is the role of racial/ethnic discrimination in these experiences?
- b. What is the role of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in these experiences?
- c. How is it different for people to use LGBTQ-friendly services versus services that are not specific to the LGBTQ community?
4. Imagine that you have a chance to sit down with the executive director of an LGBTQ social service agency in Chicago and they want to know how to update their policies for their youth program. Specifically, they ask for your help deciding who can use services and until what age, if any and what other programs or policies need to be in place if any. What are some things you would want to tell them to consider in their new policies and future plans?

Probe/follow up question

- a. How would age be a factor in usage?
- b. What other elements would be important to consider for the updates in the policies?
5. What else would you like to share with us today about youth aging-out?

Closing Statement/Thank You

APPENDIX E*Overview of Focus Group and Interview Data Collection*

Data Collection Type	Date	n
1) Focus Group	12/16/16	4
2) Focus Group	12/17/16	6
3) Focus Group	12/20/16	6
4) Focus Group	01/07/17	10
5) Interview	01/31/17	1
6) Interview	02/02/17	1
7) Interview	02/02/17	1
8) Interview	02/02/17	1
9) Interview	02/07/17	1
10) Interview	02/08/17	1
11) Interview	02/08/17	1
12) Interview	02/14/17	1
13) Interview	02/16/17	1
14) Interview	2/23/17	1

APPENDIX F

Focus Group and Individual Interview Analysis Codes

1. *'Bermuda Triangle'/'Merry-go-round'* – In vivo code -- When youth are using the same services in the area (using Boystown) and can't get out of the cycle of dependency
2. Conflict in youth spaces -- May include getting aged out early; conflict getting in the way of preparation
3. Intergenerational Dialogue
4. Community Policing -- E.g., Take Back Boystown, Profiling of youth
5. Visibility of Services
6. Benefits of the services/positive services
7. Leadership and staff not reflective of the youth clients -- May be affecting motivation and service utilization
8. GREAT QUOTE
9. Recommendations for improving services and aging-out
10. *When we're talking about creating an environment for others, make sure that others are involved in that process* -- In vivo code
11. Organizational Policy
 - a. Navigating Policies/Rules
 - b. Unclear or inconsistent policies/policies that don't help youth -- They don't help youth or aren't youth centered
 - i. Banning
12. Transparency
13. Staff/Staffing
14. Aging-Out Policy/Process -- Descriptions of Aging-Out Policies or Processes. Can be theoretical/on-the-books or in-practice.
15. Motivation
16. *I was young and didn't know no better* -- in vivo code
17. Service gaps for 25 - 54 year olds -- Use when directly talking about the lack of services for this age range
18. Ageism/Age Discrimination/Discrimination against young folks
19. Inequity in services -- Describes situations in which there are services for only certain "types" of people and not for others, e.g., MSM services/programs but no lesbian services.
20. Human relationships with social services and providers
21. Cultural competence/humility -- Actions, Policies, Practices -- Refers to programs/services/providers' actions, behaviors, policies.
22. *The Belmont Lifestyle* – In vivo code -- People get caught up in wanting to be in the area, party, find friends, chill, etc. instead of using the services that are available to young folks.
23. Nonprofit Industrial Complex
24. *People as numbers* -- In vivo code -- referring to catering to the numbers of people or a group 'in need' rather than meeting individual, specific needs.
25. Discrimination -- overt/direct discrimination or policies that are discriminatory
26. Racism

APPENDIX F (continued)

- 27. Gender Discrimination -- includes misgendering
- 28. Location of services/Neighborhood
- 29. Allies/Allyship
- 30. Aging-Out Resources
- 31. Youth/Young folks experiencing Issues with getting services or assistance from programs
 - a. The Blame Game -- Youth pitted against one another; youth blaming one another for lack of motivation, misuse of services, etc.
 - b. Issues directly related to aging-out -- A discussion of an organizational policy per se, but related to the issues individuals face related to aging-out or aging-out policies that are in place.

APPENDIX G

YPAR Process Codebook

Code	Sub-Code	Meaning/Definition
<u>Participation</u>		Use participation to discuss meaningful participation, i.e., not simply showing up, but actively contributing to the task/tasks referenced
	In designing the research	Youth researchers' participation in research design (selecting methods, instrument development)
	In collecting data (FG or II)	Youth researchers' participation in collecting "youth-driven" data
	In analysis	Youth researchers' participation in analysis of data
	In disseminating findings	Youth researchers' participation in presenting/disseminating findings
	Lack of participation	Youth researchers' lack of participation in aspects of the project
<u>Engagement</u>		Use engagement to discuss a relational situation and interaction with others (present or absent)
	Engaging with other youth team members	Interactions with other youth on the team
	Engaging with me/Jenn	Interaction with me
	Engaging with outsiders on our research	Interactions with others outside of our team (e.g., staff or participants)
<u>Youth Development/Growth</u>		Use to describe positive changes in the youth that are (or appear to be) related to the project and/or participation in the project
	Discussion of impact of research on self	Impact of project on oneself (e.g., more interested in research or helping the community)
	Current plans related to or resulting from research	Plans that will take place in the current time that result from or are influenced by participation in the project (e.g., applying to school to become a social worker or researcher due to new interest in serving the community)
	Future plans related to or resulting from research	Plans that will take place in the future resulting from or influenced by participation in the project (e.g., one day starting a not-for-profit org serving queer youth)

APPENDIX G (continued)

Code	Sub-Code	Meaning/Definition
<u>Power</u>		
	Expressions of powerlessness among youth	Use when youth discuss times or feelings of being powerless or having minimal power over the project decisions or outcomes
	Expressions of empowerment among youth	Use when youth discuss times of feeling as though they do have power over project decisions or outcomes
	Power inequities between youth & Jenn	Discussions of power imbalances between myself and the young people (e.g., I noting that I had the final say on something because I'm the one paying them for their time; times when I made decisions about the project based on my own timeline rather than theirs)
	Times when Jenn took control or exerted power over youth	Use to denote times when Jenn took control or exerted power over youth
	Times when youth took control or exerted power over Jenn	Use to denotes times when youth took control or exerted power over Jenn
	Power inequities between the Agency(org/staff) & Youth	Discussions of the Agency having control or power over issues concerning youth
	Power inequities between academia/UIC & youth	Discussions of the power differential between the academy generally (or UIC specifically) and the youth
<u>Process Challenges</u>		
	General issues related to YPAR approach	Use a a general code for issues with the approach that might not be present in more traditional, non-participatory research
	Recruitment of FG & II participants	Challenges related to recruiting participants for FG & IIs
	Data Collection	Challenges related to data collection (e.g., conflict among focus group moderators)
	IRB	Challenges related to the IRB
	Youth team member engagement	Challenges related to getting youth engaged in the project, including active participation in meetings, showing up to meetings, completing assigned tasks
	Youth team member conflict	Conflicts between or among youth researchers
	Attrition	Losing team members and discussion of attrition generally

APPENDIX G (continued)

Code	Sub-Code	Meaning/Definition
<u>Process Successes</u>		
	Accomplishments related to recruitment	Recruitment successes
	Accomplishments related to data collection	Data collection successes
	Accomplishments related to analysis	Data analysis successes
	Accomplishments related to dissemination	Data dissemination successes
	Discussions of enjoying the process or project	When youth researchers indicate that they are enjoying the work, having, fun, etc.

VITA

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CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND POSTERS:	<p>Felner, J.K., Berumen, T., Thornton, M., Gutierrez, M., Kuhn, J., & Hebert-Beirne, J. (November, 2016). <i>Using Community Health Worker Typologies to Describe the Nature of Community-Based Health Work to Sustain a Culture of Coverage</i>. 144th American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition, Denver, Colorado.</p> <p>Castañeda, Y.D., Felner, J.K., Castañeda, D.M. & Hebert-Beirne, J. (May, 2016). <i>Oral Histories Listening Event: Stories of People's Lives</i>.</p>

	<p>12th International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.</p> <p>Hebert-Beirne, J., Felner, J.K., Castañeda, Y.D. & Cohen, S. (November, 2015). <i>Leveraging Academic-Community Engaged Scholarship with Citywide Health Assessment</i>. 143rd American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition, Chicago, Illinois.</p> <p>Hebert-Beirne, J., Castañeda, D.M., Turino, C., Felner, J.K. & Castañeda, Y.D. (May, 2015). <i>Oral Histories of Adversity, Faith, and Struggle: Providing a Deeper Context to Health and Community</i>. 11th International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois.</p> <p>Hebert-Beirne, J., Felner, J.K. & Moreno, D. (February, 2014). <i>Participatory Community Health Assessment of Chicago's Little Village</i>. DePaul University, Health Disparities and Social Justice Conference, a Focus on Latino Health, Chicago, Illinois.</p> <p>Dill, L.J., Felner, J.K., & Greenbaum, J. (October, 2012). Poster: <i>Supporting Health Professionals Who Work with Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC; Poster)</i>. 140th American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Exposition, San Francisco, California.</p> <p>Felner, J.K. (2010). <i>Interpreting in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse or Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children</i>. Medical Interpreter Network of Georgia, Fall Forum, Atlanta, Georgia.</p> <p>Felner, J.K. (2010) <i>Recognizing and Reporting Child Maltreatment</i>. Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Pediatric Nurses Association Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia.</p> <p>Felner, J.K. (2009). <i>Sexual Assault: Males, Masculinity, & Prevention</i>. Sexual and Relationship Violence Prevention Education and Response at Emory University, Membership Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia.</p>
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