RACE WITHOUT A HOME: A STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF BLACK YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

by

ERIN NICHOLE MURRAY

(Under the Direction of Margaret A. Wilder)

ABSTRACT

As youth who are experiencing homelessness emerging into adulthood, their social and academic outcomes can greatly influence their social mobility. However, very little research can be found on Black youth who are experiencing homelessness and their school and social experiences. While homelessness can create challenges inside and outside the classroom, other factors such as race and gender might also impact an individual's educational and social outcomes. This study used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to elicit the stories of fourteen Black youth ages 18-21 who were experiencing homelessness to examine the complexities of homelessness, race, class, and gender. Participants were recruited from two sites in Georgia that serve youth who are homeless. Through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and field notes, data was collected to understand how the participants' lived experience and schooling experience shaped their current lives and possible future. Critical race theory and intersectionality frameworks were applied to the data to analyze the role of race, class, and gender had on the participants' lived experiences. Results show that 1) participants' academic performances were greatly affected by inequitable resources and opportunities

inside and outside of school; 2) people at school often played a greater role in the participants lives than their family; 3) females experienced housing options differently than males; 4) there was a stigma attached to being Black and being homeless that imposed societal and school limitations; 5) although school did not provide them with needed life skills, they still valued earning educational credentials. While the participants presented some recommendations on how to improve the schooling experience of youth who are homeless, more research is necessary to better address the cultural and educational needs of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness.

INDEX WORDS: Homelessness, Black youth, Education, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, Lived Experience, Narrative Inquiry, Transition to Adulthood

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my participants and all people that are experiencing homelessness.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

APPENDICES

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School serves as an institution to prepare youth for college and for the labor market. For many people, schooling shapes and defines their future. Yet for many youth in the United States who are homeless, school might be more than just a place for learning. It can also be a source of shelter, a place for guaranteed access to free food, or a place to escape a hostile living environment. On the contrary, some youth might view school as a hostile place because of certain stigmas attached to their living circumstances. This perception of hostility might be especially valid for Black[1] youth who are homeless,[2] where school is perceived to present even more challenges for learning and preparation for the future. Although Horace Mann, the pioneer of the American public school system, proclaimed the function of school to be the great equalizer for all students (Massachusetts Board of Education, 1848), the educational and socioeconomic opportunity gap between Blacks and Whites indicates school is not always a place where all students succeed (Kuhfeld, Gershoff, & Paschall, 2018; Leach & Williams, 2007; Musu-Gillette et al., 2016; Olneck, 2005).

Although children from low-income backgrounds might encounter educational hardships, children who experience homelessness often face additional barriers in school (Low, Hallett, & Mo, 2017). Lack of and access to transportation (Tanabe, 2009), loss of

[1] I refer to African Americans and Blacks interchangeably.
[2] Although many studies use the term "homeless youth," throughout this study I have tried to limit the use of the term. Instead I use "youth who are experiencing homelessness" or "youth who are homeless" to place the label of homelessness on the condition and not on the individual.

records (Swick & Bailey, 2004), difficulty in proving residency (Ingram, Bridgeland, Reek, & Atwell, 2017; Stronge & Helm, 1990), and difficulty in proving guardianship, especially for unaccompanied youth (Adams, & Shineldecker, 2014) are just a few enrollment barriers that can cause homeless students' school enrollment to be delayed. Even when students who are homeless are in school, there are few provisions to help them succeed in the classroom. With inadequate finances, students might not be able to afford supplies, technology, or extra educational support and materials (Tanabe, 2009). In addition, Aviles de Bradley (2009) found Black homeless youth often are not informed by the school homeless liaison of their educational rights, and important services and opportunities that are accessible to them. This lack of information can have an impact on a homeless youth's educational experience and make it harder for them to be successful in school.

To reduce enrollment barriers for students experiencing homelessness in PK-12, the federal government and states responded by creating the McKinney Vento Act in 1987. Although more students experiencing homelessness were enrolled in school after the enactment of the McKinney Vento Act (Markward & Biros 2001; Moore, n. d.), educational outcomes for students who are homeless are still not comparable to their housed peers. Furthermore, other educational policies such as zero tolerance and No Child Left Behind have made it easier for schools to push out students. Broadly speaking, push out is when a disciplinary policy unfairly targets students to exclude them from the general classroom (White, 2018), or when they are encouraged by a school official to drop out of school (Tate, 2008). Research has suggested zero tolerance policies disproportionally affect Black students (American Psychological Association's Zero

Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Verdugo & Glenn, 2002). These punitive policies often lead to higher rates of Black students being suspended or expelled, even for minor offenses like truancy. For instance, if a Black student who is homeless is ill, has a medical appointment, has an emergency, or has to work during school hours to support himself or herself but does not have a parent or guardian to provide the excuse, the school may consider him or her truant (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008). Unaccompanied homeless youth are especially susceptible for truancy charges. Chronic truancy may result in the youth having to appear before a juvenile court or being expelled from school. Therefore, truancy charges along with zero tolerance policies might increase the chances of Black students who are homeless being forced out of school (Browne-Dianis, 2011; Carsey Institute, 2016). This practice is unfortunate because education plays a critical role in social mobility and it also might influence how youth who are homeless fare as they emerge into adulthood.

Pursuing higher education brings even more challenges. Paying for college is a hardship many people face but for youth who are already lacking economic means and without family economic support, enrolling in college can be a daunting experience. As college costs continue to increase, Black youth who are homeless will find it harder to pay for college.

According to the College Board, in 2017-2018 the average cost for in-state tuition and fees at a public four-year college is $9,970 while the average cost for tuition and fees at a public two-year college is $3,570 (Ma, Baum, Pender & Welch, 2017). This price does not include room and board, meal or food plans, or parking/transportation fees. In an effort to alleviate some of the immediate financial burden, students may complete the

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, if a youth is unaccompanied or estranged from their parents they may not have access to their parents' financial information needed for the FAFSA (National Center for Homeless Education, 2012a). Fortunately, the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA) signed into law in 2007, allows youth experiencing homelessness to classify as independent students therefore eliminating the need to provide parental financial information. While this practice has helped many students find a way to enroll in school, lack of knowledge of the act and strict eligibility criteria continue to impede Black youth experiencing homelessness from access to higher education. If Black students, especially those who are homeless, are not receiving information from counselors to help advance their education, then policies are still ineffective.

Once Black students are enrolled in college, the pathway to graduation continues to be paved with a myriad of issues. One main issue is housing (Hallett, 2010). Because many dormitories close for holidays and summer breaks, this can leave youth who are already facing housing instability with very few options during those times. In addition, it can be very difficult to work full time and balance the demands of college (Ma, Baum, Pender & Welch, 2017), but many youth who are experiencing homelessness may not have much of a choice. Because of discriminatory practices, there are fewer employment opportunities for Black people. Ten and a half percent of Black college students actively seeking employment cannot find jobs whereas only 5.7% of White college students actively seeking employment cannot find employment (The JBHE Foundation, Inc, 2006). These types of economic and employment racial disparities continue to act as a barrier for Black peoples' financial well-being. Equally important, when Black homeless

students receive financial assistances in the form of loans, it puts them at a higher debt risk if they are unable to complete college (Jackson & Reynolds, 2013). And even when they do graduate from college, research has found most people from low socioeconomic backgrounds will still earn less and have lower occupational status than graduates from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Walpole, 2003).

While policies have been put in place to ease the educational challenges for homeless children and youth, without examining racial inequities Black youth still struggle to gain the educational credentials needed to secure social and economic mobility. This is unfortunate because education plays a critical and crucial role in how homeless youth fare as they emerge into adulthood.

Background

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of students entering classrooms without housing stability. Children and youth have become the fastest growing homeless subpopulation in the U. S. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009a). It is difficult to know exactly how many youth are homeless because some do not report their housing status, some live doubled up with friends and families, and some stay in uninhabitable places. For youth who are homeless without a parent or guardian, otherwise referred to as unaccompanied youth, the dangers of being young and on the street, makes this one of the most vulnerable populations. On any given night in America, 36,907 unaccompanied children and youth are under the age of 25 and are without homes. Primarily most unaccompanied youth are between the ages of 18 to 24. This age range comprises 87% of the unaccompanied population (Henry, Shivji, de Sousa, & Cohen, 2015).

Youth residing in southern states generally have the highest chance of being at risk for child homelessness (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014). This statistic associated homelessness with poverty and in several of the southern states like Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, the risk of poverty is higher due to broken family structure and lower educational levels (Carsey Institute, 2010). Also, Blacks and Hispanics residing in the southern states typically experience poverty at a higher rate than Whites (Carsey Institute, 2010). Georgia, in particular, accounted for the seventh largest homeless population in the nation (Henry, Shivji, de Sousa, & Cohen, 2015) and has the second highest rate of risk for children becoming homeless (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014).

In addition to geographical disparities, racial disparities exist among the homeless. For example, in the U.S. approximately 47% of children in homeless families are Black, 38% are White, 13% are Hispanic, and 2% are Native American (American Psychological Association, 2014; Child Trends, 2015). While Blacks are overrepresented in the homeless population, reports and researchers often fail to mention or acknowledge this disparity. Rarely is the issue of race and homelessness evaluated in the academic literature, especially in the education field. Very little research can be found on homeless Black youth regarding their schooling and social experiences. Research has failed to look at how the complexities of homelessness, race, class, and gender can impact the lived experiences of Black youth in schools and in society. Also, missing from the literature are the lived experiences of Black homeless youth from the southern region of the U.S.

Problem Statement

Research has revealed being homeless during adolescence years increases the chances of an individual experiencing homelessness during adulthood (Simons & Whitbeck, 1991; Tierney, Gupton, & Hallett, 2008). Consequently, the cycle of homelessness continues unless barriers and obstacles for social mobility are recognized, documented, and addressed and solutions are implemented to reduce homelessness. Solutions should also include ways to close the racial and geographical disparity rate among the homeless by listening to their lived experiences and working with homeless Black and Hispanic people in southern regions of the U.S. In addition, policy makers should examine how social institutions, like schools, can help youth who are homeless end the cycle of homelessness. While education will not resolve all problems these youth experience, it is important to recognize how schools might be able to better serve this population. For this reason, the purpose of my study is to examine the schooling and lived experiences of Black youth between the ages of 18-21 who are experiencing homelessness in Georgia. I intend to shed light on how Black youths' schooling experiences have shaped their current lives and possible futures.

Little attention has been given to the educational experiences of Black youth who are homeless. Their voices have been in the margins of academic research. To hear the stories of Black youth, I used a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to present their lived experiences. Critical race theory (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Crenshaw, 2011, Yosso, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; MacKinnon, 2013; Mattsson, 2014)) frameworks will serve as a lens to view the participants' stories. Critical race theory allows for the study to highlight the

racialized experiences of homelessness and how power and privilege creates inequities for Black youth. Intersectionality is used to recognize that although racism is a permanent element in the U.S., other identities such as gender, and class also function together to produce different forms of discrimination that create different lived experiences for multiple minority groups like Black women who are homeless, or Black homosexual males.

Presenting the youths' lived experiences is significant because they are often invisible in the literature when addressing homelessness. Specifically, my study aims to discover how Black youth who are experiencing homelessness between the ages of 18 to 21 at two different programs in Georgia interpret their lived experiences and how advocates can better serve this population. The study is guided by the following research questions:

(1) How does homelessness impact the academic achievement of Black youth in Georgia?

(2) How do Black youth who are homeless perceive their lived experiences in relation to family, school, teachers, and peers?

(3) How do Black youth navigate their status of being homeless within school and society?

(4) How do Black youth who are homeless perceive schooling will affect their current and future lives?

Significant and Purpose of Study

In the current sociocultural sphere in which we live, race and racialized issues constantly permeate our daily lives. Whether it is police brutality against Black skin,

travel bans placed on countries with a majority of people of color, or the extreme disproportion of Black people incarcerated, America continues to face racial inequities. And while there is hesitation to address racial issues in America, there is even more resistance to talk about economics. Even scholarly research is limited when examining race and economics. Hardaway and McLoyd (2009) contend that:

> Individuals who are both African American and economically disadvantaged are doubly stigmatized based on negative perceptions of individuals in both groups. More is known about how race-related stigma impacts people's lives than is known about the impact of class related stigma (p. 248).

The conversation of race is starting to stir but the discussion on class-based racism is basically non-existent.

My research grew out of me knowing personally that schools are not always welcoming of Black students. Although I grew up in a middle-class home, I saw the hidden curriculum and experienced racism in high school. Luckily, I had parental and family support to help me navigate through school and to advocate for me when racist issues arose in school. Having parental and family support also helped me emotionally, mentally, and financially as I transitioned into adulthood. But what about those Black youth who don't have family or financial support as they enter adulthood? Being Black comes with many challenges in the U.S., but what about being Black and on the extreme lower end of the socioeconomic measure, how has school impacted them when they are experiencing homelessness at such a critical time in their lives?

Working with youth who mirrored my Black racial identity, I have seen first-hand some of the educational challenges Black youth encounter. And unfortunately, because

shelters and school personnel are not always aware of some of the barriers that Black youth face, there is little advocacy or knowledge of how to help these youth. In addition, most scholarly research on homelessness tends to examine the educational outcomes of young children (Begg, Levitt, & Hayden, 2017; Cutuli, et al., 2013; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012; Masten, Fiat, Labella, & Strack, 2015; Masten & Sesma, 1999; Mohan, & Shields, 2014; Obradovic et al., 2009; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Rubin et al., 1996) but ignores the impact school has on youth once they reach 18. Research fails to look at how outside factors such as race and gender impacts their educational pathways and lives (Buckner, Bassuk, & Weinreb, 2001; Howland, Chen, Chen, & Min, 2017; Masten et al., 1997; Ziesemer, Marcoux, & Marwell, 1994) making homelessness seem one-dimensional and just a class issue. Hence, the significance of this study is to show the multifaceted lived experiences of Black youth experiencing homelessness during their transition into adulthood so that educators, policy makers, and shelter personnel can have a better understanding of some the hardships and triumphs of Black youth. The study also hopes to encourage educators, policy makers, and shelter personnel to create better policies, especially educational policies that take into account how not just class, but race and gender, affect the lives of Black youth experiencing homelessness.

Context of Study

Many southern states have high rates of homelessness. Yet most studies examining educational outcomes of homeless youth have been in cities such as Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York City, and Washington, DC. As mentioned before, the south differs from other regions because more Black students attend schools in the South, (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), it has higher rates of

child poverty (Carsey Institute, 2010), and it has lower rates of child well-being (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014).

This study looks at homelessness among youth located in Rose Park[3] which is a city in Georgia. In a recent report conducted by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (2015), 31% of the homeless population in Georgia is under 25 years of age. Georgia, which was once ranked 49th in the nation in overall child homelessness in 2010, has worked to improve its care for youth who are experiencing homelessness. By implementing better state policies and planning, Georgia is now ranked 40th in overall child homelessness according to the 2014 report by The National Center on Family Homelessness (Bassuk, DeCandia, Beach, & Berman, 2014). However, the number of children and youth experiencing homelessness in Georgia continues to grow resulting in more homeless students entering classrooms. There were 31,804 homeless students enrolled in Georgia's PK-12 public schools during the 2010-2011 school year and by the 2012-2013 school year, the number increased to 36,934 homeless students (National Center for Homeless Education, 2013). The majority of youth are living in doubled-up arrangements, which means they are in temporary living situations with friends or family due to economic hardship (National Center for Homeless Education, 2013). Academically, during the 2009-2010 school year, youth experiencing homelessness in Georgia were only 52% proficient in reading and 50% proficient in math compared to the nation (National Center for Homeless Education, 2013). Little information can be found on the racial demographics for homeless youth in Georgia, but Blacks comprise 65% of the total homeless population (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2015).

[3] For confidentially purposes, the name of the city where my research was conducted has been changed to Rose Park

In more recent years, Rose Park has become more tolerable of people experiencing homelessness, but the city government continues to be accused of criminalizing the homeless. In a multiple city-wide study on the treatment of homeless people, Rose Park had more prohibitive laws affecting homeless individuals than many of the other large southern cities in the U. S. such as Charleston, SC, Memphis, TN, Montgomery, AL, and Tampa, FL (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2011). Because the majority of homeless are Black people in the city, the criminalization laws largely target Black people.

By choosing to study homelessness, I plan to extend the literature on race, education, and youth homelessness and its impact on Black lives who have been neglected and understudied. Rose Park was chosen because it has the most emergency and transitional housing in the state for homeless youth (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2015). In addition, the majority of homeless youth in the city are Black. As cited by George R. Carter III (2011) "as Black poverty has become concentrated in center cities, so has Black homelessness" (p. 58). Although studies in Chicago (Aviles de Bradley, 2009), Los Angeles (Ellis, 2012), and Washington, DC (Rahman, 2014) have focused on the educational outcome of Black youth, one major difference is that Rose Park lacks the number of youth homeless shelters compared to these cities. Consequently, this has a huge impact on the number of resources and bedding available to youth experiencing homelessness. As a result of the city's shortage of shelters, many youth will go without their basic needs being met.

Georgia is also attracting more low income and homeless youth to the state because of its informal and formal money-making industries. Georgia is having a

growing problem of sex-trafficking. Unfortunately, youth who are homeless are especially vulnerable to becoming victims of sex trafficking. For a state that has over 300 people sexually exploited monthly (Center for Public Policy Studies, 2013; Egan, 2017) and the fifth highest human trafficking cases in the U.S. (National Human Trafficking Hotline, 2017), many sexually exploited youth who escape sex trafficking may find themselves homeless.

Another growing business in Georgia is the entertainment business. Georgia has now become the "Hollywood of the South" (Dockterman, 2018). With nascent dreams, many Black youth move to Georgia to gain employment in the entertainment industry, only to find scarce opportunities which leads to many youths having financial concerns and housing instability.

Definitions

Many organizations define homelessness differently. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Department of Education have slightly different definitions. For the purpose of this study, homelessness will be defined according to the McKinney-Vento Act (MVA, 2001). This is the federal law for educational rights of youth who are homeless. The MVA defines homelessness as a student who "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" (McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act of 2001, Sec. 725). This includes children and youth who double up for economic reasons, live in transitional or emergency shelters, are awaiting foster care placement, live in motels or hotels, and have nighttime residence in a public or private place not designated for regular sleeping accommodations.

The term "youth" has been generalized to include an array of age groups (Moore, 2005). Albeit, the vagueness of the term has made it challenging to classify. Federal agencies and policies, such as the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), the U.S. Department of Education, and The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), define the youth homelessness differently. Hence, the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017) considers the term more fluid than a static age group. Commonly, the age of a youth ranges from 12 (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016) to 24 (Henry, Shivji, de Sousa, Cohen, 2015). For this study, I define the term youth to include individuals between the ages of 18-21 since in most states 21 is the age restriction for the McKinney-Vento Act and it is the period when individuals are emerging into adulthood. However, existing literature may define youth differently.

Other key terms related to the study include:

Child and Family homeless- children and youth who are experiencing homelessness with a family or guardian.

Colorblindness- an ideology used to promote the belief of sameness to hide inequity between racial and ethnic group on the macro and micro level (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2006).

Critical Race Theory- a framework committed to critique racist practices, policies, and laws and committed to social justice (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 2011; Hylton, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005).

Dominant culture- the group that holds the most economic, political, and social power in a society. In America, the dominant culture is that of White, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

Doubled up or couch surfing- sharing housing with others due to economic reasons loss of housing, or similar reasons. This housing arrangement is usually unstable and temporary.

Enrollment barriers- any obstacle or issue that causes a delay in a student's enrollment at a school.

House peers/students- individuals who have permanent residence or individuals that do not fit the criteria of homelessness under the McKinney Vento Act.

Intersectionality- the study of how various identities intersect to create multiple forms of inequality in distinct contexts and over time (Gillborn, 2015).

Meritocracy- individual earning rewards based on their autonomous decisions and actions and moral virtues, such as hard work and effort (Hochschild as cited in Meroe, 2014).

Resilience- the ability for individuals to response positively when faced with adversity, risk, or stress (Moore, 2013; Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, 2001; Stewart, Reid, & Mangham, 1997).

Unaccompanied Youth- children and youth under the age of 25 who are experiencing homelessness without being in the physical care of a parent or guardian (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, n.d.).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth who are homeless often lack additional educational resources, personal space, and might have to take on adult responsibilities at an early age. These factors can interfere with their schooling and learning process. While researchers have argued youth who are homeless value education (Masten et al., 1997; Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004), economic hardships might make it difficult for school to be a top priority. Without stable support from school, community, family or mentors, youth who are homeless are likely to continue the cycle of homelessness as adults.

There is a consensus that children and youth experiencing homelessness encounter more educational hardships and adversity than their housed peers. Federal policies like the McKinney-Vento Act (MVA) have created initiatives to help homeless students enroll in school by mandating schools provide transportation, reduce delay in school enrollment despite limited medical and residential documentation, and through local school liaisons assist youth to ensure they have access to educational services. However, systemic structural barriers and inequalities like racism in schools and low-quality education in poverty-stricken areas, continues to place Black youth who are homeless at higher risk for poor educational outcomes. Despite these challenges, there are Black students who are homeless who do well academically in school. The literature has provided some information about homeless youth school experiences but there is still little research including race in its analysis of homelessness and education.

Homelessness and Educational Outcomes

Studies suggest homelessness can have a detrimental effect on a student's educational outcome. Although homeless youth attend school more regularly since the passing of the MVA, they continue to miss more school days than their housed peers (Aratani & Cooper, 2015; Cutuli et al., 2013; Rafferty & Rollins 1989; Rubin et al., 1996). Scholars speculate high absentee rates might be related to the number of homeless episodes. Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Brumley, and Perlman (2013) found absenteeism increased by 31% for homeless children if they experienced more than one episode of homelessness. Frequent occurrence of homelessness has also been connected to increasing the chances of dropping out of school, especially among runaway youth. Youth who had only one episode of running away had a 10% less chance of graduating from high school, while youth who ran away multiple times increased their chances of dropping out by 18% (Aratani & Cooper, 2015).

Students who are homeless and frequently change schools are at a higher risk for poor educational outcomes (Cutuli et al., 2013; Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004). In a study that compared homeless students who frequently changed schools, homeless students who attended one school, and housed students who frequently changed schools, researchers found homeless students who attended one school had better educational outcomes than the other two groups. Housed students with frequent school changes had lower reading and math scores than homeless students who attended one school. Further, students who were homeless and had frequent school changes had the lowest reading and math achievement scores among the group (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012). Thus, having school mobility and being homeless can disrupt a student's

academic achievement causing him or her to have a higher risk of falling behind in school (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009b).

A large body of research concludes homelessness increases the chances of grade retention. When focusing only on housing status of students, researchers reported that students experiencing homelessness were approximately 5 times more likely to repeat a grade compared to their housed peers (Rubin et al., 1996). Masten et al. (1997) mentioned that out of 159 homeless children ages 8-17, 38% of them had repeated a grade. Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman's (2004) study examined adolescents who were formerly homeless but who had acquired permanent housing. The researchers found even though the students were now housed, they were still 22% more likely to repeat two or more grades compared to only 8% of adolescents who live in poverty repeating two or more grades. On the contrary, Buckner, Bassuk, and Weinreb's (2001) research revealed no difference between retention rates of low income and homeless students. In both groups, one third of the children had to repeat a grade. This finding suggests homelessness may be a risk factor for grade retention but other factors such as frequent changes in schools may also contribute to grade retention.

Many studies have found homeless youth fall along a high continuum of risk for academic problems (Haber & Toro, 2004; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Rog & Buckner, 2007). For example, Rafferty and Rollins (1989) used data from standardized reading and mathematics achievement tests in New York to conclude homeless youth were underperforming in math and reading compared to housed students. Although the majority of housed students in third through tenth grade scored at or above the grade norm on both tests, homeless students scored only 42% at or above the grade norm on the

reading portion and 28% at or above the grade norm on the math portion of the standardized test. This study was conducted before the implementation of the MVA, but other reports continue to show low academic performance even after federal intervention. Two key longitudinal studies support this claim. In Obradovic´ et al. (2009) study on academic achievement trajectory, they found homeless students suffered academically compared to their peers. Examining four cohorts' math and reading performance on a standardized test for three years, results indicated across all cohorts, homeless students scored lower on reading test and math test than their low-income and income advantaged peers. Cutuli et al. (2013) had similar findings in their five-year study. Compared to housed students, homeless students lagged behind on the math and reading assessments. Other studies also reported academic delays (Masten et al., 1997; Rubin et al., 1996; Zima, Wells, & Freeman, 1994).

Mainly the educational focus on academic performance and outcomes has been on PK-12, making the data and research on homeless college students limited. Only recently has homelessness and college received attention in the scholarly literature (Crutchfield, Chambers, & Duffield, 2016; Hallett & Crutchfield, 2017; Ringer, 2015). The passing of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act in 2007 was one of the first federal policies to recognize and attempt to make college more accessible for youth who are homeless. Since 2007, more schools, organizations, and researchers are trying to address and eliminate barriers preventing youth who are homeless from accessing and being successful in higher educational institutions.

It is unclear how many students who are homeless attend college. Statistics from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) report that 33,039 students were

identified as homeless in the 2010-2011 school year (Ashtari, 2013). That number jumped to 58,158 by the 2012-2013 school year (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2014). This number is just an estimate, as many students might not report their housing status on the FASFA form, they may not be aware of the FASFA independent student option, or they may become homeless during the college semester.

One of the earliest studies on college and homelessness was conducted at City University of New York (CUNY) in 2010 (Tsui et al., 2011). The researchers included all 17 of CUNY two-year community colleges and four-year colleges. A total of 620 undergraduate students responded to the survey, revealing that 41.7% of respondents were experiencing housing instability, or living precariously. Of this number, 1.2 % of students were currently living in a shelter. Their findings on the number of CUNY students living in shelters compared to the number of New York City's shelter population revealed CUNY college students were three times more likely to reside in a shelter than New York City residents, 1.2% versus 0.5% respectively (Tsui et al., 2011). A more recent, national study conducted by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab collected data from 33,000 students at 70 community colleges across 24 states. Results indicated 14% of college students were homeless (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017). This figure is similar to a prior smaller scale study they conducted a year earlier that found 13% of community students were homeless (Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Eisenberg, 2015).

The 2017 study by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab was ground-breaking as it expanded the knowledge about college students experiencing homelessness. The study had several significant findings. Compared to their house secure peers, students experiencing

homelessness were less likely to do schoolwork at their jobs, spent more time traveling to school, slept less, stayed in less safe and conducive environments to complete work, and spent more time caring for other adults.

In addition, the study illuminated increased vulnerability of students with certain backgrounds. The authors found 29% of former foster students were homeless, a higher percentage than non-foster students. Several students (4%) had slept in an abandoned building or car and 2% utilized a homeless shelter. When it comes to age demographics, 27% of the students identified as homeless were under the age of 21. In addition, close to 70% of their parents did not have a college degree (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017).

More importantly, community colleges that had larger populations of students of color had higher rates of homelessness. Only 8% of Black students had housing stability while the rest of the Black students in the study had some sort of housing instability. Moreover, 17% were identified as homeless. This is one of the first studies to report national data on Black college students experiencing homelessness (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017).

The same year, Gupton (2017) explored the educational experience of students who were homeless at two community colleges in California. Using qualitative narrative inquiry research, he interviewed four Black students, two males and two females, about their postsecondary educational experience. While he only mentions race in listing the participants' demographic information, two of the participants commented on race. One participant's case worker, a Black male, encouraged him to apply to a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Although he was rejected from an HBCU, his interest in

going to an HBCU continued because he liked the idea of being around Black people at college. He stated:

> *I saw Grambling, Spelman, Bethune Cookman, Florida A&M, Alabama A&M, Morehouse, Tuskegee . . . and Southern. It was cool. I got to hear about some of the history of the schools. I got to check out a battle of the bands with Bethune Cookman and Florida A&M. That was crazy. The lead band people were all getting into it and the bands was playing all these like hip hop songs and stuff…*(p. 201).

Another Black student explained how she had tension with a White staff member, especially her White mentor. After a fall out with the White mentor, she got a new mentor who was a woman of color. The student had a better relationship and connection with her new mentor.

The narratives of the participants revealed that (1) although students experiencing homelessness are invisible in college, for some it is a personal choice to stay unidentified, (2) students may seek educational support and advice outside of the academic institutions, and (3) college provides stability in their life. While the study avoids addressing how racial identity impacted their lived experience, the author acknowledges:

> Strengths based frameworks recognize the assets that homeless students have, but future work should incorporate postmodernist frameworks and multiple critical theory frameworks (e.g., critical race theory, intersectionality, and queer theory). Including these conceptual frameworks would help to disrupt systems of privilege and inequity that continue to marginalize homeless students in higher education (p. 210)

Theories on Academic Achievement of Black Youth

Race also has an impact on Black youth chances for academic success. Numerous studies and reports have indicated disparities between Whites and Blacks educational

outcomes. Several theories have speculated as to why Black students' academic performances are not equivalent to their White peers. While early literature looked at Black students' educational outcomes from a deficient lens, more studies are now revealing how systemic and racial inequalities also influence outcomes.

John Ogbu, an educational anthropologist, used a cultural-ecological (Ogbu 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992) framework to focus on the state of Black education. A cultural-ecological framework examines "the study of institutionalized patterns of behavior interdependent with features of the environment" (Ogbu, 1990, p.122). The theory has two components:1) the system and 2) community forces. The system views how school practices, policies, pedagogy, investment returns and school credential impact minorities. The second component, community forces, refers to the historical treatment of minorities in school and society and how minorities presently respond to schooling (Ogbu, n.d; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The theory considers how broad societal and school factors (the system) impacts the way Blacks see and respond to the world and schools (community forces). He theorized differences in learning styles between the dominant group and Blacks contributed to the development of cultural inversion among Black people. Cultural inversion is when a minority group rejects the dominant group's culture, value systems, beliefs, and symbols and adopts their own. These different practices and preferences are often in opposition to the practices and preferences among White Americans. As a result, there becomes a coexistence of two opposing cultural frames of reference. For example, Whites trust schools will prepare them to get a good education and to excel economically. The values of hard work, meritocratic ideals, and colorblindness lead many Whites to believe that the institution of schooling is fair and

equal. On the other hand, due to Blacks' historical experiences of racism and discrimination in schools (Little Rock school integration, Brown v. the Board of Education, and studies showing Blacks receive harsher disciplinary actions in schools) they often view schooling differently from Whites. Even Black students who have succeeded in higher education with advanced degrees are not exempt from structural barriers that often discount their achievement and produce suspicion of inequities.

Black communities and Black parents realize the importance of schooling but they often mistrust the educational system in providing an equitable education for their children (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Sensing education will not have the same benefits as it does for White students, Black students may emphasize other strategies that might clash with the values of schooling resulting in other nonacademic street activities taking priority over academics (Ogbu, 1987). Ogbu argues Black students might adopt an oppositional cultural identity and reject conforming to the norms and values associated with the educational system by observing street culture. These students tend to underperform academically in school because it is not how they measure success. Instead, things that do not require school credentials, such as being athletic, an entertainer, or drug dealing, are seen as alternative ways of being successful (Ogbu, 2003).

Scholars have found Black students who excel academically in schools may be faced with the burden of "acting White" (Fordham & Obgu, 1986; Goff, Martin, & Thomas, 2007; Murray, Neal-Barnett, Demmings & Stadulis, 2012). Black students who "act White" are seen as conforming to school rules and run the risk of being ridiculed by their peers. Fordham (1988) suggests some successful Black students even adopt a raceless identity. Racelessness is the development of a conscious or unconscious raceless

persona (Fordham, 1988), in other words, the student minimizes their Black identity. Thus, students who develop a raceless identity may use it as a coping mechanism and distance themselves from their Black peers. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, while acting White is associated with school success, "acting Black" is associated with school failure (Peterson-Lewis & Bratton, 2004).

Another popular theory on Blacks' academic achievement is offered by Claude Steele (1992). Steele argues Black students are often underestimated by educators in schools. In addition, Black students' positive performances go unnoticed by educators but educators are quick to notice their negative performances. This creates a rejection of school norms because Black students begin to feel as though they do not belong, which causes them to lose interest and disengage from school. Steele termed this behavior as disidentification. According to Steele (1992) disidentification is when an individual stop identifying with a domain and the domain becomes less important to one's self-esteem and self-regard, or as Cokley (2002) states, the self-esteem of an individual becomes unrelated to their grades. By separating the two constructs of academic identity and self-esteem, the student is able to protect his or her self-esteem in the midst of low academic performance. Therefore, disidentification acts as a defense mechanism to protect a student's self-esteem. For example, if a student has an aptitude for writing but his teacher seldom acknowledges his effort, he may start to disengage from writing and school altogether. The student becomes content with just passing classes and his effort in school is now shifted to another area such as sports or music, where he may feel valued.

Several studies have been conducted to test the theory of disidentification in relation to Black and Hispanic students, as well as White students (Cokley, 2002; Cokley,

McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011; Osborne, 1995, 1997; Spenner, Mustillo, Bryant, & Landerman, 2005). Osborne (1995) studied the academic performance of Black and White students from eighth through tenth grade to test for disidentification. He found that while Black and White students' academic achievement was compatible in eighth grade, Black students, specifically Black males, began to show signs of disidentification around the tenth grade. In addition, disidentification was higher among Black male students than Black female students, leading to the conclusion that gender impacts the onset of disidentification. In a follow up study, Osborne (1997) used the same students' to examine their academic performance between 10^{th} and 12^{th} grade. He also included Hispanic students to see if disidentification occurred in other minority groups. His results revealed Black males continued to have the highest rate of disidentification among racial and gender groups and they disidentified with all subject areas. Overall, Osborne's study found Black males were the only group to exhibit true signs of disidentificaton. Expanding on Osborne's study, Cokley (2002) examined disidentification among White and Black college students. His findings only partially supported Osborne's findings. Cokley found when students' academic self-concept and GPA was measured, only Black males demonstrated disidentification but when self-esteem and GPA was measured, Black males and females exhibited disidentification with academics. This finding suggests that Black males and Black females differ when it comes to the importance of the academic self-concept. The gender difference is postulated to occur because Black males disconnect their racial identity from their academic self-concept while Black females' academic self-concept is strongly attached to their racial identity (Cokley, 2001).

The disidentification theory is not to suggest that Black students do not value education, rather students may disidentify with school because their grades are a misrepresentation of their aptitude due to teachers' negative perceptions and opinions of Black students (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011). For example, gifted Black students may be mislabeled as troubled or emotionally disturbed because they are viewed by teachers as being overactive which can cause students to disengage and not care about school. Thus, internalized stereotypes by a student and perceived bias from a teacher may hinder a student's belief that they can succeed in an environment where they do not feel welcomed or valued.

The disidentication theory is a precursor to Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat theory. Similarly, both theories are based on how the negative perceptions of society affect Black students' confidence about their academic performance. Stereotype threat is how the fear of confirming negative societal stereotypes about one's group membership influences the academic performance of the individual (Steele & Aronson, 1995). For example, Black students who are homeless might know the information on a test but anxiety and being conscious of negative stereotypes about Black students might cause them to underperform because of the enormous pressure to defy the stereotype.

Steele and Aronson (1995) first examined the effects of stereotype threat when they compared Black and White college students' performances on ability tests. Students were divided into three groups. One group was told the test would evaluate their abilities, the second group was told the test was not going to be evaluated, and the third group was told the test was not going to be evaluated but it was difficult and they should try their

best. The results indicated there was not any significance difference in the performance of Black and White students in the non-evaluated groups. However, Black students in the evaluation group performed poorer than Black students in both non-evaluated groups. Concluding the thought of being evaluated or judged on a test can elicit stereotype threat, Steele and Aronson also found that even the mention of race or racial identity on a test can trigger a fear in Black students of possibly confirming negative stereotypes about Blacks. When Black students were assigned to take an evaluation test or a non-evaluation test and had to record their race on the test, both groups performed poorly on the test. This finding suggests merely including a racial prompt before any type of test is enough to activate cognitive availability of the racial stereotype and for it to become a distraction during test performance.

Stereotype threat does not mean the person has to personally believe the stereotype. It is activated through recognition of the stereotype. In fact, highly intellectual individuals and highly academically motivated individuals are more vulnerable to stereotype threat because more pressure is placed on them to refute the stereotype (Steele, 2004; Wasserberg, 2014). Also, stereotype threat is not limited to Black students. Studies have shown that stereotype threat has impacted the academic performance of Latinos, women in mathematic fields, and basketball, football, and hockey athletes (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002; Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2008; Jameson, Diehl, & Danso, 2007; Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999).

Researchers have supported the notion that a strong racial identity is a positive attribute for Black students' educational performance (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Chavous, Bernet, Schmeelk-Cone, & Caldwell, 2003; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry,

2003). Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) proposed a tripartite model recognizing three components of a racial-ethnic identity (REI). The three parts are connectedness, awareness of racism, and embedded achievement. Connectedness refers to how strongly one relates to their ethnic or racial community. Awareness of racism recognizes how racism exists in different modes. Embedded achievement is the belief that success is inherently part of the ethnic or racial group trait. Findings from their study revealed awareness of racism and having a salient Black identity (connectedness) coincided with high achieving students staying on task longer. Black students whose identity included all three components of the REI demonstrated more persistence in academics. Several other researchers have supported the conclusion that a positive racial identity is connected to favorable academic outcomes. Ford and Harris' (1997) work with gifted Black students; Rogers, Scott, and Way's (2015) study on Black adolescent males; Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke's (1998) study on Black college students; and Marsh's (2013) study on twelfth grade Black females at a high achieving school have all maintained that a positive racial identity increases academic success among Black students.

Although theories have been developed to explain Black students' academic achievements, few scholars have considered how race intersects with homelessness to influence the academic achievement for Black youth. The number of homeless Black students is alarming, yet research has neglected to analyze the context and socio-cultural factors that have contributed to racial disparities among the homeless population (Gamst et al., 2006). Without addressing how race and homelessness influences the educational, social, and occupational outcomes of Black youth, the voices and experiences of Black people who experience homelessness continues to be silenced.

Emerging Adulthood

The ability for young people to shift into positive adult roles is of great economic and social benefit to individuals, communities, and society (O'Conner et al., 2011). However, without their proper needs met, youth who are homeless adjustment to adulthood might not be so easy. Many youth may have had to take on adult responsibilities at a young age and are trying to navigate a new stage in their lives. Adulthood may also signify the end of having access to resources and supportive services. For example, youth in family or domestic shelters usually cannot stay pass the age of 17 (especially if they identify as male) and individuals that age out of foster care or become emancipated from foster care may have limited time to access state supported services before their benefits are cut off.

Emerging adulthood includes individuals from ages 18 to about 25. It is a distinct developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, instability of future goals, becoming self-focused, a feeling of in-between adolescent stage and adulthood, and open possibilities to transform one's life (Arnett, 2004). But unlike their domiciled peers who can enter this stage with some form of security, emerging adulthood might not afford youth who are homeless as many opportunities to blossom into adulthood. Most emerging adults still rely on their parents for social and financial support. However, Black children who come from low income families or youth who are without parental support might have already had to take on adult roles at a young age. Before they enter adulthood, these youth might feel pressure to provide financially for their families or for themselves. In particular, Black youth from low income families are more likely to support their family and worry about financial troubles than White youth (Kendig,

Mattingly, & Bianchi, 2014). This early entry into adulthood, decreases youth chances for economic and financial security because they might not have developed the needed resources or support that appears to benefit their peers who are able to delay adulthood (Kendig, Mattingly, & Bianchi, 2014). Similarly, many youth who are homeless enter adulthood without the proper skills, credentials, social, and psychological support needed for economic and social success (Hagan & McCarthy, 2005). Whereas for many people emerging adulthood brings excitement, freedom, and possibilities, emerging adulthood for Black youth who are homeless means having to navigate society facing lack of housing and food security, stressors of poverty, and potentially dangerous environments.

It is important to note that the main characteristics of emerging adulthood vary according to country, cultural, and social class (Arnett 2000, 2006). For marginalized groups like Black youth, their identity explorations must contend against a world that already views them in a negative way. Racism, discrimination and microaggressions can become daily stressors that interfere with identity exploration and place potential limits on Black youth's adulthood. Racial prejudice can impede identity choices. As Arnette and Brody (2008) attest "For African American emerging adults, the challenge is not just to sort out their own assessments of who and what they wish to be but to reject and overcome the negative stereotypes that others hold about them" (p. 292).

Additionally, for Black youth experiencing homelessness, the stigma of being "homeless" places an adverse label on their identity. In contrast to their housed peers who have greater chances to navigate different identities, stigma and limited economics can restrict their identity discovery. For example, financial burdens can diminish their chance

to explore college, or negative stereotypes about homeless people may limit their job opportunities.

To some, being Black and being homeless is a double pejorative. Therefore, Black youth might reject the homeless identity because of the shame and humiliation attached to the word. In fact, in Hickler and Auerswald (2009) groundbreaking comparative analysis study on African American and White homeless youth in San Francisco, California, they found that although White youth embraced the label of homeless and appeared homeless by their dress and hygiene, Black youth did not identify as homeless. Not only did they denounce being homeless, they also tried to make sure their appearance did not reveal they were homeless. Likewise, eleven years earlier Ensign and Gittelsohn (1998), also noted the Black participants in their study did not identify as homeless. One can only speculate that maybe rejecting the homeless identity, is a way for self-preservation, to avoid being stigmatized by their class status and to give them hope that they can transform their lives. As one youth stated when I interviewed him "*I look at it like I'm not homeless cause if you look at it like you homeless, you gonna start believing that you're homeless."*

The Relationship Between Race and Homelessness

Very few scholars have considered how race intersects with homelessness and educational outcomes. To understand the role of race on homelessness, one needs to first understand that historically the narrative of Black homelessness differs from White homelessness in the U. S. While the depth and scope of the history is too extensive for this paper, a brief overview is presented to demonstrate the different historical context among Black and White homelessness.

Much of the literature on the history of homelessness in America is narrated from the dominant culture perspective and categorized into distinct historical periods. The era and public's image of homeless people changed as the social conditions changed (Mitchell, 2011). Guided by the historical research on homelessness (Cronley, 2010; Carlson, n.d.; Mitchell, 2011; Murphy & Tobin, 2011), I have classified homelessness into six distinct periods: the colonial period (1725-1864), post-Civil War period (1865-1900), the industrialization period (1901-1929), the Great Depression period (1929-1944), the skid row period (1950-1979), and the contemporary period (1980-the present).

Many documents recorded from the early colonial years, depicted the homeless population as White orphans and homeless youth living on the street (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Yet it was common to see adults begging for food and foraging the garbage for leftover food (Mitchell, 2011). Whites who were homeless were considered outcast and disgraceful. The Protestant work ethic and religious morals of the colonial period saw homelessness as a religious punishment and reserved for the undeserved poor (Carlson, n.d.; Mitchell, 2011).

Many Whites became homeless during the post-Civil War era, the early economic depression of 1879 and 1893, and the influx of White immigrants who were unable to find steady work (Murphy & Tobin, 2011). Homelessness was believed to be a result of moral character flaws and personal deficiencies. The post-Civil War period became known as the "tramping era" because homeless people were a cheap source of flexible and seasonal laborers for the rising industrial era (Hoch, as cited in Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Mitchell, 2011). The post-Civil War era was also when skid rows began to emerge in urban areas (Mitchell, 2011).

The industrialized era ushered in the image of the deviant, White, native born, less than forty years old, single, physically handicapped homeless person. The perception of a homeless person changed after the Great Depression when the economic downturn forced many people to become impoverished. Homelessness increased significantly as the U.S. faced an estimated 25% unemployment rate (Carlson, n.d.). The Great Depression period saw more homeless families than any other historical period (Tower & White, as cited in Murphy & Tobin, 2011), prior to the contemporary period. As the number of families and children and youth increased, the perception of homelessness shifted from "personal defect" to "helping and aiding the victim" (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

After the late 1940s, the number of homeless people declined (Kusmer, 2002; Stronge, 1992) in America but a new population of homeless people emerged. The skid row period brought many skid row communities to urban areas. The majority of the homeless population was considered to be native born, single, older White males who suffered from disabilities or chronic illnesses (Murphy & Tobin, 2011).

The homeless population has increased during the contemporary period (Carlson, n.d.). Homelessness is often attributed to cuts in federal programs, factories closing, homeless veterans, deinstitutionalization and the growing worker/CEO pay gap (Carlson, n.d.). Presently, homelessness is characterized by a more visible and diverse population. Part of the visibility comes from the fact that a growing majority of people are living on the street without shelter (Kusmer, 2002). Today, many people who are experiencing homelessness are minorities, families with young children, and unaccompanied youth (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

The historical context on Blacks and homelessness is sparse but varies greatly from the dominant culture's perspective. The most reliable sources come from research conducted by Johnson (2010) and Hopper and Milburn (1996). Both find that there is little documentation on Black homelessness during the colonial years partially because slaves were not considered to be homeless because they were provided "shelter" (Johnson, 2010). However, Johnson (2010) argues the large number of runaway slaves should be considered as an early example of Black homelessness. Also during slavery, free Blacks were often suspected by Whites of being homeless because they were "masterless" (Hopper & Milburn, 1996). Although homeless Whites were considered beggars during the colonial time, "homeless" Blacks were considered to be lost property.

During the Civil War many slaves escaped to join the Union Army; however, the number of transient, poor Blacks increased as many who escaped were out of work or received low wages. It is estimated that close to four million Black Americans were homeless at the end of the Civil War (Slaughter, 1969). Although the Reconstruction Era established the Freedman's Bureau to help the newly freed slaves with food, housing, medical aid, schooling and legal assistance, the reform failed to provide economic equality for Blacks. Many Blacks were left without the economic means to provide shelter for themselves and their families.

Homeless Whites and Blacks were negatively viewed as tramps and deviants, but Black men had it harder because they were more likely to be arrested for vagrancy, were discriminated against, and encountered less sympathy from the public (Hopper & Milburn, 1996). The actual number of Blacks who experienced homelessness during the post- Civil War period is difficult to report because most records did not report race, but

according to Hopper and Milburn (1996) available records show that many Blacks were arrested for being tramps, lived in lodging houses, and were transient in cities such as Philadelphia, Kansas City, and Washington, DC.

The Great Depression Era crippled many Americans, but Blacks were hit the earliest and most severely (Johnson, 2010). Records from 1932-1933 during the winter of the Great Depression revealed nearly one-quarter of Philadelphia's homeless transients were Black, one-tenth of Chicago's sheltered men were Black, one-fifth of Buffalo transients were Black, and Blacks constituted one-sixth of New York City's public shelters (Hopper & Milburn, 1996). One reason for the high numbers of Black homelessness is that many private and public agencies and organizations excluded Blacks from receiving services and governmental aid (Johnson, 2010). It was even harder for many Blacks who were living in the rural south as tenet farmers (Johnson, 2010).

As skid row communities emerged in urban areas during 1950 through 1979, little attention was given to the racial construct of this group. Reports cite 9% to 40% of men on skid row were Black (Hopper & Milburn, 1996), yet they are usually not represented in the mainstream history of homelessness. It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that Black homelessness became visible in the United States. Even then, Blacks who were homeless were considered "welfare queens" and "lazy drug addicted Black men and women" and children were often viewed as culturally deficient not only because of their housing status but also because of their color.

In summary, race plays a large role in the historical and contemporary context of homelessness. To truly understand the phenomena of homelessness and address why Blacks are disproportionally represented in the homeless population, the historical

perspectives of Blacks and homelessness needs to be acknowledged. Analysts and researchers rarely look at how race has shaped the current conditions of Black homeless people and by ignoring race, the voices and experiences of Black people who experience homelessness continues to be silenced.

Education and Black Youth Who Are Homeless

In spite of all the research on homeless children and youth's school outcomes, most educational studies have been mute about race. Granted, research has well documented low-income students and Black students encounter different racialized experiences in school compared to their White peers, few scholars have addressed structural and institutional inequalities students who are homeless face. Of the few researchers who have examined race at the primary and secondary school level, Aviles de Bradley (2011) found Black high school students became homeless for various reasons and their definition of homelessness did not always equate to the traditional definition of homeless. Many of the youth still had relationships with their families, who they would stay with occasionally. Therefore, they were more likely to see themselves as experiencing housing distress than experiencing homelessness. And although there is usually a negative narrative associated with youth experiencing homelessness and schools, she found most of the participants in her study demonstrated agency by advocating for themselves at school, participating in school activities, and maintaining attendance at school. Extending the literature on Black homelessness, Ellis's (2012) qualitative study on four African American adolescents between the ages of 14 to 17 found that although participants had high absentee rates, they desired to complete school. However, one school barrier was that none of the participants informed the school

officials about their shortage of housing. This could possibly be connected to the fact that the participants participated in informal activities to survive or fear of child and protective services becoming involved in their lives. Also, unlike Aviles de Bradley's (2011) participants who still had relationships with their families, many of Ellis's participants had inconsistent relationships with their families due to violence, drugs, prison, and death. Mistrust and neglect from parents and family may make it difficult for Black youth to trust adult figures at school too.

In another study that examined Black homelessness and education, Rahamn's (2014) mixed-methods study on Black homeless youth's resiliency found the sample group did not have a strong ethnic affinity. In fact, none of the 94 respondents had a great deal of pride in their ethnic group or had a strong attachment towards their own ethnic group and only about 3.8% felt happy to be a member of the ethnic group to which they belonged. Because respondents answered a survey, it is left unclear why they felt this way. Perhaps, the respondents were focused on survival and did not see race as an issue or maybe they felt less comfortable answering questions about race on a survey compared to a face to face interview. The lack of ethnic pride is significant because the racial ethnic identity theory stresses the importance of how having a positive racial identity correlates to positive academic outcomes among Black students. This implies that if Black students who are homeless are not comfortable with their racial identity, they may not be motivated for academic success.

Critical Race Theory Framework

Systems of oppression ingrained in educational policies, practices, and hidden curriculums continue to have deleterious effects on the education of Black students. The

consequences of marginalization, discrimination, and educational biases are even more harmful for Black students who are homeless. These students contend with racial and class inequality in schools because the cause of their economic status and the conditions of their schooling is significantly linked to institutional and structural racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theorist, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) claimed that "if we look at the way that public education is currently configured, it is possible to see the ways that critical race theory (CRT) can be a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that people of color experience" (p. 18). Applied to the lived experiences of Black youth who are homeless, a CRT framework has the advantage to reveal how these students schooling experiences differ from the dominant narrative that views them as deviant, criminals, and lazy, and CRT can reveal how homelessness is entrenched by race and racism in the U.S.

Before being applied to education, CRT was used primarily by legal theorists. CRT is a progeny from critical legal studies (Crenshaw, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical legal studies were championed as a movement that used liberal tactics to address legal issues of inequality. However, many scholars began to feel it was only making slow progress towards equality (Crenshaw, 2011) because it failed to create effective strategies for social transformation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical legal studies were also criticized for its lack of focus on the main issue of race and racism in the U. S. (Crenshaw, 2011). Many scholars felt that race should be the unit of analysis from which legal issues should be addressed. As a result, CRT emerged to address the significance of race and power inequity in society.

Drawing on the works of Bell (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998), Crenshaw (2011), Hylton (2012), and Yosso (2005), I define CRT as a framework committed to critique racist practices, policies, and laws that subvert social justice. It is an analytic tool used to deconstruct oppressive structures, reconstruct agency, and construct social transformation. CRT acts as a framework to explain race and oppression, but also has an established set of methods, principles, and philosophies that informs the research.

There are some variations to the main tenets in critical race theory, but my study will borrow from CRT methodology in education (Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005) and Delgado and Stefanic's (2001; 2017) CRT tenet of intersectionality. The tenets include that racism is a normal occurrence in the US. Therefore, CRT studies are focused on the centricity of race and racism in society with other forms of subordination. Race is at the central analysis, but CRT acknowledges race intersects with other marginalized identities. Second, CRT challenges notions of the dominant ideology. Ideas such as meritocracy, colorblindness, and equal opportuinity are ways to justify inequality. CRT exposes these ideals as self-interest terms of the dominant group to continue the status quo. Third, it promotes social justice. It seeks to empower marginalized groups. The fourth tenet is the centrality of experiential knowledge; meaning that CRT recognizes, validates, and prioritizes the voices and knowledge of people of color. The use of an interdisciplinary approach is the fifth tenet. CRT uses erudition from various fields of study to place race and racism in a historical and contemporary context. Lastly, adding Delgado and Stefanic's concept of intersectionality shows how multiple marginalized identities overlap, resulting in specific forms of systemic oppression and compliments CRT methodology in education. Solórzano, Ceja,

and Yosso (2000) explain that CRT methodology in education differs from other CRT frameworks in that it:

> simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color. Further, it focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of communities of color and offers a liberatory and transformative method for examining racial/ethnic, gender, and class discrimination. It also utilizes transdisciplinary knowledge and the methodological base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law to forge better understandings of the various forms of discrimination (p. 63).

CRT has been used in educational research to account for inequities found inside and outside of schools, yet it has been underutilized to explain homelessness. Although race has been mentioned in a few studies, it is often relegated as a side note. Only a few researchers such as Aviles de Bradley (2009) and Ellis (2012) have used CRT to show the connection between race and homelessness in education. Race is a critical factor that scholars need to examine if we are to have a true understanding of how to address homelessness. As one participant noted in Kidd's (2007) study on social stigma, "People aren't afraid of me because I am homeless. People are afraid of me because I am Black" (p. 296). This powerful statement voices how race can have a greater impact then being homeless.

Meritocracy

There is a belief that one can be successful in America by working hard. This has been stated so often that it is now viewed as the main road to achieve the American Dream. This American meritocratic value evolved from Thomas Jefferson ideal of replacing European aristocrats to more "deserving persons" with natural talent (Verstegen, 2015). For Jefferson, emphasizing "deserving persons" was a way for White males from the lower (non-property owning) class to acquire social mobility through their intellectual skills. Incidentally, Jefferson's ideal did not apply to Blacks, who regardless of their hard work and intellectual skills could never be deserving of social mobility because of their skin color. Even when slavery was abolished, policies and practices such as redlining, disenfranchising, and Jim Crow laws ensured that freedom and social mobility was not available to Blacks.

Michael Young coined the term meritocracy in his satirical novel *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870-2033: An Essay on Education and Equity* (1961). Although the novel mocked the idea of meritocracy (Celarent, 2009), the term has now been hailed as the American promise that individuals will be rewarded based on their autonomous decisions and actions and moral virtues (Hochschild as cited in Meroe, 2014; McNamee & Miller, 2018). Meritocracy is based on the idea that all people are equal and free to pursue whatever opportunity they desire; all that is needed is hard work and effort. Meritocracy makes it easy to blame the individual for their faults and failures rather than look at systems and institutions that causes such inequities.

Proponents, who believe that homelessness is caused by individual deficiencies, often make their claim on the basis of meritocracy. These supporters fail to acknowledge

visible and invisible barriers that prevent people from advancing in society. Structural barriers, such as institutionalized oppression and socially created hierarchies by the dominant group, prevent some groups from receiving equity and fair opportunities. Hence, hard work does not always equal advancement.

Recent court cases have shown how discrimination can limit Black students who are homeless success in schools. In the case of *Penny Doe v. Richardson (1998),* a Black female was denied access by two schools because she was experiencing homelessness and because she was Black. A class action lawsuit was brought forth to protect her educational rights and the rights of others. The case was settled and the Alabama Board of Education and other local districts adopted new rules pertaining to the education of youth who experience homelessness (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2015). In another case, *Burgin v. Community Consolidated School District 168 (2000),* four Black students experiencing homelessness were verbally attacked because of their race and economic background (Heybach, 2002). The students were forced to leave school when it was discovered they were homeless. Even though two were honor students, the White superintendent remarked to a White employee of the State Board of Education "If we let scum like these into our schools, then pretty soon the whole area will be a ghetto" (Heybach, 2002, p. 28). The children obtained legal assistance which resulted in a settled claim and the students were able to return to school. Conversely, the Board of Education failed to investigate the superintendent's conduct.

In both cases, students were denied access to a fair and appropriate education on the basis of their skin color and housing status. It was the institutions that failed the students. Meritocracy blames social and economic inequalities on the individual;

however, in both cases, it was the students' race and socioeconomic status, not their personal choices, which presented barriers for them in their pursuit of education. With a long history of negative attitudes toward homeless people, the history of racism in the school systems, and the large number of educational and economic disparities, it would be naïve to believe that social institutions are just and fair. Teacher bias, hostile learning environments, zero tolerance policies, and enrollment delays are all discriminatory practices which impedes the schooling success of Black students experiencing homelessness. Consequently, studying Black youth's experience in school and homelessness may be a critical first step toward breaking down existing barriers and improving their educational outcomes, especially given that the amount of connectedness to school felt by students is considered an important factor in positive educational outcomes (Waters, Cross, & Shaw, 2010).

Some people will attempt to make the argument that there are Black students who experience homelessness who "made it" and figure that if they made it, all others can. But this argument fails to address their outcomes after high school graduation. Over half of students experiencing homelessness do not complete college (Hallett, 2010). Money and resources can still limit their chances once they pursue higher education and they often lack the social networks needed to navigate the school system. Therefore, Black students experiencing homelessness who work hard may still encounter racial barriers and inequities that prevent them from being rewarded for their accomplishments. Secondly, others choose to ignore the fact that racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented in the homeless population, much of which is generally caused by institutionalized discrimination. Documented records have shown that Blacks in general

receive unequal access to quality housing, education, and employment (Nunez, Adam, & Simonsen-Meehan, 2013).

One theory that tries to explain Blacks overrepresentation in the homeless population is the push and pull factor. Push factors include poverty, residential segregation, increase in affordable housing demand, decrease in affordable housing supply, housing discrimination, and lack of social and mental health resources (Carter, 2011). These factors push Blacks into homelessness. The major pull factor is access to shelters (Carter, 2011). Research has shown shelters are often located in areas with high percentage of Black and other racial minorities (Baker, 1994; Lee & Farrell, 2004). Carter's research on precarious housed and non-housed individuals' access to affordable housing and shelter pattern supported the notion that high rates of residential segregation lead to inadequate living and overcrowded housing for Blacks possibly pushing them into homelessness. This is just one example of how racial discrimination and institutional racism are directly linked to increasing Black homelessness.

Colorblindness

Along with meritocracy, colorblindness is another ideal that expresses the belief that all people have an equal opportunity for success. It promotes the idea that race does not matter and human beings are all "seen" as equal. Supporters of colorblindness suggest the purpose behind the practice is to be open, helpful, fair, multiculturally sensitive, and treat all individuals equally (Marable, 1998). However, colorblindness fails to examine how race and racism continues to reproduce the inequalities in society (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Omi and Winant (2015) argue America has never been colorblind, instead it has

always been a race-conscious nation entrenched in racism. “From the very inception of the republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one’s political rights, one’s location in the labor market, and indeed one’s sense of identity” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 8). Bonilla-Silva (2014) has coined the term *colorblind racism* to account for contemporary racial inequality that excuses the dominant culture from any accountability and responsibility. Others also contend that colorblindness promotes the notion of sameness to hide inequity between racial and ethnic group on the macro and micro level (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Feagin, 2006). Feagin (2006, 2010) posited that a white racial frame allows Whites to believe that every person’s experience is like the White experience, therefore denying the magnitude and impact of race and racism. Whites use a white racial frame to view issues of race. Colorblindness becomes a way to make Whites feel comfortable when addressing race and racism. The racial frame uses racial stereotypes, metaphors and interpretive concepts, images, symbols, and emotions to excuse racism and make racism seem natural, which continues the cycle of systemic racism.

To demonstrate how colorblind policies plays out, take for example the war on poverty promoted by President Lyndon B. Johnson. After passing the Civil Rights Act Bill in 1964, White politicians felt this policy would “cure” racism in America. All the while racial violence, lynching, voter suppression, redlining, and school inequities continued to plague Black people. Instead of implementing and enforcing policies to dismantle racial institutions that prevented Black people from social and economic mobility or distributing political or economic power to Black people, White politicians ignored the realities of Black people. White officials claimed a victory on racism and

shifted the focus on poverty. This was a way to redirect the American public's attention away from racism and focus on a less controversial topic. And even considering Blacks are disproportional affected by poverty and homelessness, the war on poverty disregarded race and racism.

Literature on homelessness and schools often discuss economic background or income but ignore race. Most academic research is dedicated to focusing on achievement outcomes, policies, life trajectory and other nonracial issues. Two exceptions are studies conducted by Masten et al. (1997) and Buckner, Bassuk, and Weinreb (2001) who briefly mentioned that racism and prejudice may contribute to the disparities found in the academic outcomes of children experiencing homelessness. Other studies seem to treat race as if race is taboo (William & Land, 2006) but class is an acceptable topic when addressing homelessness. This is due to the colorblind approach that tends to ignore race and infers that skin color is irrelevant to the distribution of social goods in the U.S. (Monahan, 2006). Colorblindness gives the illusion that we are all on the same playing field, while ignoring how slavery, redlining, Jim Crow, inadequate schools, inadequate healthcare, and other systemic and structural racist practices continue to limit Blacks economic mobility and financial gains. Blacks are still playing "catch up" in a society that continues to create barriers for social and economic success.

Although the participants in many educational studies on homelessness have been Black, researchers have failed to address the role of race in their studies. The conversation of homelessness continues to be an area in which a colorblind approach seems to be the norm. In a recent study, Marian Moser Jones (2016) conducted a literature review on race, racial discrimination and homelessness. Examining 44,750

peer-reviewed scholarly publications on homelessness from January 1985 to May 2015, she found less than 0.08% of the publications focused on race. The majority of studies that focused on Blacks have been on the topic of health and drug usage (Corrigan, Pickett, Kraus, Burks, & Schmidt, 2015; Gattis & Larson, 2017; Liverpool, McGhee, Lollis, Beckford, & Levine, 2002; Rogers, Robinson, Arroyo, Obidike, Sewali, & Okuyemi 2017; Whaley, 2002). The few scholars who have examined Black students educational experience include Aviles de Bradley (2009, 2011, 2015), Begg, Levitt, & Hayden (2017), Ellis (2012), Gupton (2017) and Rahamn (2014).

Addressing homelessness without looking at the different historical perspectives allows the dominant group to avoid focusing on how racism and discrimination has impacted the lives of Blacks who are homeless. By obscuring race from the conversation, people who experience homelessness are viewed as having the same experience. This presents a distorted view of homelessness. It causes society to believe a one-size fits all approach is appropriate for all individuals facing homelessness. For example, the MVA and other homeless policies do not address race, yet Blacks are disproportionally represented in the homeless student population. While the MVA addresses class disparities in the school system, it does not address racial disparities in suspension rate, graduation rate, retention rates, and tracking/placement rates, all which affect Black students at a higher rate than nonblack students. If schools and other institutions are to create policies to address homelessness, they cannot be colorblind. The policy must consider the fact that race, a social construct shaped by discrimination and cultural factors, impacts the entrance and exit out of homelessness (Jones, 2016).

Many educators pride themselves on not seeing color and treating all children the same but Wilder (1999) has argued that the ideal of colorblindness often serves as a shield to protect White teachers who teach Black students from appearing 'uncaring.' Moreover, the underlining belief is that White is the standard bearer and all students, policies, and practices should conform to White standards (Gotando, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2004; William & Land, 2006). This allows for the invalidation of Black students' experiences causing them to feel that their views and cultures are devalued. As a result, many Black students who experience homelessness may become disidentified from school. If educators fail to consider how race impacts Black students schooling experience, then expecting them to thrive in an institution that does not welcome them may be counterproductive.

Resiliency

A critical aspect of CRT is the commitment to eradicate racial inequality within institutions like schools (Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos, 2014). Social justice cannot occur if people do not challenge the status quo or allow a safe space for marginalized groups to share their experiences. CRT challenges deficiency theories by seeking to empower marginalized groups. Two ways CRT does this are through listening and sharing the voices of marginalized groups and showing the resiliency and strength of racial minorities.

Youth experiencing homelessness are often categorized as having social and educational deficiencies. Numerous studies have revealed they have lower academic achievement than their peers (Masten et al., 1993; Center for Homeless Education, 2012b; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Rubin et al., 1996; Zima, Wells, & Freeman, 1994).

They also are presented with various economic hardships that impedes their education, yet they do not all fall behind academically. Several students experiencing homelessness demonstrate resiliency in school. Resiliency is described as the process of responding positively when faced with risk factors (Moore, 2013). In fact, a few studies have revealed that several homeless students are performing at or above their grade level. Obradovic´ et al. (2009) conducted one of the first longitudinal studies showing signs of academic success among students who are homeless. The study compared the reading and math achievement for three consecutive years between homeless and highly mobile students with low-income children, and income-advantaged students. Results indicated that although the other two groups outperformed homeless and highly mobile students, there were achievement variations among the homeless and highly mobile students. On the reading assessments, approximately 17% scored at or above the national means. The results for math were even higher. About 23% of homeless and highly mobile students scored above the national mean level on the math assessment. Obradovic´ et al. findings were similar to Cutuli et al. (2013) who also studied the five-year math and reading achievement between homeless and highly mobile students and their peers. Cutuli et al. (2013) results showed that about 45% of homeless and highly mobile students met or exceeded the expectation on the math and reading assessments.

Both studies revealed the academic resiliency of many students who experience homelessness, but neither study elaborated on what factors contributed to the academic resilience of these students. However, Masten and several colleagues (2012) have begun to examine the role of resilience and protective factors in academically high performing students who are homeless. Results indicate students with high executive function (EF),

also called cognitive self-control skills, tend to have better academic outcomes and social relationships than students with less adaptive EF because high EF skills help a student plan and stay focused and on task. (Masten et al., 2012; Obradovic´, 2010). In addition, other studies looking at students who live in homeless shelters have found that a positive parent-child relationship significantly contributes to their academic success (Herbers et al., 2011; Herbers, Cutuli, Supkoff, Narayan, & Masten, 2014; Masten & Sesma, 1999; Miliotis, Sesma, & Masten, 1999). Hence, high EF skills and positive parenting may be factors that contribute to academic resiliency among some students who are experiencing homelessness.

The role of external support, especially mentors, has also been shown to increase the chances of a youth staying in school and showing resiliency. In a study on 197 youth experiencing homelessness and natural mentors, researchers found that youth who had a mentor were more likely to be attending school than youth without a mentor (Dang, Conger, Breslau, & Miller, 2014). This is to suggest that having a mentor, like a parent or even a teacher, can possibly strengthen a student's resiliency in schools.

Many youth who experience homelessness overcome many adversities, not only in the classroom but also in their daily life. Resiliency is a needed essential trait if youth are to overcome their harsh circumstance (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011). One way resiliency is shown is by being able to adapt and survive on the street and in shelters. Contrary to the dominant narrative that Black youth are lazy, they are very resourceful. Blacks use shelters more often than Whites (Carter, 2011) and use their networks and connections to find resources and support (Aviles de Bradley, 2011; Rahman, 2014). Although many Black youth may have trust issues with adults (Ellis, 2012), they still are able to seek

relationships with caring adults to help them navigate school and support services (Aviles de Bradley, 2009, 2011).

Black youth who are emerging into adulthood while experiencing homelessness might also have to navigate in the mist of racial discrimination. They contend with interpersonal racism in the form of microaggression and racial aggravations (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Stigma attached to their class status and skin color can make living in America difficult. Black youth may be able to hide their homeless status, but they cannot conceal their skin color. Racial discrimination can take a toll on Black youth experiencing homelessness. Gattis and Larson (2016) report that emerging Black adults who are homeless are more prone to depressive symptoms and suicide when they experience racial discrimination compared to sexual orientation discrimination and homeless stigmas. However, certain protective factors can help them cope with their economic and housing circumstances. Many studies have shown that spirituality can act as a buffer against racism (Rowles & Duan, 2012; Scott Jr., 2003; Walker, Salami, Carter, & Flowers, 2014). Having spirituality, maintaining a positive attitude, and having peer networks helps youth to survive on the street (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn 2007). Likewise, Thompson et al. (2016) found that internal strength, positive perspective on life and external social support led to resilience in youth who experience homelessness. Overall, through all the racism Blacks must withstand, youth who are homeless are still able to use internal and external resources to maintain resiliency.

Intersectionality

Homelessness is not just an issue confined to class and race. There are several other structural powers and combinations of identities that make homelessness a complex issue. And although CRT places race at the center of analysis, the collected narratives of homelessness cannot be examined without recognizing how other inter-connected group memberships and identities contributes to multiple forms of inequality. Intersectionality works in conjunction with CRT to expand on race and examine how other marginalized identities are affected by structural oppression. Similar to CRT, intersectionality also has a transformative component by creating allies between different groups and changing the status quo (Gillborn, 2015). Utilizing intersectionality as an explanatory tool becomes useful in analyzing how different identities intersect to impact different group experiences in education. Intersectionality is described as "an indispensable analytical tool with which one might study and examine the ways in which structures of power interact to produce disparate conditions of social inequality that affect groups and individuals differently" (Cho, 2013, p. 385), or as Gillborn (2015) states, "the term addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time" (p. 278).

Intersectionality emerged from Black feminist studies and critical race theory to address how multiple forms of oppression operate in American society. Originally applied to show how race and gender differentiated Black women's experiences from other groups (Crenshaw, 1991), it has now been expanded to include how multiple marginalized identities and social structures interact with each other.

Intersectionality has been criticized for its misuse of identities. Some critics point out that intersectionality research does not address all the multiple categories of identity. On the other hand, studies have also been criticized for using too many categories leading to confusing results (Delgado, 2011). Therefore, it is important to specify what categories will be analyzed in the study. Because of the limited scope of my study, only race, class, and gender will be examined and included within my analysis. Other marginalized identities would run the risk of having too many categories to analyze.

McCall (2005) explains that there are three methodological approaches to intersectionality: anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical. Each approach differs in how it uses categories to show the intricacy of how identities intersect in society (McCall, 2005). The anticategorical approach deconstructs categories and views categories as artificial and social labels that are used to oppress groups (McCall, 2005). Researchers who use this approach would question the existence of a race or gender category when examining homelessness. The anticategorical approach would use intersectionality to demonstrate the inequalities caused by labeling people as homeless or by labeling people by their race. Intercategorical uses a comparative approach to focus on many groups and strategically uses categories. The focus of analysis is the relationship between the groups. An example would be a researcher studying the inequality of education between Caribbean-born homeless females and African American homeless females in America. Lastly, intracategorical addresses the complexities of multiple identities within and across multiple dimensions or as defined by Mattsson (2014), intracategorical "focus on diversity within social groups and illuminate lived experiences, multiple identities, and standpoints of people who are situated in the intersections of

numerous oppressions" (p. 10). The goal is to show the complexities of marginalized groups lived experiences (Budryte, 2013). To use this approach, a researcher recognizes inequalities exist and would look at how race and gender and class intersect to create multiple forms of oppressions for homeless youth. For the purpose of this study, an intracategorial approach will best be suited to examine the lived experiences of Black youth experiencing homelessness and the multiple identities that increases thier marginalization in schools and in America.

Intersectionality is not just a concept that studies the sum of categorical identities but a way to examine how all hierarchical relations interact on a person's lived experiences (MacKinnon, 2013). Applying intersectionality means recognizing that power structures affect minority identities differently (Crenshaw, 1991; MacKinnon, 2013; Mattsson, 2014) therefore the experience of a Black homeless female will be different than the experience of a Black homeless male. Also, some youth may be more prone to certain types of discrimination or inequalities due to their identity. For instance, females may experience more sexism than males, or as Penner and Saperstein (2013) found in their study, females who are welfare recipients are more likely to encounter racial discrimination because they will likely be perceived as Black, but this does not apply to males. In other words, when people hear the words "welfare recipient," they are more likely to assume it is a Black female than to assume it is a Black man. When examining class issues such as homelessness one must realize "that race and class are gendered, and gender and class are racialized" (Penner & Saperstein, 2013, p. 320).

Race, class and gender intersect to create different homeless experiences for those outside the margins. A closer examination reveals that there are certain issues that affect

each gender differently. Black females experience homelessness differently than their male counterparts because their perceived subordinate class, race, and gender identity operate to assign them to the lowest societal position. Black women have been viewed as angry, hypersexual, loud, ghetto and other derogatory epithets. Without identifying how race, class, and gender overlap to produce stigmas of Black women, one negates how Black women's experience of homelessness differs from Black men's and other racial groups (Amuchie, 2016).

Young black women's story has been silenced in the homeless literature. The few investigations on homelessness and Black women are targeted toward older women (Moxley, Washington, & Crystal, 2015; Washington, Moxley, Garriott, & Crystal, 2009; Washington, & Moxley, 2008). One notable exception comes from Aimee Cox (2009), whose work on African American young women who are homeless in Detroit, Michigan showcases how racialized gender and class-based roles influences but also threatens their sexual identity. The Black women in the study negotiate between diva, thugs, wannabes, and other identities to challenge the dominant and traditional discourse of what a woman should be and to gain status in the shelter, society, and in the workforce. This study shows how CRT's intersectionality tenet gives voice to Black women, challenges dominant narratives, and presents the authentic lived experiences of a marginalized group. As Amuchie (2016) profoundly states "One cannot fully understand the depth of Black women experiences without adopting an intersectional approach and lens (p. 620)."

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As homeless children begin to transition into adulthood, many of their services and programs end abruptly. After age 17, youth are left to fend for themselves or they are faced with systems ill-equipped to meet their needs (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Also, this is the time when youth who are planning on pursuing higher education might face financial challenges, have problems applying for educational services, and lack knowledge on how to navigate the educational system. Moreover, the educational support youth receive in high school will greatly influence how accessible they perceive higher education to be and how prepared they feel for social mobility once they transition into adulthood. Examining how Black youth who are experiencing homelessness navigate the educational process can expose barriers inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the educational experiences of fourteen Black youth who are experiencing homelessness in Georgia as they transition into adulthood.

The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does homelessness impact the academic achievement of the participants? (2) How do the participants perceive their lived experiences in relation to family, school, teachers, and peers? (3) How do the participants navigate the status of being homeless within school and society? (4) How do the participants perceive schooling will affect their current and future lives?

Research Design

The study is a qualitative narrative inquiry study. The research design coincides with the CRT framework by privileging the voices and stories of marginalized youth. Qualitative research seeks to understand the human experience and to understand specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). Unlike quantitative research that attempts to achieve breadth of understanding, qualitative research aims to achieve depth of understanding (Patton, 2002). It allows the researcher to explore the personal experiences of participants, see how meaning is influenced by culture, and connect closely with participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, flexibility of qualitative research allows the study to be open to new discoveries and to adopt new inquiries to better understand the stories of the participants.

Narrative Inquiry

As a paradigm under qualitative research, narrative inquiry is a strategy that allows the researcher to ask individuals to provide stories about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Narrative inquiry builds off the rich stories of the participants to find understanding in how people experience life. Moreover, narratives and life are intertwined. Polkinghorne (2007) asserts that "narrative research is the study of stories" (p. 471). Moen (2006) expands the definition to include narrative inquiry as the meaning individuals give to the experiences through the stories they tell. Yet, there is more to narrative inquiry than just telling a story because narrative inquiry functions as a phenomenon and methodology (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It operates as a phenomenon because it first and foremost is how an individual thinks about an experience. The phenomenon then is the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It is the

lived experience of the individual. Narrative inquiry as a methodology is how the phenomenon is viewed (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). It is the collected stories, the data, and the transmitting of retelling the story. The main purpose of narrative inquiry is to study the way humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Essentially, narrative inquiry focuses on the experiences of individuals (Chase, 2005; Creswell, 2008). Narratives have the ability to bring forward life experiences, in relevant and meaningful ways (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The experience is central to the work, becoming the unit analysis. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr (2010) state "We cannot study experience narratively, that is, through narrative inquiry, without understanding experience as a storied phenomenon" (p. 82). All narrative inquiry must include some type of experience to observe.

Narrative data collection involves information from the participants and the researcher. Thus, the narrative inquirer becomes part of the inquiry relationship (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This reflects the close rapport and bond needed for narrative inquiry. Researchers interact with the participant to co-construct narrative stories (Riessman, 2008). The researcher and the participant become part of the phenomenon under study (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010). Narrative inquiry becomes a collaboration process where both researcher and participant help to tell the stories. The mutual construction ensures that researcher and participant have an opportunity to share their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Narrative inquiry allows for flexibility in the design which can more appropriately address power disparities (Johnson-Bailey, 2004) and give participants' space to freely tell their stories. Coupled with CRT, narrative inquiry caters exclusively to the voices and

stories of disenfranchised persons. The focus centers around listening and respecting their lived experiences. Presenting space for marginalized groups to share their narratives can expose stories that others are afraid to hear but it can also mobilize a movement for social change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

There were some issues of which I had to be mindful when using narrative inquiry as a methodology. Polkinghorne (2007) comments on the validity issues of narrative research. He contends that a possible validity threat occurs between the actual experience meaning and the meaning they tell and connection between the stories and the interpretation of the stories. Participants may forget some of the story or only fragments of the experiences still exist in their consciousness. Stories can also get lost in translation. Although the stories are co-constructed, the final retelling of the story is based on the perceived meaning of the researcher.

Another concern was narratives may be fabricated. Stories may be told out of deception (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Or a story could include what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) call the "Hollywood plot" in which everything is perfect in the story. This can become complicated, as the researcher has to decide how to present the story. Nevertheless, while these shortcomings do exist, narrative inquiry is not about the truthfulness of the story but how we interpret the meaning.

In a study on Black teenagers experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles, Ellis (2012) discussed how the participants were excited to participate in constructing the final narrative. Including them in the whole process not only empowered the teenagers but also gave better rapport with the participants and added to the richness of the final story. The strength of using narrative inquiry with Black youth experiencing homelessness was best

articulated by a participant in Ellis' study who stated, "We are used to people talking at us, not with us" (Ellis, 2012, p. 70).

Likewise, it was my hope that using a narrative inquiry approach would grant Black youth the opportunity to expose others to their lived experience with homelessness. I realized as a researcher I was asking participants to share their most personal stories with me. Keeping this in mind, the very nature of asking personal, intimate details about their housing status meant I had to be open, receptive, and congenial for participants to feel welcome to share their stories with me. It also meant building a trust where they felt comfortable talking about sensitive subjects in the interview session. I did this by being visible at the agency and interacting with the youth and staff.

Narrative Inquiry and CRT

Ladson-Billings (2005) states concern over researchers who use CRT because they often focus more on storytelling than the central idea of the study. To this end, narrative inquiry analysis requires the researcher to produce rich, detailed narratives that places the participants lived experiences in context and at the center of the analysis. The goal of narrative inquiry is not just to tell vivid stories but to give voice to the participants' experiences that describes their interpretation of their lives as they see it. Communities of color narratives often differ from the dominant group's narratives which views their culture as flawed. Mainstream approaches often promote the deficient stories of minorities, leaving no room to challenge these views. Narrative inquiry differs from these approaches in that it provides people of color with a space to challenge dominant ideologies and discourse. In addition, narrative inquiry connects to CRT's fourth tenet of experiential knowledge because as an analytical tool, narrative inquiry gives voice to the

participant and allows the researcher to construct knowledge from the narrative that does not discount race (Milner, 2007; Milner & Howard, 2013). The experiential knowledge of marginalized groups is often expressed through the oral storytelling using narrative inquiry.

Voice is critical in telling the stories of marginalized groups. Narrative inquiry gives participants the space to share their stories. In this space participants are encouraged to name one's reality by using counter-narratives (McKay, 2010). Counter-narratives challenge the majoritarian story by acting as a tool to show a new reality (Delgado, 1989). By engaging consciousness, it can "challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Narrative inquiry and counter-narratives also authenticates the experience of Black people by presenting their reality and knowledge as valid. Both, narrative inquiry and CRT, work to contextualize race as a lived experience. Narrative inquiry provides the detailed, rich descriptions from the participants to understand the role of race and racism that may be embedded in the narratives. Encouraging disenfranchised groups to share their stories is a powerful tool for empowerment. Counter-narratives can lead to healing and liberation; it lets subjugated people know they are not alone in their experience and can inspire group unity (Delgado, 1989). Race and class-based isolation can make one unaware of other people's experiences, but stories can humanize and allow the reader to see the world through other's eyes (Delgado 1989). Naming injustices and informing people about how devalued groups experience oppression has the potential to mobilize people into creating social change (Riessman, 2008).

As it relates to homelessness, narratives are a medium to show experiential knowledge. Applied to this study, the use of interviews and participant observations connected the six tenets of CRT to the lives of the fourteen Black youth. As Figure 1. shows, critical race theory and narrative inquiry overlapped in my study as they both employed counternarratives to examine the participants experiences with homelessness.

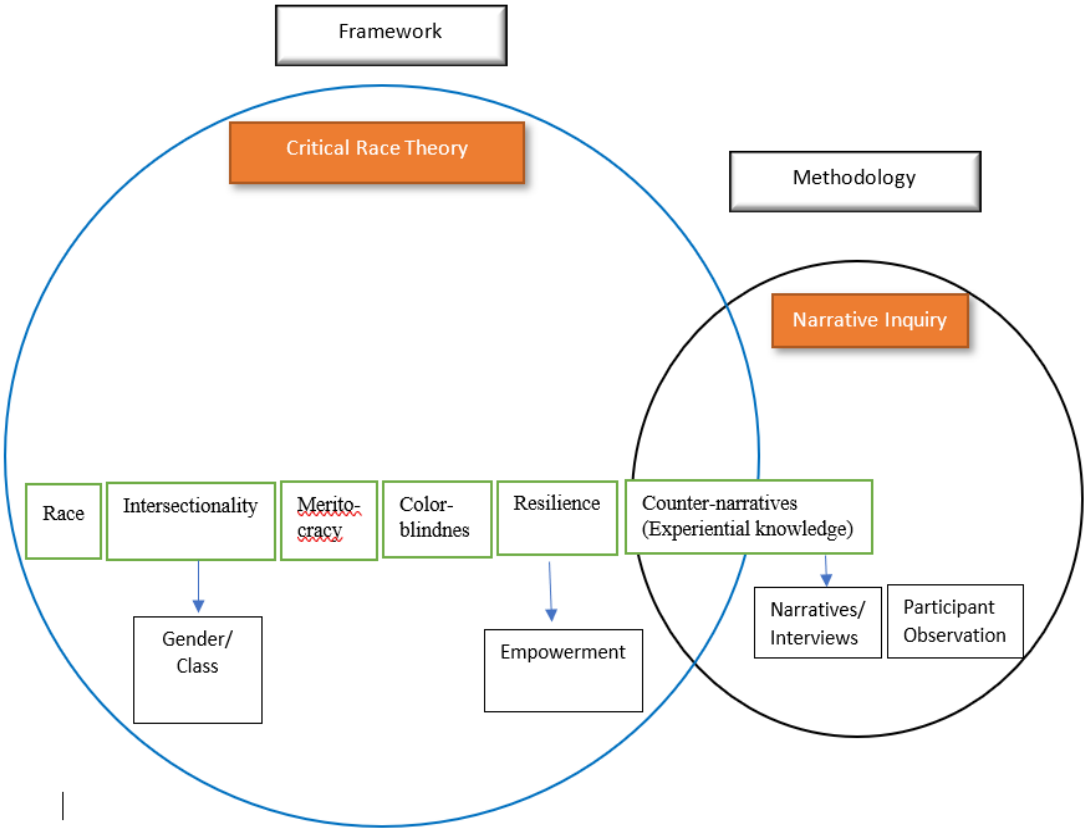

Figure 1: Synthesis of the Research Methods
(shows how critical race theory and narrative inquiry are connected through counter-narratives)

Method

The focus of this study was to examine the lived experience of Black youth experiencing homelessness between the ages of 18 to 21. I chose the age range of 18 to 21 because youth at this age are starting to emerge into adulthood and take on new identity roles. Also, I wanted to show the various school trajectories and school levels at

this age. This age includes youth who are still in high school and under the MVA statue, youth who have been pushed out or dropped out of school, youth who are in college or vocational school, and youth who have graduated and pursuing careers. Participants at this age can provide recollections of their earlier schooling experience because their educational paths are likely shaping their future mobility choices. The information about their schooling experiences can expand from elementary school to college.

Because my study concentrated on a limited age range, I searched for agencies that provided services for this age group in Georgia. I found a dearth of providers. I reached out to two service agencies with which I was familiar. I had volunteered at one of the organizations, Youth Thrive[4]. At the other site, I had previously worked with one of the employees when I was a home counselor for children in a state-custody residential program. Both organizations agreed to participate in the study but before I could begin data collection, one site recanted the agreement without providing any details. While most of the participants for my study were part of the Youth Thrive program, I also recruited from a local four-year college that provides support for college students who are experiencing homelessness. Figure 2 shows the research strategy flowchart.

[4] All names of participants, organizations, schools, and locations have been given pseudonym

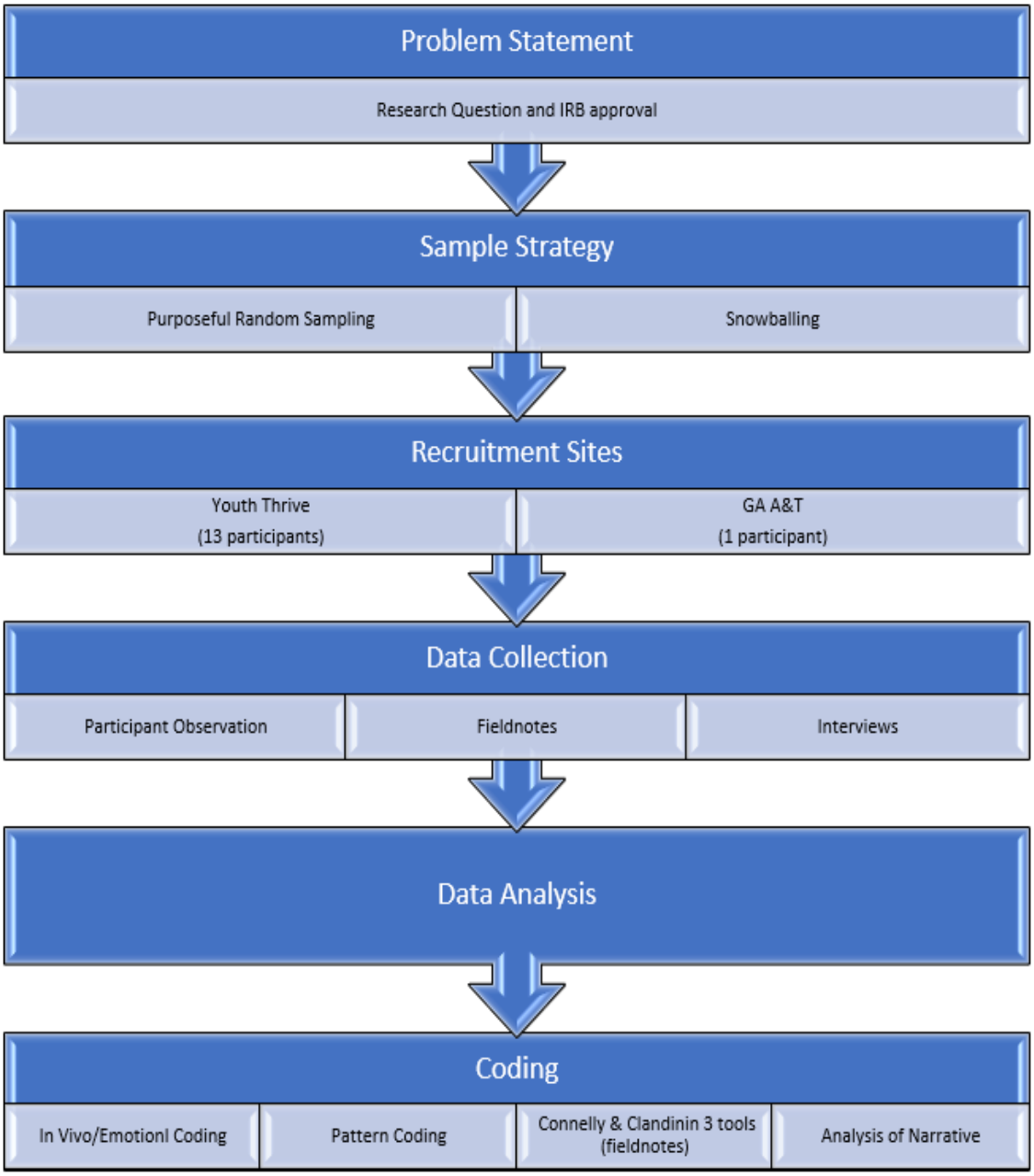

Figure 2. Flowchart of research strategy

Sampling Strategy

The participants were selected based on purposive sampling. There are several subcategories of purposive sampling, but to satisfy the goal of my study I chose purposeful random sampling and snowball sampling. Purposeful random sampling increases credibility of the study (Patton, 2002) and finds cases that are most likely to be rich in data. It also increases the chances that the participants selected will have stories related to the phenomenon of interest. The snowball approach can help to identify key informants (Patton, 2002) who may be harder to locate. Some people may hide their homeless status or not identify as homeless (although they meet the definition of the MVA), and because homelessness is a sensitive topic it became necessary to find participants through recommendations.

Recruitment

Once my study was approved by my university's Internal Review Board, participants were selected for the study. To participate, participants had to meet certain criteria. Participants were eligible for the study if they identified or phenotypically looked Black, were between the ages of 18 to 21, presently experiencing homelessness, and attended a high school in Georgia for at least one full school term. Participants were recruited from Youth Thrive, a service provider for youth experiencing homelessness and Georgia A&T State University (GA A&T), a four-year college. At Youth Thrive, flyers were placed in the educational center and case managers were given the flyers (electronical and in print) to identify youth who met the criteria and could inform the youth about the study. Because I also volunteered at Youth Thrive, staff members would also recommend potential participants who met the criteria and were willing to participate

in the study. In addition, being visible at the agency helped me develop a rapport with youth and helped me with my recruiting process. For example, I oftentimes participated in chess. It was during this activity that I would engage in casual conversation with the youth. Sometimes the topic of my research would come up in our conversation and the youth would volunteer to participate in the study. Recruitment at GA A&T was limited to placing flyers at the campus resource center for youth experiencing homelessness and emailing case managers at the resource center the flyer, per the university's IRB agreement. I also was allowed to set up a booth outside of the resource center with flyers posted and descriptions of my study. Unfortunately, this did not generate any participants for the study.

Sample Size

An area of debate for qualitative research is sample size (Mason, 2010; Nelson, 2017; van Rijnsoever, 2017). Most researchers argue a study has "data adequacy" (Morse, 1995) once it reaches saturation. Saturation emphasizes the need for rich categories and conceptual depth. According to Charmaz (2006) saturation is not the repetition of events or stories but rather "when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories" (p. 113). In the past, many researchers used saturation to determine sample size, yet some criticisms of this method claim it is ambiguous how the researcher reaches the number of saturation and it often is used to justify small samples (Charmaz, 2005). With this in mind, I followed Charmaz's (2005) criteria for grounded theory studies in social justice inquiry which includes the four concepts of credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Nelson's (2017) conceptual depth criteria were also helpful in determining if

the sample size was sufficient. This includes a wide range of evidence, complex connects, subtlety in the concepts, resonance with existing literature, and stands up to resting for external validity.

Studying lived experiences also means recognizing it is not so much the individual being sampled but the variations of the experience (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Therefore, when selecting sample size I considered the following: several qualitative researchers have posit sampling between five to twenty participants (Creswell, 2007; Crouch & McKenzie, 2006; Kuzel, 1992), saturation has been found to occur after twelve participants (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) and several qualitative studies on the lived experience of homelessness have included between nine to twenty participants (Alvi, Scott, & Stanyon, 2010; Begg, Levitt, & Hayden, 2017; Bongoy, 2016, Crutchfield, 2012; Mendez, Dickinson, Esposito, Connolly, & Bonilla, 2018; Phillip, 2014). Based on these factors, my goal was to recruit 15 participants, however, I was only able to recruit 14 participants due to difficulty of recruiting at GA A&T.

Setting

Youth Thrive is a service provider for youth experiencing homelessness. The organization serves individuals between the ages of 18-26. It provides 90-day shelter for youth 18-21 and a more long-term transitional housing program for youth 18-26. It also has a drop-in center that youth can utilize for clothing, food, showers, and resources for employment, education, health, and social services. Youth who are part of the shelter program have to meet certain requirements to move to the transitional housing program such as following their case management plan and having a job or attending in school. Although it has a shelter component, the facility looks more like a campus. Most of the

individuals that the organization serves are Black youth. I would estimate that annually over 95% of the youth are Black. While I was there, I noticed a racial divide among the staff. It was also brought to my attention several times by staff that most of the staff members who worked directly with the residents were Black, but most of the administrators and executives were White.

On the other hand, Georgia A&T State University is a predominately White university. It is a four-year public university that offers several undergraduate and graduate programs. The campus has various resources to help students who are experiencing homelessness. The director of the program was passionate about helping students and served as a great resource of knowledge on homelessness. I chose to collect data at this site because of my familiarity with the director and the success of the program.

Data Collection

Participant Observation

To get a better understanding of the setting and build rapport with the youth, I volunteered at the Youth Thrive twice a week for a year and a half. During this time, I helped with the educational program. The staff in the educational department was very receptive to my research and allowed me to plan and participate in events. I helped plan two college fairs and one chess tournament, co-taught and taught several classes weekly, advised thirty-three youth on school opportunities, went on seven field trips with the youth, and presented research with the organization at three conferences. I was able to collect data as a participant observer while volunteering. Patton (2002) states there are many benefits to participant observation. These include capturing the context within

which people interact, being aware of things in the setting, and moving beyond selective perceptions of others such as media images about homelessness or societal view of what it means to be homeless. Repeated observation and my duration at the service agency gave me a chance to see events and actions that the participants might not be consciously aware of or may not discuss during the interview (Becker & Geer, 1957; Flick, 2014; Maharaj, 2016). I was able to see youth's interactions with staff, other youth, and how some of the youth operated outside of the agency while on field trips. My active involvement in the setting gave me a chance to understand what participants may be unwilling to talk about in the interviewing process, have a better understanding of the language and vernacular used among the youth at the site, and gain firsthand experience to draw on my own personal knowledge during the analysis and reflective sections of my study. More importantly, being visible at the site helped participants build trust with me and feel comfortable to share their personal accounts of their private and public lives. I would often have youth want to participate because other youth knew me and suggested they talk to me about their life. Even after the interviews, many of the youth that were still in the program would update me on their life and educational journeys.

Fieldnotes

My observations were documented as field notes which included audio recordings, and journal entries. The field notes functioned to aid in creating thick, rick descriptions, critical self-reflection, and address visual and non-verbal cues during the interview. Field notes helped situate the study within a temporal context and larger community (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). The field notes added substantial information to my study such as when we toured a state building on a field trip and a youth

questioned the absence of Black people on the walls in the hallway murals. His inquisitive comment started a conversation among other youth who then begin to comment on the White figures in the building and lack of Black figures (Fieldnote, 10/13/16).

Interviews

Along with participant observations, interviews were part of the data collection process. Interested participants who met the requirements were given an IRB approved consent form that informed them about the purpose of the study. They were assured that all information would be confidential, their participation was voluntarily, and that their names would not be included in the final document. Participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any loss of benefit from the agency. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate account of the interviews. Only participants willing to have their interviews audio recorded were able to participate in the study. Participants were given the option to select their own pseudonym for the study. In addition, all references to school names and other personal identifiable information were replaced with pseudonyms.

Before I began my interviews, the agency afforded me the opportunity to conduct a focus group for their research on GED options and programs. Youth Thrive developed the study to measure the secondary educational needs of the youth. This was a great experience for me to see how youth would react and respond to questions about education and school experience. The group included seven Blacks youth and one White youth who were just entering the shelter program. Some of the items were similar to some of my questions, so it provided some indication of how forthcoming and receptive the youth

might be in my study's interview session. The focus group lasted for about an hour. I did not have a chance to interact with any of the youth before the focus group. Initially they were hesitant to respond but shortly afterward they began to voice their opinions freely. Although none of the participants in the focus group participated in my study, the experience helped provide me with feedback on how to approach certain questions.

Through my observation, I learned about some of the trauma the youth experienced. Because trauma was prevalence in most of the youth's lives, I decided to discuss my questions with the on-site psychologist and the Community Service Coordinator at the agency. I wanted to be sure that the questions were appropriate and rephrase any words the professional service workers thought might trigger psychological or physical damage to the participants. As a result, two of the questions were modified to simplify the wording and improve clarity.

The interview sessions began four months after observations. Face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted twice with each person except two participants. Two participants completed the full interview in one session because one was leaving for college the next day and the other youth was recently placed on time restriction in the education building where the interview room was located. The interviews lasted from twenty minutes to three hours, with the average interview lasting an hour and a half. A general interview guide worked best because of time constraints and to keep the interview focused. The aim of the in-depth interviews was to inquire deeply into the interviewee's educational, social, and personal affairs (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The first interview focused on the participant's life history and the details of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). Participants shared information about their

school experience, social life, and family. The second interview continued to focus on the details and reflections of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). In the second interview, details of their identity, racial and gender experiences, and future were discussed. Due to the transient nature of the participants, the second interview was scheduled within a week from the first interview. To make the participants feel comfortable and for privacy, the interviews were conducted in a private meeting room at the agency. Because I volunteered at Youth Thrive by teaching life skill courses, organizing college fair events, and helping with their research and educational initiatives, the agency decided to provide the participants with a $25 gift card for participating in the study. The interviews at GA A&T took place in a private office at the campus resource center. The participant received a gift card to a local fast-food restaurant on campus.

It should be noted that participants were recruited for the interview session at Youth Thrive and at GA A&T. However, 13 of the 14 participants were from Youth Thrive. Avid recruiting at the college for eight months only resulted in one participant participating in the study. I asked the director about the low recruitment and she suggested it might be due to the limited age range criteria. Many of their students who were identified as experiencing homelessness were older than 21. Another factor mentioned by the director was that in college, many students are constructing new identities and they do not want to identify as homeless.

Data Analysis

I transcribed all audio recorded interviews. The data was coded with Polkinghorne's (1995) analysis of narrative in mind. Using analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995) permits the narratives of the participants to shape the research. The

goal of analysis of narrative is to reduce ambiguity (Kim, 2015) and develop general knowledge from the stories (Oliver, 1998). It reduces the narrative to common elements (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 2001). According to Polkinghorne (1995), analysis of narrative (1) depicts categories of themes and emphasizes the relationship among categories, (2) finds commonalities among participants' experiences, and (3) creates general knowledge from the collection of narratives (Kim, 2015). Qualitative studies, as this one, uses analysis of narrative method of paradigmatic analysis to examine data to locate common themes (Polkinghorne, 1995). This means that CRT and intersectionality framework were employed to uncover concepts that relate to the framework in the data. Oliver (1998) argues this can be done in two ways. First reoccurring themes are extracted from the stories of the participants through an inductive analysis. Inductive analysis involves the discovery of themes and patterns derived from the raw data collected by the researcher (Patton, 2002). It works best when trying to derive core meaning from text (Thomas, 2006). Thomas (2006) describes five common features of this method (1) category label- which are short phases to denote a category; (2) category descriptions; (3) text or data related to the category; (4) links which may show commonality or relationships between categories; and (5) the framework or theory may be incorporated into the category. This was where CRT and intersectionality were applied as an analytic tool to gain understanding and interpret the data. CRT and intersectionality reduce the data to see themes related to race, homelessness, and education.

Field notes from my observations were also analyzed. First, they were sorted by descriptive notes and reflective notes (Bodgan & Biklen, 1982). Descriptive notes included observed behaviors and responses, settings, conversations, and other factual

information. The reflective notes consisted of my own reflections, opinions, and ideas. Then Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) three analytical tools: broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying were applied to the notes to generate contextual information and add depth to the participants' narratives. The first tool, broadening, connects the broader context of the participant's story with the field notes (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2015). Analyzing my descriptive notes through the broadening technique helped to situate the participants lived experience in the social-political milieu. Burrowing focuses on specific events, such as participants feelings, understanding, or the impact of an event (Garvis, 2015; Kim, 2015, Li & Logan, 2017; Sowa, 2016) which allowed me to weave the participants' reactions and nonverbal cues, along with my reaction and thoughts, into the narratives. Lastly using story and restory, the descriptive and reflective field notes were examined to recreate the significance of the participant's lived experience and interpret the meaning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Garvis, 2015).

Coding

Saldana (2016) explains that "just like plays are not written, they're rewritten; data are not coded-they're recoded" (p. 76). My transcribed interview data produced over 1,000 pages of data. With a vast amount of data, I found it necessary to go back and listen intensely to the transcriptions to solely concentrate on what the participants were saying. Next, I (re)coded the transcribed data using in vivo and emotional coding. In Vivo is rooted in preserving the participants own language. Focusing on voice, in vivo aligns with CRT's counter-narrative and narrative inquiry because it honors and prioritizes the voice of the participant (Saldana, 2016). Phrases are taken directly from the participant to generate codes.

Homelessness is a phenomenon that not only explores an event but also explores the emotional toll it can take on a person without stable housing. The topic can invoke painful memories that are necessary to uncover for others to understand its effect on people's lived experiences. Narratives not only describe what happened but also express emotions, thoughts, and interpretations (Chase, 2005). Therefore, emotional coding was utilized with in vivo coding. Emotional coding labeled emotions experienced by the participant or emotions that I inferred about the participant (Saldana, 2016).

The codes generated from the first recoded cycle were logged into a codebook to organize the in vivo and emotional codes into a category. Each category had a definition that determined which codes would match the category. For example, the in vivo code "I was just homeless you know on the streets and stuff. When I wasn't here I was on the streets and I had people taking care of me that were also homeless you know" was placed under the category "Living arrangement when homeless" because it fit the definition of an individual's living situation when experiencing housing instability.

Analytic memos used throughout the study also aided in generating codes, categories, emerging patterns, concepts and themes (Saldana, 2016). Memos worked to understand the relationship between homelessness, CRT, intersectionality, and education. Frequently questioning the data such as "how does or how does that not connect to my framework? Or "did the phenomena look the same in the field as the interviewer described it?", are examples of how analytic memos helped me to identify codes, categories, and other units of analysis. The significance of memos in the coding process can best be described by Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008) who state, "memos are

therefore the vehicles that transport the researcher from the concrete to the conceptual" (p.71).

The second cycle coding was developed to excavate themes and concepts from the (re)coded and categorized data. Using Saldana's (2016) pattern coding technique as a second cycle allowed me to group categories into more meaningful units of analysis. Applied to my data, pattern coding helped develop major themes from the categories, searched for causes and explanations in the data, and created a foundation for cross-case analysis by producing themes and relational process (Saldana, 2016).

Lastly, concepts were combed over with Polkinghorne's (1995) paradigmatic analysis of narrative to see if and how the framework of CRT and intersectionality was embedded in the data. I looked for instances of race and racism, meritocracy, colorblindness, resistance, and intersectionality to locate the CRT framework in my study. Figure 3 illustrates how each layer of coding was used to build upon each other. The final themes were constructed with a non-linear coding relationship. Analyzing the data required that I go back and forth between the raw data, in vivo and emotional coding, pattern coding, and paradigmatic analysis of narrative to extract themes for my study.

Figure 3: Data Analysis Coding Scheme

How data was coded using coding cycles. Note: arrows show non-linear relationship

Data Management

To manage my data, I followed some of the strategies and techniques that Seidman (2013) suggested. One important strategy he recommended was organizing and keeping track of all research materials. Labeling, filing, documenting, and separating material from the start of the research reduced the stress of having to find things later.

Another tactic I used was to listen to the recording of the interview after the initial interview session, but I refrained from any in-depth analysis until all interviews were complete. This prevented me from imposing meanings from one participant's narrative to other narratives. Maxwell (2013) discuss the importance of memos and how to use them effectively. Taking his suggestion, I kept a journal to make notes and used it as a reflective tool.

Documents were protected by keeping all participants' recordings and information in secured and locked storage. After recordings where checked for clarity, the audios were uploaded to a computer transcribing program. Access to all electronic records were protected with a password to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

There were minimum risks associated with the study. Possible risks included discomfort and stress from the interview questions and fear of social stigma. I brought tissue and paused the tape when participants felt overwhelmed and needed time to regroup. The benefits of the study included giving participants a chance to share their stories. Moreover, Gilkey (2008) found that giving adults experiencing homelessness a space to safely tell their story can be therapeutic, can help them to make sense of their experience, and can be empowering for them. I found this consistent with my study, as many of the participants expressed gratitude for listening to them.

Assessing Data Quality

Lincoln and Guba (1986) list four criteria appropriate for qualitative rigor. These include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Each criterion was applied to the study to validate the rigor and trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility is similar to quantitative research's internal validity, in that credibility is how confident the researcher is in reporting the realities and phenomena being studied. Lincoln and Guba (1986) argue that credibility is a crucial aspect of establishing a study as trustworthy. Persistent observation, theory/perspective triangulation, and member checking was used to assess the data and to strengthen the credibility of my study. For instance, I used site and participant observation as a form of data checking. To improve triangulation, CRT, intersectionality, and narrative inquiry was used to provide multiple perspectives to the data (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 2002). Before the second interview with the participants, I restated and summarized the main points from the first interview to confirm findings or to make necessary corrections to the participants' stories. I was not able to follow up with participants who left the service agency after the second interview due to Youth Thrive's policy that prevented youth from being contacted directly unless it was from the company's e-mail. To circumvent this issue, I frequently received feedback and updates about the participants from staff members.

Transferability is the degree that the findings can be applied to other similar contexts or settings. This is not to be confused with generalization. Transferability does not mean that replication of the study will always yield the exact results; instead it is the degree that the results of a study may be similar in comparable contexts and settings (Anney, 2014). To ensure transferability, thick descriptive data was used throughout the study. According to Patton (2002), thick rich description is the foundation for qualitative research. A good description specifies many details and uses interpretation to gain meaning from structures and culture (Geertz, 1973). Being a participant observer, volunteer, and crafting field notes in the naturalistic setting for a year and a half provided

me with enough descriptive data about the place, people, interactions, and other events that happen or do not happen in the setting and environment.

Auditing the data is required to establish dependability and confirmation (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Dependability means the interpretations are supported by the data and confirmation means the findings are shaped by the participants. Confirmability included my memos, field notes, transcriptions, and organized files used as my audit trail. In addition, my research stance states my assumptions and biases because qualitative research is filtered through the researcher's perspective and interpretations.

Researcher's Stance

Critical race theory is grounded in the belief that race is a prominent category alongside class and gender. As a Black female graduate student, I agree with the belief that one's race influences his or her perspective of the world. From an ontological position, race is embedded in American society. I also believe that socioeconomic status can determine how people perceive the world and how the world perceives a person. From this standpoint, I acknowledge many Black people's reality, including mine, may differ from the dominant group's reality. The different experiences Blacks encounter creates different views and stories from those of the dominant perspective. I believe that epistemology is constructed by the stories of people's lived experiences. Narratives and oral knowledge are forms of empirical data. People make sense of the world through narrative form. Similar to Bernal (2002), who uses a raced-gendered epistemology to challenge the historical and ideological representation of Chicana and Chicano students, I intend to use a raced epistemology to challenge the way the dominant culture has told stories about Black youth who experience homelessness.

Using CRT as a framework places the researcher in a position to already be biased against the dominant group ideologies. As a CRT researcher, I approached the study doubting the concept of colorblindness and meritocracy in education and believing in White privilege, intersectionality, and interest convergence. Instead of viewing homelessness as a defective trait, I prefer to look at the resilience and strength of youth who endure and survive amid adversity.

I am personally motivated to address homelessness, race, and school experience because when I volunteer and donate to the homeless shelters, I am always alarmed at the high number of Black individuals without stable housing. As mentioned before, I know from personal experiences that schools are not always welcoming to non-Whites which directs me to question how supportive the educational system is to Black youth who are homeless.

There were factors that I had to be aware of when I conducted research at Youth Thrive and GA A&T. Realizing that I am an outsider, I acknowledge my socioeconomic privilege. I realized that I needed to be conscious of my appearance and demeanor at my research sites. I had to be mindful of how I navigated the sites, especially if I wanted to be granted access to the lives of the youth. In an article by Johnson-Bailey (2004), she mentions distance as being between those from the ivory towers and people who have not attended college. In an effort to reduce power tension, I had established rapport with several of the youth before the interview at Youth Thrive. During the interview, I gained and maintained a connection with many of the participants as I provided snacks of their liking and actively listened to their life narratives. It was important for me to be receptive to their accounts. Even if the participant seemed to veer from the topic, it was important

that I continued to listen because hidden in the conversation could reveal important details about their life. As Bodgen and Biklen (1982) state "Listen to what the people say; Treat every word as having the potential of unlocking the mystery of the subject's way of viewing the world" (p.137).

Another crucial aspect to developing rapport is acknowledging the role of feelings. Feelings help to judge the participant's perspective (Bodgen & Biklen, 1982) and establish trust between both parties. Participants may share their joy, triumphs, and success but they may also share their pain, loss, and failure. Because of this, researchers using the qualitative methodology need to be aware of the impact of feelings that are tied to the participants' stories (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007). Studies often require researchers to disclose risks involved for participants for ethical purposes and to protect the safety of the participants. Yet researchers may also face emotional risk when inquiring about participants' personal and sensitive issues. Qualitative research can be taxing on the researcher because constant emotional stories can cause the researcher to develop feelings of guilt, develop emotional and physical exhaustion, become desensitized to stories, and create blurred relationships (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007).

The reality that many youth who are homeless face hardships is an understatement. They may have encountered challenging situations and consequently had to make difficult choices in order to survive. I was cognizant that when prying into the lives of my participants and searching for in-depth emotional connections to the topic of homelessness, narrative inquiry can uncover some harsh realities. While I could not predict the emotional and uneasy moments, my background as a home counselor who had

worked with youth sex offenders, drug and alcohol abuse youth, and independent living youth, had prepared me to deal with many sensitive and emotional issues. Also, reading others experiences with homeless youth has enlightened me to some of the emotional challenges that participants and researchers may encounter.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES

In the following chapter, I present a snapshot of each participant's lived experience. The intention is not to romanticize or demonize the participants' lives but to understand some of the events that have shaped their outlook on school and to explore how homelessness and school events have impacted their lives. Although some participants might share some commonalities, no two stories are alike. Black youth who experience homelessness come from various backgrounds. The participants in my study varied by educational attainment, duration of homelessness, age of initial homelessness, services used, and other factors. Participants were between 18 to 21 years of age, with the average age being 20. Seven of the participants identified their gender as male, six identified as female, and one participant identified as transgender female. The school attainment background of the participants was diverse. Six participants had not received their secondary school credentials, one had stopped his formalized schooling after he received his GED, three stopped their schooling after receiving a high school diploma, three had some college experience, and one was enrolled as a junior in a four-year college. The majority of the participants were from the Youth Thrive program, only one participant was from GA A&T.

Table 1.

Participants Characteristics

Name	Age	Gender	Highest school level completed	Site and Services
Rob	21	Male	11th	YT/ Transitional housing
Tyler	21	Male	11th	YT/ Shelter
Tete	18	Female	11th	YT/Drop-in services
Me'k	20	Male	11th	YT/Shelter
Lil Red	19	Transgender Female	11th	YT/Shelter
Cali	21	Male	11th	YT/Transitional housing
Demetri	21	Male	GED	YT/Drop-in services
Rachael	19	Female	12th	YT/Shelter
Pedro	19	Male	12th	YT/Transitional housing
Raven	20	Female	12th	YT/Shelter
Keshaa	21	Female	Some college	YT/Shelter
Harmony	21	Female	Some college	YT/Transitional housing
Aaron	19	Male	Some college	YT/Shelter
Tasha	21	Female	Junior in college	GA A&T

Table 1 shows each participant's age, gender, the highest school level that he or she completed and the research site and what services received from Youth Thrive (YT).

Chapter Four is divided by each participant's educational attainment. The first section presents the narratives of participants who have not received a high school diploma or GED, the next section is the narrative of participants who have earned a high school diploma or GED, the last section presents the narrative of participants who have attended college. The methodology used, narrative inquiry, emphasizes how research is a co-constructed process. Given this notion, this chapter presents the participants' stories through the researcher's and participants' perspectives. Each participant's narrative is intertwined with their quotes and stories to give precedence to their voice.

As a volunteer and participant observer, I had the chance to interact with many of the participants before and after the interviews. I saw many of the challenges, joys,

anguishes, and celebrations that occurred away from the interview. My perspective serves to share the "behind the scenes." My interaction with the participants and observations allowed me to provide follow-up information on some participants and connect their experiences to larger social issues in society concerning Black homeless youth.

Section I: Participants Without Secondary School Credentials

Rob's Narrative

> *I was actually living with my auntie and my uncle. That was the last place that I was before I was homeless. So, after that, 16 turning 17, I was like couch surfing but then I was homeless at the same time. Basically, I pretty much slept everywhere that I could.* -Rob, 21

I met Rob while teaching a class at the shelter. We would often talk when he came to the education building. One day during our conversations, he mentioned his negative experience with a for-profit school and how it impacted his outlook on school. It was from our after-class conversations and his interviews that I came to understand how his personal trials and tribulations impacted his perspective on school.

Rob was adopted at a young age. His father was in prison and his biological mother had been diagnosed with a severe mental disorder that impaired her parental ability. The woman who adopted him was a lawyer who cared for him until she fell ill. He then moved in with his aunt and uncle during the 11th grade before experiencing homelessness. Rob enjoyed attending elementary and middle school, but things changed for the worst in high school.

> *My experience in high school, I'm not going to lie, it was probably the worst time of my life simply because umm a lot was going on in that time frame… I was basically going through high school by myself and umm I was getting picked on at school, my anxiety was really bad, and I was always nervous. It was a lot that happened in high school that weren't the best memories.*

It did not help that he attended three different high schools between the 9th and 12th grade. At his first high school, where he attended 9th and 10th grade, he was able to maintain mostly As and Bs. However, when his guardian[5] mother became sick, he moved in with his aunt and uncle who lived in another county. The school and home transition took a toll on his grades, which declined to Bs and Cs.

By 12th grade, Rob's aunt and uncle got a divorce and he began couch surfing, staying at weekly rentals, or anywhere he could find shelter. To support himself he got a job at a fine dining restaurant while going to high school but found it difficult to balance work and school. He recalled why he dropped out of school in the 12th grade.

> *I guess I just stopped* [school] *because I was trying to work at the time and get income to survive. I felt like it was just hard to put them both together for me at the time because I was worried about my living situation. Whenever I was at school, I was focused on my living, so I wanted to have money… I had to keep working, you know, to pay rent.*

Although he dropped out of school to support himself, he thought he had the opportunity to return to school when an online school contacted him about getting his high school diploma. Unfortunately, the for-profit online school took advantage of him and scammed him out of the little money he had saved. He paid money for a non-accredited online high school diploma and took out loans to pay for the online college program. It was not until he tried to transfer to another college that he found out his high school diploma and college credits from the online school were fraudulent.

> *After I'd been there for a while, something just didn't sit well with me. A lot of people were complaining. I saw a lot of complaints on the internet and I experienced those problems too. So, I ended up leaving… I wanted to try to go to school up in Garrett. It was a technical college called Morganville something, Morganville Tech I think, and I was in there. I was so excited, I was like "oh my God, I'm starting something." I handed the lady my diploma and she went to*

[5] He referred to his adoptive mother as his guardian mom

> *scanning it or whatever. She was like "this diploma is not real. I don't know where this diploma is from. I've never heard of it. It's not valid. You know we're not going to accept it". And I was just like "what?" That's kind of weird cause another college accepted my diploma. And she was like "I'm sorry, but we can't accept this, we don't know where it's from". I was like that's weird. So I went home, I went home at that time and looked up the diploma and I found out that it was a fake diploma basically. That it wasn't legit.*

Unfortunately, he is not alone. Rob fits the profile that predatory schools target: low-income, people of color, and youth who are homeless (Janes, 2011). A report by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Arbeit & Horn, 2017) found that more Black students attend for-profit colleges than public and non-profit schools. Black students constituted 26% of students at 2-year for-profit schools and 27% of students at for-profit 4-year schools. In addition, 53% of students at for-profit schools have annual incomes less than $30,000.

To make matters worse, he was obligated to pay back the student loan that he had borrowed for a fake diploma. The whole ordeal temporarily discouraged his faith in the educational system.

> *I was scammed. I just didn't go to school because of that reason. I kind of stop going to school because I didn't know what else to do. I felt like okay I'm going to have to pay this student loan and at the time I didn't know what to do, so I just didn't go to school. That's what made me not really go to school, that was, that was a block for me.*

By targeting students like Rob, the school can receive large amounts of funding from the federal government (Naylor, 2016). But high default rates and the lowest graduation rates compared to private, nonprofit, and public institutions (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, & Brown, 2015) puts homeless students at a greater risk of ending up with large amounts of debt and without the reputable educational credentials needed for job

opportunities and advancements. This often leaves a student feeling hopeless and helpless.

Rob was angry that the time and money he spent at the for-profit school was useless but he realized the value of earning school credentials. Throughout our conversation, he emphasized that he wanted to obtain his high school diploma. He had looked at returning to the alternative public school he previously attended, but due to him being close to aging out of public high school at 21, he realized that he would have to look at other options such as getting his GED.

Shortly after the interviews, I saw Rob a couple more times. He came by the educational department and we talked about possible GED programs and he expressed interest in attending one of the programs. When I last saw Rob, he mentioned that due to inclement weather the orientation for the GED program was rescheduled, but he planned to attend the next session. In the meantime, he was working and pursuing his music career.

Tyler's Narrative

"*I didn't have a childhood like natural kids*" – Tyler, 21

Around the same time Rob dropped out of high school, another youth, Tyler was being forced out of school. Born in Alaska, Tyler was popular in elementary school but by middle school many of his friends left the school district and his schooling experience changed dramatically. He became the object of ridicule, especially because of his appearance.

> *The youth there, like the people there, they always made fun of me, stuff like that you know. I never really had the best clothes. I only had what my mom could support me with, so that was mainly one of the things that people picked on me for is my clothing and you know stuff like that.*

He was able to find solace among the teachers at his middle school. He loved his elementary and middle school teachers. In fact, it was his teacher's compassion and concern that rescued him from a noxious situation at home. While in second grade, he was physically and sexually abused by a family member. Due to his fear of the perpetrator, he did not tell his mother. Even after going to the hospital due to signs of physical trauma, he was scared to tell anybody. It was not until his second-grade teacher inquired about his bruises that he confessed the incident.

> *I told her at first, "I can't tell you, it's a secret." So she gave me 50 dollars, a 50 dollar bill. She was like "now tell me what happened?" So I took the 50 dollar bill. I put it in my pocket and I told her everything that had went on and she told me that I needed to stay in the classroom you know. I needed to stay with her at all times, and I did it you know. I didn't understand what was going on but I just did whatever she said.*

She immediately reported the abuse to the authorities and the family member was finally placed in jail. After this incident, he was placed in the foster care system for a few years before returning home to live with his mother. The physical and emotional scars were long lasting, as he has been in and out of mental health and residential facilities.

Before the start of high school, Tyler, his mom, and his siblings moved to Georgia. He confessed that the transition from Alaska to Georgia was difficult due to negative interactions with some teachers, continued bullying, and a more rigorous grading system. With an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), he was able to maintain A, B, and a few D grades. However, he was held back in the 11th grade, right around the time he first started to experience homelessness.

At age 17, his mother kicked him out of the house. With nowhere to stay, Tyler confided to a teacher and the school counselor about his lack of housing. That same day

the counselor and teacher found him shelter and escorted him to the shelter. Later that year, the counselor who helped him out in times of trouble, left his high school. The new counselor was the antithesis of the former and proved to be not as compassionate as the prior counselor.

His senior year in high school, Tyler was anticipating graduation, especially because he had managed to improve his grades while experiencing homelessness. But little did he know that the same institution that provided him stability would seek to disenfranchise him his senior year. He explained the devastating news,

> *I was in the middle of my 12th grade year. I was doing good too. I got As and Bs and barely any Cs in stuff. So the person who deals with transcripts, my counselor, he called me via my transcripts to his office. He basically told me, when I went to his office, he told me to sit down and I was like okay, so I sat down you know. He asked how I was doing and stuff. I said I was good and stuff. And umm basically he wanted to talk to me about my transcripts, saying that my transcript wasn't in their system. And me being there for a little over 3 years, that was a little funny because before that, there was another counselor that told me I should've been well passed 12th grade because of my grading level, you know. So it's like this counselor told me my transcript didn't exist and I was like "what do you mean?" And he was like basically you need to restart high school and that was it. I mean I just, I walked out of the building you know and a few days later I came back with a staff from Youth Thrive. I forgot his name, but umm I came back to the high school to get my transcript and stuff, they still said it didn't exist. So I was like you know what, what am I going to do, you know?*

As Tyler spoke of his situation, the soft spoken, timid young man, appeared frustrated and indignant that he was degraded by a school official. Although the interview was our first meeting, he revealed the emotional strain he endured, "*It made me feel sad you know cause I had been doing so well, focusing, staying to myself you know, and then for me to get told I don't exist in that school you know, it's like I just didn't understand."*

Tyler wanted to show his transcript to the counselor to prove that he did exist in the school, but he couldn't find his documentation. Because he was unable to locate his

records, it made it arduous for him to dispute his case. With no leverage, he was provoked and encouraged by his school counselor to leave school, or better stated, he was pushed out of school.

Black and low-income students are prime candidates for being pushed out of school, especially with the pressures of high-stake testing being connected to funding (Advancement Project, 2010; Simson, 2013). Push-out is usually disguised under the facade of strict zero-tolerance rules, suspension and expulsion for trivial offenses, or just blatant suggestions by teachers and counselors to leave school. For homeless youth like Tyler, one way to push them out is to cite issues with documentation or records. Being that many homeless young adults are transient, their records and documents may get lost, stolen, or misplaced due to lack of secure storage. Although the McKinney Vento Act (MVA) forbids lost documentation as a reason to deny students access, it did not stop Tyler's school counselor from using it as a reason to marginalize him.

It has been three years since he has been pushed out of school and three years that he has intermittently used services from Youth Thrive. Commenting on his previous living situation he explained, "*I was hopping in and out of the shelter you know. I was just homeless on the streets and stuff when I wasn't at the shelter*". He still hoped to get his GED.

I stayed in contact with him after the interview. I, along with other staff in the educational department, worked with him to find a GED program that would fit his schedule. Within a month, he had started to make personal progress. He was able to get into the transitional housing program at Youth Thrive and had secured a job with a local company. At our last meeting, he informed me that he had attended the GED program but

still had to take the test. He was planning to take it soon because he wanted to continue his education and be the first in his family to go and graduate from college. From there he wanted to get his master's degree in graphic arts or gaming, so he could work for a global gaming company.

Lil Red's Narrative

> *School not putting money in my pocket and getting me on that bus to go to job interviews. School is not telling me to get up in the morning. School is not saying go out there, you have to get a job so you can make sure that you find you somewhere to live so you don't have to worry about when these 30 days are up at this program that you have to be right back on the streets again. School is not doing that for me. It's not. I'm not even doing it for myself sometimes. The program is helping me but after these 30 days, if I don't do an extended stay or stuff like that, I would be right back on the streets where I came from, living underneath a bridge, being a stripper again, being a prostitute again, just selling my body just to make sure that I have somewhere to lay my head at night. Come on now, school doesn't care about that.* – Lil Red, 19

My first time meeting Lil Red was on the day of the interview and two days before our first interview she had withdrawn from high school. Upon first glance, Lil Red phenotypical looked like a Black male but early in the interview Lil Red explained how she identified as a Bajan (Barbadian of Afro-Caribbean and mixed descent) transgender female. While she acknowledged that society saw her as a young Black male, she preferred to be addressed by feminine pronouns. But notably within the interviews, she oftentimes used male and female pronouns interchangeably.

Born on a Caribbean island, Lil Red moved to the United States when she was 10 to live with her grandparents due to her mother losing parental custody because of illegal drug usage. Her relationship with her grandparents was tempestuous because they did not approve of her sexual orientation. Reflecting on her family she stated, **"***My family is*

mentally abusive, especially my grandmother, and my mother was physically abusive, and I didn't like it."

Lil Red proclaimed that after 5th grade, she stopped trying to perform well in school. The only reason she passed in middle school was because of her good behavior, not because of her grades.

> *When middle school came, I realized I can't entertain people no more all day, I have to actually sit here and try. I passed because they saw that I was trying, not because I was actually passing on my own. And if they had to give me the right grade because of my work ethic, I would still probably be in the 5th grade. I wouldn't have went to 6th, 7th, or 8th, because I failed everything but they passed me with a 70 because they were like "he's a good kid, he's trying, he's a sweetheart, we got to give him something, he's working with us. These other kids are being a-holes, even though they're smart, they're being a-holes to us, cussing us out, calling us out of name, throwing eggs and stuff. He doesn't do none of that, look at him, we gonna go head and pass him, let's pass him." Literature was the only thing I passed, only because I like reading.*

Family conflict drove her to run away from home between her 8th and 9th grade year. During this time, she explained that she was unofficially homeschooled.

> *I had two friends who were homeschooled who were brother and sister. When I ran away from home, I stopped going to school like for a whole year. I went to go stay underneath a bridge, but I went to their house and I learned from their mom, it just wasn't really on the record… So I went there and learned from her and she was very, very smart and the way she taught was based off of life too.*

Once she returned to her grandparents' home, Lil Red returned to high school. She did not like going back to public high school nor did she like staying with her grandparents. The constant quarrelling with her grandparents resulted in her leaving their home again. She returned to living on the street and under bridges. To escape her inhabitable living conditions, she decided to gain income by working at a strip club at the age of 16.

Homelessness can be a precursor to the sex industry. The chances of a youth who is homeless entering the sex industry increases after one month of homelessness (Nadon, Koverola, & Schludermann, 1998). Certain factors, such as being an ethnic and LGBTQ youth, placed Lil Red at a great likelihood of being lured into sexualized jobs (Holger-Ambrose, Langmade, Edinburgh, & Saewyc, 2013). For many youth of color, the sex business is attractive because institutionalized racism in the education system, the justice system, housing policies, and hiring practices can reduce their income opportunities pushing them into the sex industry as a means to support themselves (Farley, 2006). Without a high school education and lacking shelter, Lil Red felt that she needed a quick and steady income. Working at fast food restaurants or retail was not going to provide her with the money she needed to support herself. In her case, the sex industry was connected to an economic need. She enjoyed knowing that she was earning money. Furthermore, the job not conflicting with her school schedule. The money she earned from dancing allowed her to have a stable abode and focus on her academics. She elaborated:

> *When I went to work, I did my dances around the pole and I was more so not a stripper, I was more of an exotic dancer. You know the exotic dancers are the ones that wear the tight clothes, who dance inside of the cage, does gymnastics and moves around and got to be very pretty as they got paid just as much as a stripper did. So I didn't have to get naked for anybody unless I wanted to…and it was fun cause right after I did that, I probably got like a hour and a half of sleep and I had to jump right back up for school. But my mind was already stabilized. Money in my pocket motived me more to want to go to school because I was putting money in my pocket. So then when I went to school, I was like "square root of x is pi over R subtract the two and your answer is B". The teacher would be like "Lil Red, you okay?" "Oh, I'm fine, why you ask me?" "Well lately you just being doing so good."" So is that a bad thing?" "No but you just haven't been coming in here with an attitude lately and you seem more concentrated and I just wanted to make sure you're okay. How's your family been, I mean are you still staying there?" "No, I'm staying on my own and have me a job now so I feel more like I'm in control of my life. I have time to breathe and think and to focus.*

> *My mind is clear" …every day of my life I was going to the club and then turning back around and going to school.*

Lil Red continued to improve academically until she stopped working at the club and ended her relationship with her boyfriend. She remarked that her grades declined because she was not happy, she lost her housing stability, and she didn't have anything to motivate her to do well. She ended up living back on the streets until her high school counselor helped her find shelter.

At times during the interview, Lil Red was very animated. She was very expressive using her hands and body for demonstration, she walked around as she spoke, and she would frequently tell a story by breaking out in song. Other times she had a somberness in her voice, especially when she talked about what led her to drop out of school. She vividly recalled:

> *Getting jumped was my worst experience of high school. Only because never in my years of being at that school had anybody actually picked on me that bad. And the funny part about it is these are dudes that I thought were heterosexual, but by me not doing what they wanted me to do with them, they beat me up for it. I don't appreciate that. It's basically like you're raping me… I fought back for a little while, then after a while I realized it was pointless, so I ran, and I never went back after that and I'm not going to go back. And the only reason why is because my mind set wasn't already there. I was homeless, I had nowhere to go. I didn't know what I was going to do the next day. I didn't even know what I was going to do the next five minutes, so school was never an option for me because my mind set was never there…Why sit here and keep fighting over and over again when you don't even know where you're going to lay your head at night. And now that I have somewhere to lay my head at, I still can't grasp and put my hand on the reason why I should go back to school even though it's my last year. I mean, it's so much. I feel like my mind is too far gone to the point where I don't even think I can pick up where I left off and I really don't want to start all over cause then I'll get discouraged.*

Lil Red has given up on completing high school. Two weeks after the first interview she tried to return to school but claimed that *I'm going back to school next week but it's not for the school, it's more just for her* [the school counselor] *and to do the*

talent show. Once that talent show's over, I'm going to quit again. Her immediate goal was to find a job at a boutique where she did not need a diploma or GED. She felt that education credentials were not needed for her long-term career goal of becoming a singer.

I saw Lil Red a few times after the interview. We would always talk and catch up on her life but a month after the interview, she disappeared. Then two months later, a person with long wavy hair and red lipstick approached me at the agency. It was Lil Red. She had changed her look. I greeted her, and she updated me with her life. She had been suspended from the shelter for fighting but she was using another program to help her with housing. She still was not in school and although she quit working in the strip club, she said she still pondered over the quick money she could earn, sometimes making her wish that she had stayed on the job.

Me'k's Narrative

> *Well, me, my mom, and my sisters, had to go stay with one of our cousins. I was in the 11th grade. That was pretty much the only time I experienced it with my family. Well no it's not. There was another time when me and my mom, and my sisters after we left from staying with our cousin, we had to go stay with my aunt. I guess you can call it homelessness, but it really wasn't homelessness cause we had a nice place, decent place. You know, it was family too so it was pretty cool until we got back on our feet. - Me'k, 20*

At 15 months old, Me'k was placed in foster care. Shortly thereafter, his grandmother gained custody of him and his two sisters. Growing up, he and his grandmother had a contentious relationship. The disruption in his home life carried over into his school life. He did not like going to school and admitted that he "sort of slithered" his way through middle and high school, resulting in receiving C and D grades. His lack of effort was not because he did not know the information, but he attributed it to how the information was taught. He explained "*I always thought there was much more*

and what was being taught didn't interest me. So I really didn't work as hard in the areas as I should have worked." He went on to discuss how problems inside his home life and at the school caused him to face hardships:

> *I had challenges not only stemming from the home with different emotional challenges dealing with family members…I also had, umm, of course family issues, feeling like I didn't have everything that I needed…I also remember the adversities in school as well. I had trouble with the structure, because I've always been very advanced in my thinking. So what happened was the structure of the schools and how school is set up is what gave me a hard time. Like the structure of going to this class, staying in here for this period of time, going to that class, the being in the box is what gave me a hard time. Umm also, the information that was being taught didn't really resonate with me. So, I didn't really feel the need to learn it, nor did I feel the need to, umm, do the work that's based on the information that was taught. So those were some adversities that I had to overcome as well.*

Challenging the indoctrination of school and using his critical thinking skills, he took to rectify school's shortcoming:

> *I was always one to do my own research. Like when I would go home, I was always one to just go online and research this and research that. I would pretty much just go home and be like okay, screw school, Imma do my own research and figure out about this subject or about this topic. That's pretty much what drove me to the level of awareness that I'm at now, is being able to do my own research as opposed to someone in front of a Promethean board telling me that this is this. Why, should I accept what you tell me is the truth? Why am I not allowed to do my own research? So that's pretty much another issue I had is the watered-down information and also the falsified information, umm, that they were teaching us in the schools. And I knew it to be false, but I had a hard time struggling with figuring out, okay, how can this be changed?*

In high school, Me'k began to get in legal trouble. His first arrest occurred when he got into a fight at school. His schooling was not compromised because he had already passed his classes, and he served his few days in jail during the school break. Conversely, the next arrest had a major impact on his schooling.

> *I was incarcerated for shoplifting at a grocery store. That's pretty much what led to that arrest. And then I had to relocate after being released from my*

incarceration. Umm and that's pretty much what led to me saying I don't know about school, I'm going to get a job and I got my first job.

By the time he was released from jail, his mother had moved again to stay with another relative who lived outside of his school district. He moved in with his relative and mom but, with no transportation available to get him to his original high school and already feeling disinterested in school, he dropped out of the 12th grade. He got a job working at a fast food restaurant. He did well at the company and quickly moved up the ranks at the job. Before he was able to earn the manager position, he left the restaurant and took another job as a traveling salesperson selling organic cleaners. At age 18, he flourished at his job and enjoyed working in sales. Unfortunately, another run in with the law caused him to lose his job which led to housing instability.

I suppose what led to me experiencing homelessness was just recently me losing my job. I was a traveling sales man, who would travel to state to state, stay there for about 2 or 3 weeks depending on the size of the state and move to another state or just move to a different area within the state and stay in hotels, you know, decently nice, 3, 4, star hotels and just go city to city, county to county, knocking on doors trying to get people to buy cleaners. You know the simple life. And pretty much after I lost that job, that's what led me to becoming quote on quote homeless, which is what brought me to this situation.

As a Black male going from house to house selling organic cleaners, he was mistaken for a burglar and lost his job after he was falsely accused of second degree burglary and prowling. He was incarcerated again for 17 days before having all charges dropped. Once released, he went to Youth Thrive for shelter.

Prior to losing his job as a salesperson, Me'k became immersed on a new spiritual journey. It influenced his current views on life and was exhibited by how he carried himself and how others viewed him. He was well liked by his peers and the staff who commented on his drive and intellectual thought. Even my conversations with him prior

to the interview while in class and at chess club were interspersed with knowledge of history, philosophy, and spirituality. It was his spiritual enlightenment that helped him achieve emotional stability. He acknowledged that his spiritual awakening "*opened my eyes to everything and I felt the emotion, the one true emotion which is unconditional love."* He expressed that his spiritual philosophy transformed him mentally, especially in how he internalized depression. When asked about the impact of homelessness on Black males, he explained:

> *What homelessness can do is it can drag you into a lower state of depression. When you're depressed because you don't have a place to stay, you don't have food, clothing, you don't know what's going to happen next, you become stuck within the confines of the illusion and you're not quite sure how to operate, so depression is one emotion that especially needs to be released.*

He explained how depression operated differently between males and females by saying:

> *I believe females experience more, what do you call it, the empathic emotions, more empathy and more sorrow with their homelessness. It's like the more depressive emotions…it is more like sadness, sorrow, umm, you know, just like crying. For men what homelessness can potentially, I don't want to say do for a fact, but men can potentially experience more of the violent emotions such as anger, hatred, you know just like destructiveness.*

He credits his spiritual discovery for helping him to recover from depression, allowing him to see the world in a different light concluding that "*When you release those emotions associated with homelessness which are all lower vibrations, you yourself come out of that matrix, that realm, and you shift into another dimension."* Supported by MacKnee and Mervyn's (2002) work on factors that facilitate or hinder homelessness, Me'k's change in perception echoes their finding that emotional and cognitive adjustment helps non-domicile people to revolt against their current situation of homelessness. Me'k's spiritual journey protected him from many of the adversities associated with

homelessness. Research has shown that disenfranchised groups such as the economically disadvantaged and Blacks have a stronger connection to religiosity and spirituality than the general population (Harley & Hunn, 2015; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994).

Returning to school was part of Me'k's spiritual journey. He was making progress in obtaining his diploma. A week after the interview, he left Youth Thrive's shelter program to attend an out of state educational and vocational training program to receive his diploma.

TeTe's Narrative

> *See being homeless has made me sit down and look back at life a lot cause, like, when I wasn't homeless I'm like oh okay, I got everything I want. I don't need to do this, I don't need to do that. I don't have to ever worry about being homeless. But then that junk hit me right in my face. I'm sitting back and I'm like dang I remember days when I had everything I wanted and now I got to stay in shelters, this, that, and the third. And I sit back and I think about it. Well this is a decision I made and I gotta go about it how I gotta go about it, so I sit out here and I bust these moves.* - TeTe, 18

I had not met TeTe prior to the interview session. Because she was only utilizing the drop-in services at Youth Thrive and did not stay in the residential program, she only came to the organization periodically. She heard about the study from the case manager in the drop-in service and decided to participate. Energetic and upbeat, TeTe was delighted to share her life narrative.

Many youth experience homelessness because of forces outside of their control such as being kicked out, escaping abusive situations, etc., but for 18-year-old TeTe, she decided she didn't want to live under her mother's rules and voluntarily left home. At the time of the interview, she had been experiencing homelessness for three months, but this is not her first episode of homelessness. She first experienced homelessness periodically in New York as an unaccompanied minor between the ages of six to nine. Although she

had been in foster care since the age of two, court services allowed her biological parents visitation rights on the weekend. It was during these times she would run away. Between six and nine years old seems like a young age to experience homelessness but data indicates children in kindergarten and elementary school have a higher chance of experiencing homelessness (McFarland, et al. 2017). Where TeTe differs, is that she was an unaccompanied youth at an early age. Most unaccompanied youth are over the age of 13. However, in a 2013 report, 7% of unaccompanied youth were between the ages of 6 through 12. While it is likely that they were staying with a parent or relative younger than 18 years of age (Child Trends, 2015) there are few like TeTe who run away and live temporarily on their own. When asked about being homeless at such a young age, she explained:

> *Well it was kind of worse than this. I wasn't even in shelters. I was sleeping on benches and parks. That was like worse… I was running away from my biological family cause, like, I still had to go on weekend visits and see them or whatever. Even though I was in foster care, they still had the right to see me or whatever. So when I did see them, and like knowing that the experience with them wasn't great, I always ran away and slept on the park benches and stuff.*

At the age of 10 she was adopted by her adoptive mother and four years later she and her adoptive family moved to Georgia. When she started school in Georgia, she became motivated to do well in school. She received mostly As and Bs, and a few Cs. While she was able to maintain her grades, she had problems with her anger which caused her to be placed at the alternative high school. Her emotional and behavioral issues also caused her to be admitted to mental health facilities periodically during her high school years.

Beginning her 12th grade year, TeTe began having legal troubles. Her temper led to her getting locked up for simple battery after getting into a fight with a teacher at the

alternative school. She served a few days in jail. When she returned to school, she became disengaged and discouraged because she felt she was far behind the other students. She asserted:

> *Yeah, the first time I got locked up I just felt like, well damn there's no point in me to keep going. I was like just falling asleep in class, turning my assignments in late, being behind in class and everything, and my grades started dropping.*

Seeing that she was struggling in school and knowing that she could do better, her homeroom teacher offered to tutor her. She worked diligently to catch up with her peers. Her grades started to improve, and she was almost back on track with her studies, but then she got locked up again for fighting. This time the incident involved her fighting her ex-boyfriend at school. The fight was due to offensive comments her ex-boyfriend said to her.

> *We were friends and everything, but it was like the whole back and forth, back and forth. Him calling me out of my name and him telling me he gonna bitch slap me and everything, it was just like the disrespect. It's not on my level cause I feel like if I come to you with respect, I deserve the same thing.*

She was initially charged with second degree simple battery, simple assault, terroristic threats, and violation to school property. The latter two charges were dropped after the school counselor intervened and told officers that the boyfriend had initiated the conflict. This time she was expelled from her high school.

> *I started fighting and I got locked up, a couple of…well twice and the second time I got locked up I wasn't really able to go back to school because of the situation at the school. I was going to wind up moving out here, coming here* [to Rose Park]*, which I did and technical I could have stayed and went to school but the two, it's two people that I got locked up for in that school. I just, I couldn't be around them anymore. It was part of my plan and probation that I just couldn't be around them anymore. So instead of me setting myself up, I just was like I'll just come down here and try to find my way of getting back into school, so yup, that's it.*

She decided to leave home to find her own way in life. Her rationale for leaving was she wanted to be on her own.

> *I mean I've been homeless a couple of times, but I was able to get back on my feet and live with my parent, but I decided when I turned like 17 I just wanted to leave the house. I was tired living under their rules.*

The last few months of being homeless, she has lived on the street, lived in hotels, traveled to several states with friends selling merchandise, and was now staying with her boyfriend Demetri, who was a participant in the study and was also receiving services from the drop-in program at Youth Thrive. She was trying to get back in school but her charges have been a hindrance.

TeTe was the only female in the study who did not have her high school diploma or GED. A major obstacle for her not receiving her diploma or GED was the legal problems on her record. Morris (2016) reports that "Black girls in trouble with the law have a long history of being assigned to institutions that fail to adequately respond to their marginalization from school" (p. 140). Morris continues to state, "In the past, correctional facilities, training schools, and residential houses of refuge were designed to 'correct' the behaviors of 'bad' Black girls in ways that failed to prioritize education as a rehabilitative practice" (p.140). It is these archaic practices that continue today to cause Black females like TeTe to fall behind in school. So it is not surprising that being in the penal system has made it harder for her to get the educational credentials she needs for economic and job opportunities.

She realized that her legal record, withdrawing from high school, and being homeless placed her at a disadvantage for economic mobility and housing stability. Her goal was to earn a high school diploma or GED and enroll in college to become a

therapist. She was unemployed but actively seeking employment in retail. She and Demetri had discussed getting married soon and she was planning on getting engaged the next week on Valentine's Day. I did not see TeTe after the last interview; however, I later found out from Demetri they had broken up and she was doing well and had gotten a job.

Cali's Narrative

> *So I look at it like I'm not homeless. It's just a part of my life that got rocky and I'm staying at a group home and I'm trying to get out that group home. That's the only reason I think like that cause when I think of me being homeless, I don't want to do nothing. If I'm homeless then what's the point of me doing this and that, but when I look at it like a different way, I literally go out and look for jobs. I try to provide for my family even though I'm here and they're there. That's why I don't look at it like I'm homeless.* -Cali, 21

Cali was a 21-year-old Black male from California. He started to experience homelessness at the age of 18. He had previously used Youth Thrive's shelter service but was kicked out for violating policies. He was allowed to return and this time he had been promoted to the transitional program. Two of his siblings were also experiencing homelessness (one was Demetri, his half-brother, who was a participant in the study) and receiving services from Youth Thrive.

Cali liked to play chess. He would come to the chess club when his work schedule permitted. It was at the chess club where I first met him. We would discuss how we learned to play chess and it was in one of our conversations that I told him about my study and he readily agreed to participate. Chess was not the only activity he enjoyed, as he loved to play basketball. He started playing in the 8th grade and it became a big part of his life. Although he did not "really care for school," playing basketball was his motivation to do well in school. He explained how the threat of not playing basketball in 9th grade caused him to improve his grades.

> *Like 9th grade I really fell off of my grades. Like my grades started going down and I didn't think I was going to pass the 10th grade, but it's like at the end of the semester I just counted all my stuff and like I really had to buckle down. I really got my grades up cause…he* [his coach] *was like you can't play on the team, like you can't play in the game, you sitting on the bench cause your grades are too low. And I was like, well it's time for me to get up cause that was something I loved to do and that was killing me, so I had to really get back to doing me… Without basketball I really didn't care for school cause I know that I had something to look forward to do at school. So, I was like if I go to school and I do my work then I can play on the team, but like if I didn't play basketball or nothing I wouldn't be the same person.*

Another motivational force in his schooling experience was his high school science teacher. She was like a maternal figure to him. He confessed "*as long as she was there, yeah I was always on point, but when she was not there I was acting a fool*." She was supportive when he got into some legal trouble and she continued to be his encourager.

Cali was popular in high school because of his personality and athletic ability, but the popularity led to him "wilding out" or becoming unruly at school. It was hanging with the wrong crowd that got him convicted of a felony offense his 11th grade year. He admitted that *"I had got in trouble and got incarcerated, so I was like that messed up my whole school thing."* He was locked up for two years, serving time in a juvenile detention center and an adult correctional facility. While in the juvenile detention center, he continued his formalized schooling by choosing the high school diploma track instead of the GED track, but survival started to take precedence over school because he was trying to stay out of trouble. He tells of how he navigated the penal system.

> *When I was in DJJ* [juvenile detention center], *I was going to school. I was still, you know, addicted to school. I used to do that but you got to watch yourself because at any time a fight can break out or whatever, you feel me. So I was more focused on watching my surrounding than doing my work. I got credits from DJJ but like I really could have more credits, but I was so focused on not trying to get into fights and all this. I wasn't worry about work, I was more worried about*

> *trying not to fight and all that, so I wouldn't get in no more trouble cause I was trying to show the judge like, "look that's not me. I'm not what you think I am."*

Unfortunately, he left the juvenile detention center without his high school diploma and was transferred to the adult correctional system. His schooling options were limited in the adult facility.

> *Once they sent me to prison, you know in prison there's no high school, so they was like straight GED. So I was like, well guess it's just GED I got to work on now. And then my mind set just changed straight to GED.*

He was close to taking the GED test when he was released from prison early.

> *I was on the verge of getting it* [GED] *but then …the same day I was supposed to take the test, I got out. So they came and got me that morning. I thought I was going to take the test but they really took me to the hold. They take you to the hold cause they don't want nobody try to hurt you before you get out.*

Once released from the correctional facility, he attempted to reenroll into public high school. However, the school would not enroll him due to his felony charges.

> *When I got out I was trying to return to school but the school denied me because you know they was like…you know my mom, she's real, she keeps it real. She was like he just got out of prison, this, that, and he's trying to finish his school. And she* [the school official] *was like what did you go to prison for? And she was like "no". They were like "no we cannot have that here." So, you know, they denied me.*

When adjudicated youth are released from a correctional facility and attempt to re-enroll in school like Cali, they are often denied admission. However, for many of these youth, school can provide the resources and educational credentials they need to prevent recidivism. Most youth in residential and correctional facilities will not earn a secondary school credential before they are released and even fewer will receive secondary school credentials after being released (Keeley, 2006). Without the formalized training needed for social mobility and economic opportunities, lacking educational credentials and having a "tainted" record diminish these youths' legal opportunities.

It is not surprising that the school to prison pipeline is a linear process. It is acceptable to move youth from school to prison but not from prisons back to school. These youth may be seen as a threat to students or more importantly, they may be seen as a threat to the academic status of the school. Instead of helping these students receive the educational services that they need, officials choose to protect their schools' progress and achievement status (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2009), so they are not pushed out of school or pulled out of school they are just prevented from attending school, increasing the chances that they will return to the criminalized system that they just exited.

Shortly after his release, Cali also started to experience housing instability. He could not return to his mother's house or his grandmother's house because of housing restrictions. Subsequently, his mother was also in the process of moving out of state and once again, rules and his probation prohibited him from moving with her.

> *Like I couldn't move with her because you know when I got locked up I had got a felony and she was on section 8. You know section 8 felonies can't live with people that's on section 8. So I was just like ya'll just go ahead. They left and then I was like okay.*

Cali's school and housing options were limited by the felony charges on his record. Likewise, many youth exiting the juvenile criminal systems as they emerge into adulthood may face challenges securing housing. Once released they may have limited options for housing due to their legal background (Mears & Travis, 2004) and it might not be feasible for them to live with family.

Cali was left without stable residence and began couch surfing with friends. Later, he would find shelter by staying in abandoned cars and abandoned buildings. With limited resources and no educational credentials, Cali began to participate in gang activity. His brother, Demetri, referred him to Youth Thrive, where he stayed for a few

months before being kicked out for illegal activity. Several months later, he returned to Youth Thrive. At the time of the interview, he had a four-year-old daughter and was anticipating his second child. It was important to him to earn his GED by the end of the year for himself and his children. He was employed at a fast food restaurant but was also planning to get his commercial driver's license to start his own landscaping business. A month after the interview sessions, Cali moved out of state for work.

Section II. Participants Who Earned Only a High School Diploma or GED

Demetri's Narrative

> *Only problems I probably have to face are debating about where I'm going to sleep at tonight or the next night or if the place I'm sleeping at tonight, is it safe for me to sleep there?…Like I'm in a program now and it's a steady program but the neighborhood I'm in is not really such a good neighborhood.* - Demetri, 21

Through hi-fives and what's up nods, Demetri saluted several youth as he and I walked to the interview room. He was well known throughout the program because he had been using Youth Thrive's service sporadically since he was 18. He was referred to me by the drop-in center case manager. Donning a Miami Heat's hat, we started talking about sports and how he was born in Florida. At a young age he was adopted by a lady (who he referred to as his God mom) who worked at a school with his biological grandmother. He loved Florida but hated going to school there. Once he moved to Georgia at the age of 11, his view on school changed.

I ain't never used to like school, but coming to GA, school kind of like became a habit for me. Like it was actually fun to actually go to school, like the teachers I had were funny, cool, except for one.

In middle school he made team captain in football and basketball. Being the athletic star on the team led to popularity among his friends. Coming to school in Georgia

also gave him his first time at being recognized for his academic performance. He shared his reaction when he received his first academic accolade:

> *I looked and I seen my name. I said "oh snap!" Went to the next sheet, my name on that one, I said "oh snap!" I was like "I aint never made no honor list like this!" So it was kind of fun. And then they selected me to be president in middle school for student counsel, then we had morning announcement team, I was on that. So it was like, a wondrous experience overall, getting recognized for a lot of things that I never think I could accomplish. So that was kind of a new experience for me, I kind of liked that.*

Demetri continued to succeed in school until his biological grandmother passed away due to cancer. He had an estranged relationship with his mother and although his biological grandmother lived in Florida, she was the only person on his maternal side with whom he had a close bond. Woefully, he talked about the devastating affect her death had on him:

> *And so my God mom, the one who adopted me, let me go down there* [to Florida] *and we stayed down there for a little while so I could see her* [his grandmother*] and when we got back to Georgia, I want to say maybe the very next night, yeah the very next night, I got a phone call that told me my grandma had passed, so that kind of like took a major impact out my life cause it was like my grandma pretty much raise me like besides my (God)mom like I had never been around my momma all my life, I always pretty much been around my grandma and my god folks…it's like ever since that day, that's when my world really flipped sides and how I started getting in trouble with the law and everything else.*

After his grandmother's death, Demetri started participating in illegal activities. Six days shy of his 14th birthday, he was charged with gang related activities, gun charges, drugs, shoplifting, theft by taking, aggravated assault charges, and aggravated battery. The courts were going to try him as an adult, but his charges were dropped down to juvenile offenses. For three years he stayed in the juvenile detention center. He did some course work, but school was not a top priority when he was locked up.

> *I ain't gonna say I ain't really do work in school, I started to, like I did work in social studies, did language arts and a little bit of math. I just didn't do science.*

> *Then after that, for a while, I just stopped. I think I really stopped because I was coming down to the wire that I was finna get out. So I was just like, I didn't want to do nothing else no more, I don't want to do nothing no more. I just want to kick back, relax, and just let my time wine down. So like after that, I stopped cause it's like when I was locked up for three years they would kind of like do online school. They only give you courses you need to graduate and I feel like if I was to push for all three years and did the school work, I could have graduated before I got out. But when it came down to that wire and me getting out, I was like forget that, forget school work, I don't won't to do this. I kind of just want to chill now.*

Once released from the juvenile detention center at the age of 17, Demetri ended up attending four different public high schools for various reasons. Finally, he ended up going to an on-line school. He did not like that he had to sit in front of a computer every day, but he did get more work completed doing school online rather than in a traditional classroom. It was while he was attending high school online that he was kicked out of his brother's residence because he was breaking house rules and not completing his school work as his brother felt he should. This impacted his school performance because without a place to live, he had limited resources.

> *The reason I stop going there* [on-line school] *cause that's when me and my family member had fell out and I had got put out. So I just stop going completely cause I didn't have a computer or the resources to get to class or anything so it's just like I just stopped going. And then I missed so many days of school, so they kicked me out.*

While computers and cell phones are ubiquitous, lack of funds, technology, and stable housing made it difficult for him to keep up with his work. Homelessness may hinder people's access to digital technology (Reitzes, Parker, Crimmins, & Ruel, 2017). As in the case of Demetri, limited use and access to computers during homeless episodes made completing classwork and homework difficult. This creates a digital divide between those with access to computers and those without access. Moreover, for students like Demetri, without access to internet, they may experience homework gaps putting them at

a disadvantage compared to their peers. Homework gap is a barrier that exists when students do not have internet access. Statistics show that Black students from low-income homes are more likely to be without internet service (Horrigan, 2015). Specifically looking at emerging adults who are homeless, Pollio, Batey, Bender, Ferguson, and Thompson, (2013) found Whites were more likely to use technology than Blacks. While this contradicts Reitzes, Parker, Crimmins, and Ruel, (2017) finding that race was not connected to computer usage, they did not note if that included internet usage. Other larger samples such as the one conducted by File and Ryan (2014) align with the findings that low-income Blacks have less access to an internet connection. Unable to complete the digital course, Demetri was dropped from the online high school.

During his experience with homelessness, he was able to find other housing options; he couch surfed with some friends, went to different homeless service agencies, and briefly went out of town to stay with a friend's grandmother. When he came back to Rose Park, he stayed with a friend for a while before getting in legal trouble again.

> *I went to another friend's house and they let me stay there and stuff like that. I think I stayed with them for a little minute until I got arrested cause I was also on probation and I had violated my probation. So at the same time when I violated probation, I think I was in jail the first time, they kept me in jail for like 30 days, got out, then they referred me to this program called Journey.*

Once he left Journey, he violated his probation for the second time. This resulted in him having to serve time, or as he puts it "*sit for a little minute*." Since being released from jail, he has continued to use various programs and network connections to find interim shelter.

Demetri did earn his GED. He was proud of his accomplishment because many people doubted his potential and said he would never graduate school. He commented:

> *My GED, that's the number one thing I treasure cause I use that as me going from slacking off at school, to not caring about school...to me actually caring and me actually wanting to learn something.*

He had a job and looked forward to enrolling in a two-year college before transferring to a four-year Historically Black College and University. Demetri's future goal after completing college was to own his own record company and having housing stability.

After the interview I would occasionally see Demetri hanging around Youth Thrive. One day while catching up with him, he told me and a staff member that he had gotten a new job. Also, he lost his temporary housing, had lived in the shelter for a few days at Youth Thrive, and was now staying at an upscale hotel. He was still utilizing the drop-in services at Youth Thrive. I asked him about his relationship with TeTe in which he told me that they were not together anymore but the last contact he had with her, she said she was doing fine.

Rachael's Narrative

> *I was so stressed out. I was never late on like turning my stuff in when I needed to turn it in but like there's times where I had to miss school because I had to work the night before and I needed to meet up with my mentor, so I could get my hours…I needed money cause honestly my 12th grade year, that's when I became homeless. – Rachael, 19*

Rachael, a 19-year-old Black female, was born in Georgia but moved to Arizona while still an infant with her mom and sister. The first few years they stayed in one of her grandmother's trailers but after a neighborhood shooting and a disagreement with her grandmother, her mother moved the family around Arizona. Her 12 years in Arizona were painted with constant school mobility. She noted:

> *When I was in school in Arizona, I went from school, to school, to school. So one year I'd be at one school, next year I'd be at another school, next year I'd be at this school. I moved around a lot.*

From kindergarten until the sixth grade, she went to at least four different schools. "*It seemed like every year or two years I would move*," she stated, "*I don't know what was my mom's reason of why I moved from place, to place, to place so much*".

Third through six grades were difficult years for Rachael in school because of the severe bullying. Being the racial minority at her school, she was repeatedly teased about her skin color. She was called derogatory names resulting in times she would *"go home and just cry and cry and cry"* because there was nothing she could do nor anything the schools did to stop the bullying. To make matters worse, she explained how one racial experience in school impacted her view of school and life.

> *I also remember in elementary school, 4th grade, and it was like the subject of slavery and I knew it was a subject that I still had to come across, even though like you know it was years ago. But it's still like, you know, my skin color, it was still a problem at that school. So, when we came to the topic of slavery I remember my teacher, she was a White teacher, she pulled me out the class and she told me "if you don't want to participate because we're talking about slavery, you don't have to. I can just give you a 100 and you're good." And I looked at her and I told her no, because at the end of the day I still am going to learn it, whether you're just going to slide me by with an A, my next teacher is not going to slide me by. I'm still going to have to sit there and listen to it. And I just didn't appreciate her saying because of my color, I didn't have to sit in the class. It doesn't matter cause I still have to learn what happened in that era…Why would you even pull me out the class, just me, and tell me I can't stay in the class but you'll pass me on. To me, I felt some type of way, you know.*

After reporting the incident to the principal, she received an apology from her teacher, but the teacher's racial actions and bigotry from her peers caused Rachael to have low self- esteem. Later, her low self-esteem would play a role in her enduring two physically abusive dating relationships in middle and high school.

The year Rachael returned to Georgia, she experienced a lapse in her middle school education. By the time she started 6th grade in Georgia, she was academically behind her peers.

> *I was behind on a lot. When we got here we stayed in a hotel for like a few weeks and then my dad finally came and got us and then once my dad came and got us, that's when I started school like a week later, two weeks later. Like I said I started school at Sarah E. Goode but I missed a lot of school, that's why I said I don't really remember like my 6th grade year.*

She stayed with her father until her mother could find housing in Georgia.

It was a big transition being the racial minority in her Arizona schools to becoming the racial majority in schools in Georgia. Her middle and high schools had a large Black population and although she was not teased due to her race, her peers still found ways to taunt her, especially about her learning disability.

Twelfth grade year was a turning point in Rachael's life because it is when she first began to experience homelessness on her own. Her mother decided to move outside of the school district her senior year, but Rachael wanted to continue attending her original high school. Due to an argument and miscommunication with her mother, she ended up staying with her boyfriend and his family because they stayed close to the school. The living arrangements only lasted a few months. She recounted why she left and how she became homeless:

> *I was staying with my ex but then I left because he started putting his hands on me. So then when that happened I kind of was like okay, I stayed with my friend for like a week or two and then I was basically house hopping.*

Like many females and some males who escape domestic violence situations, Rachael ended up experiencing homelessness. While intimate partner violence affects people from all backgrounds, Black youth from economically disadvantaged

backgrounds, are at a higher risk for experiencing intimate partner dating violence compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Landor et al., 2017).

Twelfth grade year was also significant for Rachael because she started to realize her academic potential.

> *In high school I slid by until like my 12th grade year and that's when everything kind of kicked my butt. And that's when I kind of started getting my act together and my teachers actually saw that I'm actually, I'm smart. And that's when I saw like I am smart, you got As and Bs, you're a smart child.*

She admitted that it was difficult to balance work and school but the loving support and motivation she received from her teachers inspired her to do well.

> *I don't know how I balanced work and school my senior year, but I did it. There was times when I didn't do my homework, there was times when my teachers were like I understand but there was also times when they were like "You see this? You need to get it up."*

Her hard work paid off that year as she received her best grades in school and graduated on time with her class. Despite being homeless that year, she received her most treasured accolades the most improved award and her high school diploma.

A few months later after staying at a friend's house, she found out about Youth Thrive and decided to go there for the shelter service. This was her first time using their services. Rachael had only been in the shelter for a week and the interview was our first time meeting. Although she considered this her first episode of homelessness, Rachael came from a history of housing and school instability. Although she stated she was not homeless until the 12th grade, it appeared that her school and housing mobility in elementary and middle school might have been signs of homelessness. She did state that she, her mother, and sister lived in a hotel and a motel when they first moved to Georgia. Following the definition of the MVA which considers students who "lack a fixed,

regular, and adequate nighttime residence" including living in motels and hotels as homeless, Rachael could be categorized as briefly experiencing homelessness when she moved to Georgia. She was hoping to secure a job to apply for the transitional housing program and then save money to attend cosmetology school and become a hairstylist. I saw Rachael a few more times after the interview. We talked about her applying to cosmetology school and she told me that she had started working. A few weeks before she left the shelter, she came in to tell me that she had decided to move out of state with her mother and was going to try to pursue school when she got settled.

Pedro's Narrative

> *I want to say me being homeless affected my future with school because I always wanted to go back to school… I was like yo, God please, why can't you just give me a scholarship now, full ride scholarship to go to school. Cause I would be having funnnn!!!* -Pedro, 19

My first day of observing at Youth Thrive, I went to the educational department and sat in on a learning session. It was here where I first saw Pedro. This was his first time experiencing homelessness and he had only been at Youth Thrive for a few weeks. By the time of the interview, he had been at Youth Thrive for four months and had been promoted to the transitional housing program.

Pedro was adopted by a family at a young age. From the beginning he had contention with his adoptive parents. He revealed that "*even in kindergarten I was like I don't want to go home. I really didn't, because I already knew it was going to be some type of commotion, and I don't want to fight."* Despite his home issues, he found solace in going to school, especially in middle and high school. He was excited as he described his school experience. "*School was fun although I hung out with the bad crowd. I mean there's nothing I can say but middle school and high school was fun."*

Part of the reason he enjoyed school was because of his popularity. He was known throughout middle and high school because of his older biological brother's notorious reputation for fighting and involvement in the gang-life. While Pedro was not part of a gang, he did participate in illegal activity, which got him in trouble at school.

> *So 8th grade year I started hustling, got caught up with the wrong person, they told on me and I got kicked out and expelled… In middle school I had got in trouble for selling weapons on school ground. Then in high school, they tried to charge me with gang activity and battery in high school. And it was just a lot of trouble I was getting in. I used to sell movies in high school too. I thought I was going to get in trouble but I never got in trouble, thank God, thank God….I wasn't in the gang, but I used to hang around like gang activity and stuff and it's just like I had to hustle. My adoptive parents, I felt like they didn't really care too much about me so it's like, man, I got to hustle.*

In an effort to get him motivated to stay in school, his older brother decided to let him stay with him in California. Also, Pedro's brother saw he was getting in trouble, and he did not want Pedro to end up in prison or dropping out of high school like he did.

> *My brother just wanted me to stay in school, be logical, keep my mind straight, but the places he was sending me to school like it was just too much commotion. Like he obliviously stayed in bad neighborhoods. I'm like "bro can we live in a good neighborhood? Like you always getting something robbed or taken." He* [his brother] *come around me talking about some "yo, we got to move." Okay, or it used to be me getting in a fight and stuff, he would say "oh bro we got to move. I'm not trying to have people come and break in my house no more and try to rob me"…My brother was smart, but he was dumb with the decision he made to drop out of school. Me too, but I still have my high school diploma, I still have my high school diploma.*

After spending three months with his brother, he returned to Georgia to stay with his adoptive parents. Unfortunately, he continued to get in trouble and received additional juvenile charges. This time the judge, who had been lenient the previous times in court, threatened him with serious jail time if he came before him again. He had not been in legal trouble since then.

Pedro lacked the effort to do well in school. He knew he had potential but did not apply himself, partially because of his anger issues.

> *Boy, my grades were bomber! My grades were bomber! But I was a smart kid. It was just like my mom put me in anger management class. My teachers would tell you like I was a smart, smart kid…When they put me in anger management class and they was like yo, you got a higher score than anybody in the class and I'm just like I know. I know because I'm smart, I just play around a lot. She* [the teacher] *was like yo, why are you in this class? And then they find out it was because of my anger.*

The other problem was he did not like how some of the subject material was taught.

> *I mean in elementary they was teaching us history, I was fine with it but then when I got to middle school it was just like I felt they was trying to make history not history. Like for instance, they would say Christopher Columbus explored the world but then really, it's like you know these Native Americans explored the world. So, I really never believed in that history like in school, so I just started hating history.*

His home issues with his adoptive parents continued throughout his middle and high school years. He felt as if they never really cared about him and as a result there was constant distrust and quarrelling between the two parties.

> *We had beef like, we didn't trust each other. I didn't trust them, they didn't trust me. I used to take from them because I used to be hungry and they never used to feed me that much. So, I used to go in there and try to get something to eat because I was hungry. It was a lot of things that broke our trust relationship… I was committed to the state for two years and they tried to get me to go back to jail. I was just like man, honestly, I'd rather spend my time in jail than to spend time with y'all because it may not be much freedom, but they feed me better than y'all feed me. It was just like we never had that relationship.*

During the beginning of his senior year in high school, the tension between he and his adoptive parents had reached the boiling point and his parents kicked him out of the house. He ended up dropping out of school for a few weeks but was able to enroll in an out of town educational and vocational training program that provided him shelter and a

way to earn his high school diploma. It was here, his senior year, that he started to focus and apply himself academically. He proclaimed:

> *Yeah, once I got to Van Peebleston my grades changed. Even though I was hanging around the wrong crowd, all my course averages were like 80s and 90s and my lowest grade is like in English Arts and it's a 76. My English course average is like a 76, all my others like 80s, 90s.*

When asked why the sudden change in academic performance he explained:

> *I don't know. I was just smart and I was trying to get into college. Then I was like man, those other years don't really count and when I got to my senior I was like man, Imma do all my work for my senior year, and I did, and it just paid off. My GPA was a 3.4. I know I should have went to college. I'm trying to go to college now, but I don't wanna pay another loan.*

After he graduated from the program, he had nowhere to go. It was the counselor from the educational and vocational training program that was able to secure him a temporary placement at Youth Thrive's shelter service.

Pedro was dedicated and determined to go to college, however, he encountered some enrollment barriers. One of his main concerns was affording college. He had an estranged relationship with his adoptive parents and they did not want to vouch for any financial responsibilities on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) form.

> *I filled out my FASFA and everything, but I just don't have the funds to pay for school cause they say my parents got to sign off, but my parents don't want to sign off. It's just like, I don't know what to do. I really want to go to school real bad, real, real, real bad.*

He was unaware that he met the requirements for an independent student, where he would not need his parent's signature because he was homeless and staying in a shelter. Pedro is not alone in this matter. The US Government Accountability Office (2016) reported that "despite their financial and housing needs and without

knowledgeable adults in their lives, many homeless and foster youth are not aware of federal programs that could help them" (p.27).

Pedro advocated for himself. On his own initiative, he called colleges about their programs and application procedures, talked to college representative, and went on Youth Thrive's college tours. It was through his determination to go back to school, that I had the most contact with him. I was able to guide Pedro through the completion of the FASFA form. However other financial barriers appeared. There was the application fee, testing fee, concern about housing and housing cost. If a student is not identified at their high school as experiencing homelessness and has already graduated, attempting to get a waiver for fees can be challenging. Luckily, I had some connections and knew about certain college programs that could help alleviate his fee burden. Also, Youth Thrive offered some financial assistance for him to apply to college. Pedro had taken several steps to enroll in college. He was still having some personal and financial issues but in the meantime he was promoting his rap music and working part-time at a small business.

Raven's Narrative

> *My grades were okay. I still did the best I could in school. I did good, I really did. I did fail some classes, but I still kept at it until I got my diploma. There were times where I wanted to just drop out because I just, I couldn't take anymore, because I was also going through some drama and it's like I just, I wanted to drop out because I just can't take it no more, high school and its BS…It's like so I'm almost finished, bear with it. I'm almost done. So I just kept at it cause I'm almost at the end. Everybody kept telling me stay, stay with it, stay with it and I just kept with it, because I'm like let's not make the situation worse by dropping out of school.* - Raven, 21

Raven was born and raised in New York where she spent her early childhood and early adolescent years attending school. She did not have fond memories of elementary

and middle school. In fact, all she really remembered was the relentless bullying that occurred throughout her childhood.

> *All schooling I was bullied until I moved down here… it started in kindergarten... I mean like, it wasn't as bad but, like, my worst years was 3rd grade through 9th grade. Umm but I mean second, first, kindergarten, I had a good share of it. I mean, that's all I can really think about when I think of like what went on in school.*

She wasn't a good student academically. She would barely pass her classes, usually scoring just high enough to get promoted to the next grade level. She attributed her low performance in school to complications going on at home and at school. As a result, she became invisible at school. Not only could she not connect to her fellow peers, she also felt teachers did not connect with her.

> *I would say I was just a victim. Just a victim from…not even just students, just teachers, like (pause), I don't know. It's just like they really didn't like get me. I couldn't connect with no one in middle school.*

High school in New York was no different. She still encountered the constant bullying and began to skip school to avoid it. She had to deal with bullying in high school until her parents decided to move to Georgia. Contrary to her middle school and high school days in New York, once she moved to Georgia she became more outgoing, sociable, and outspoken in class but she would occasionally skip school. She recalled, *"I wasn't getting bullied anymore when I moved here so I for the first time in 15 years, I actually made friends.* Her friends played an important role in her schooling experience as they provided emotional support. This was needed because she lost her mother to cancer at the age of 16. This was also when she started to notice symptoms of depression. Some of her teachers were aware of her depression and on one occasion her depression at school caused school officials to intervene. She explained *"so they [the school*

administrators] took me to the hospital, umm, cause I had said something and so then I had to prove that I'm okay that I can come back to school." Although her mental distress manifested at school, it did not affect her academically until later in her life.

> *It didn't really affect me in terms of school. My grades were still good but I mean it was kind of like not noticeable but it just got worst over years, and umm this like medicine, and I became homeless, and it's just been like…it's skyrocketed.*

She had been working with social service professionals to manage her mental distress. However, during the interview I observed her mercurial behavior. In the first interview she was forth-coming and receptive to the questions but during the second interview she seemed lugubrious and short with her responses. Later, I found out she was on medication and perhaps this contributed to her change in behavior.

During her senior year in high school she had to deal with another family death, the death of her father. This placed Raven at an economic disadvantage because most youth in their emerging adulthood years depend on their parents for some financial support. Using a national longitudinal study to show racial disparity contributing to racial disadvantage, researchers found that compared to Whites, Blacks were twice more likely to lose a mother, and had a 50% greater chance of losing a father by age 20 (Umberson et al., 2017). The fact that both of her parents died when she was still an adolescent put Raven in a precarious situation. The death of a parent during the adolescent years can potentially cause mental and physical health challenges, such as social withdrawal, difficulty in school, risk of depression (Harris, 1991; Lin et al., 2004; Melhem et al., 2011; Tremblay & Israel, 1998). And while the literature shows that Blacks oftentimes have supportive extended family relationships, (Adams, 1978; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013), for youth without extended family

networks who are entering adulthood, parental death can place stress on their living arrangements. At the age of 18, Raven's age prevented her from entering foster care in Georgia. The sudden death of both parents caused Raven to take on adult responsibilities. With no family in Georgia, she had to secure housing on her own.

Compounded with the death of her parents and battling mental health issues, she felt compelled to drop out of high school, but she continued and graduated. After graduating high school, she was able to secure housing for a few months but soon encountered housing instability.

> *So once my father passed away umm I, I didn't take over the lease but I was paying the bill and I was getting social security thanks to him. But they stopped my benefits because I graduated high school so I didn't know what to do. I didn't know anything about Youth Thrive or anything about shelter. I didn't know what to do so I stayed with ummm with a family.*

The family that she stayed with were friends of her parents and had lived in the same apartment complex as her family. She stated that when "*I had no place to go, they offered me a place in their house and that's like really special because how many times have you heard about families with kids even offering a home to someone?"* She stayed with them for a year but admitted it was not easy because they were trying to teach her how to take care of adult responsibilities, but because of how she was raised it was difficult for her to appreciate their efforts. At times, she was confrontational with the family and after a year of staying with them she moved out of town. However, lack of planning and lack of economic resources caused her to eventually become homeless.

> *So, I was living with a roommate but I couldn't afford it because I had no job, so she kicked me out. Then I was sleeping in my car and stayed at hotels all the month of November, then I found another roommate. I stayed with her all of December but then she kicked me out cause of, not because of rent, but it's like for stupid reasons, petty.*

Raven's story is unique in that it shows how parental lost can be a pathway into homelessness. Few researchers have examined how parental loss impacts housing instability of Black youth. One notable study by Berman et al. (2015) on the role of parental loss as a factor for residential instability and homelessness focused on the experience of eight Black women and one Latina woman. The study showed that all women had difficulty in succeeding in high school. The emotional stress and lack of stable housing precipitated depression, lack of motivation, transportation issues, dealing with getting to school, and financial concerns that required them to work during the day. Similarly, Raven experienced many of the same barriers as she tried to balance life inside and outside of school without her parents. Although she did graduate from high school, her plans to enter college after graduation were placed on hold after the death of her parents. She explained *"I didn't have a car. I had no transportation basically. So it was kind of all these things kind of like hindered me from going to school."* Nevertheless, she used the resources of the education department at Youth Thrive to enroll in college. Two months after the interview, I was informed that she was in the transition housing program and had enrolled at a local college to pursue her career goal of obtaining an art degree.

Section III: Participants with Some College Experience

Keshaa's Narrative

> *I'm trying to get it together cause I ain't got a lot of time. And honestly I feel like if I don't get it right this time, I don't know what I'm going to do. It's just how I feel, and I need to get everything together.* - Keshaa, 21

Keshaa was staying at the shelter program at Youth Thrive. This was her fourth time using the organization's services. She felt she had to hurry to get stability in her life because she knew she would age out of the shelter program in a few months. Before

experiencing homelessness for the first time at the age of 16, Keshaa spent most of her younger years living between her parents' house and her grandmother's house. When she began public school, she stated that the school curriculum sometimes conflicted with what she learned at home. For example, she talked about learning about religion at school.

> *I remember one time in middle school we learned about religion or something and at the time my family was transitioning from being Muslim into Yoruba, so I knew more about Muslim stuff, and it's like when you hear stuff, when you learn it in school versus what you learn at home it's just like "what are you talking about?" so it was kind of confusing to me.*

Keshaa enjoyed school up until the end of her 9th grade year. She recounted:

> *I got to around the end of 9th grade where it was like "I don't want to be here" so I stopped going to class unless I felt like it was a point. I always did my homework though, so I was still passing.*

It was not until she went to stay with her grandmother in a different school district to attend the predominately Black high school her tenth grade year, that she started to enjoy school again. She attended all her classes and felt smart at her new school. Furthermore, she loved her teachers at the school because they challenged her and took interest in the students.

> *As you can see I went straight from not going to school, to going back to school cause I really wanted to be in school… like I really loved school when I was in the predominately Black school. I didn't love it when I was in the other high school. Like when I was at the Black school it was like I felt like I can actually learn cause they actually work with you rather than just spit information at you. So I was like "okay, cool." It was really good, I really liked my classes, I really loved my teachers. They actually were good teachers…*

School was a priority in her life until she was forced to move back with her parents after she got into an argument with her grandmother. She returned to her former school where subsequently, her interest in school begin to dwindle again. Keshaa felt the

teachers held a bias against her because of the previous school district she attended. Then one day, after being denied help from the teacher, she became frustrated and left high school.

> *I'm not gonna flex, I got mad, I unplugged my phone and left, and I told my mom I wasn't going back there no more unless I went back to the predominately Black school. She said well I guess you ain't going back then.*

That same year, Keesha was kicked out of her parents' house because she was secretly harboring a male friend in her room who was experiencing homelessness. Put out of the house by her mother, she went to stay with her grandmother again. However, her grandmother had moved to a senior citizens' housing community. The rules at the senior citizens' housing community restricted Keshaa from staying there legally but she would often sneak in the building to stay with her grandmother. Other times she found shelter by couch surfing at her friends' homes.

Her first experience of housing instability was brief. After three months of housing instability, she enrolled in a GED military boarding school program. By the end of the program she had earned her GED and some college credits. Receiving college credits at the program inspired her to enroll at a four year historically Black university. Unfortunately, her enrollment at college was short-lived due to financial issues. She explained:

> *I mean I wasn't supposed to take this long of a break from school. I was supposed to take a semester off, it's been almost four years. I've been wanting to go back to school but it's just the fact that I know that I had financial issues… what I figured out was staying on campus was way more expensive, so I wanted to stay in school but the campus housing (sighs)… I wanted to fix my issue because I figured my financial aid would cover it, but they dropped my classes. I figured okay, all I got to do is fix my financial aid and I can go back to school. But nobody gave me time to do that…. So I feel like the events leading up to that is what led me to here right now and we need to change that, definitely.*

Keshaa's financial woes are similar to many other students who cite financial reasons for their college attrition. Financial factors are a common problem among college students, especially Black students attending HBCUs. Hutto and Fenwick (2002) surveyed 1,014 freshmen students at three HBCUs. Enrollment management and financial assistance were the respondents greatest concern. Enrollment management issues included many students feeling they did not receive enough information about financial aid sources or receive it in a timely manner, they did not feel comfortable speaking with financial aid counselors, and they did not feel the counselors were competent. Financial assistance issues included students feeling the institution would not meet their financial needs, there was a lack of financial assistance available to students, and it was difficult to receive work study assistance. Another study by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) found that compared to predominately white institutions (PWI) HBCU students have a higher rate of borrowing federal loans for college, 55% vs. 80% respectively. Placing these figures in context, Black families in the U.S. largely have less assets and income than other races, which affects their saving and spending for college expenses (Saunders, Williams, & Smith, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that Keshaa's financial issues at an HBCU postponed her post-secondary education.

After leaving college, she experienced homelessness again. Although she briefly experienced homelessness before she went to the GED program, it was only after she lost housing stability after college that she acknowledged experiencing homelessness.

> *Now the first time I became homeless which I count was because I was living with my ex-boyfriend. It was a very abusive relationship. When I left from over there, I went to my best friend's place, she stayed in a hotel. I stayed with her for like a couple of weeks. I guess, I don't know what happened to the hotel room. I know I ended up downtown, so I was stuck downtown. I mean I would spend nights at my grandma's house but you know I can't live there, but I can spend the night*

sometimes. Then it just turned out to be I was spending too many nights in the cold downtown…I was just like I ain't going to no shelter, I felt like I was too good for a shelter but then I ended up coming anyways cause I want to see if it was a better situation.

She arrived at Youth Thrive only to stay in the shelter for a few days. After she left Youth Thrive, she was arrested on drug charges. Once released from jail, she continued facing housing instability, so she and another ex-boyfriend found shelter in an abandoned building. Unfortunately, living in the abandoned building resulted in her being arrested again for trespassing and violating probation. She explained:

After we got evicted and I had my own house, well we had our own house, we came back here [Youth Thrive]. *Then we left* [Youth Thrive] *after my friend had told us, see this was the problem because my friend, well he's not my friend, this boy, he had told us that he had his own spot. We was thinking it was his house until we realized every time we come in here, this man go through the back door. It took us like a week to realize that. It really did, cause it was like lights working, heat working, I mean air conditioning, everything works, we got food, we got a microwave, I'm thinking okay, cool. Naw cuz, not at all, so it was just like okay, that' when it was time to really reevaluate. I mean I was in jail for like two months.*

*S*he divulged that the same ex-boyfriend might be getting out of jail soon and coming to Youth Thrive for services. This is her first time at Youth Thrive without him and although she was partially excited for him to join her at Youth Thrive, she stated:

I know even tho we not together and I'm talking to somebody completely different now, I know when he comes home he's still gone be my number one priority. So that's why I've been trying to make sure I'm straight first, cause I already know when he come home, whether we together or not, it going to be me coming up here to come check on him if I'm not here. To make sure he straight, he's doing this, that, and the third, so I'm just glad that I had my own time to really reevaluate and get myself together.

I saw Keshaa a few more times after the interview at Youth Thrive events. She would often come and speak to me because we bonded over the book *Stolen Legacy* and the film *Hidden Colors*. At our last conversation, she told me she was interested in either going back to the college she last attended or going to a closer local college. Although

she still owed money, she had been in contact with a few people to address her financial issues and was hopeful she could reenroll in college.

Harmony's Narrative

> *I didn't have a drive for education because I didn't understand why I needed it and I didn't understand why I didn't need it because no one really explained it to me in a way that I can understand. And then I was also dealing with my depression which took away from my drive for school and then just everything that was going on in my day to day life. It made me put school on the back burner, so I feel as though it wasn't my fault that I didn't have the drive there. It was just based off my circumstance. And I feel like people who aren't motivated, there is also a stigma against them because people look at them as though, "oh you're just lazy", "you just don't want to do anything". It's like you never know what they may be going through mentally and emotionally and spiritually as to why they don't have the drive there. I feel like mental health is definitely important and I feel like it should be implemented in the education system and it's not and that's why a lot of people fail.* - Harmony, 21

Living in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, Harlem, and in other New York cities, Harmony's family was continuously moving due to problems with the landlord or the high cost of rent. During this period of housing mobility, Harmony briefly experienced her first episode of homelessness at age nine. She explained *"I was with my family, we were staying with my aunt but then her boyfriend and my step-dad got into it, so she kicked us out."* Within a few weeks her family was able to find suitable housing; however, it was not until her 6th grade year, that her family was permanently housed.

Harmony attended public elementary school until sixth grade. When her parents gained housing stability, her mother decided to homeschool her, her sister, and her brother. She spent her 6th and 7th grade years being homeschooled. She confessed that during the time they were supposed to be homeschooled, they mainly spent their time doing things other than learning school work, but she excelled on state standardized test.

> *My mother homeschooled me and honestly, it feels like I didn't go to school those two years because she also dealt with mental stuff. So the first two weeks of*

> *school she'll teach us, after that my brother, sister, and I would literally just watch TV all day. We would watch TV or go to the park, basically do whatever we wanted to do. And we never really knew when we would have actual school, but the end of the year we would go take the test and we would test like four grades ahead. I never understood how, because we never learned anything but we still passed the test, so I think that's how we got away with it to do it another year.*

She returned to public school her 8th grade year when her family moved to Georgia. Harmony did not want to leave New York and the thought of having to return to public school after being homeschooled for two years, made her anxious.

> *It was scary because I had all these fears of like not being that smart as the other kids because in the back of my head I knew that my mom wasn't teaching me anything. So I felt like I was going to be behind and I also felt socially awkward because I had not really been around other kids for like two years, and then in elementary school we were moving around a lot, so I never really got a chance to make good, stable friendships.*

Academically, her grades dropped when she returned to public school, but she was able to improve her grades in high school and make the honor roll. Socially, she did have difficulty fitting in at school. She spoke about how her religious identity was a point of conflict in her life at school.

> *My mom and my step-dad were Muslim and when I first went to school they didn't make me cover, like wear the traditional headdress and stuff. Then one day I asked my mom if I can go skating with my friend and it was like 7 o'clock at night. She was like "you think you're grown, you think that you can go outside?"…she was like "you know what, you need to wear your headdress." So then I had to go to school covered and I was just super embarrassed because well for one, I didn't like the way it looked. And two, people were already used to seeing me a certain type of way. I didn't like all that attention being on me because of course everyone was like "what's that?" "Why do you have to wear that?" Having to go through this long day of people asking you all types of questions and then people, ignorant people, started making jokes about 9/11 and it was a very uncomfortable time for me. And then at the time I kind of just, I didn't even really enjoy being Muslim cause I felt like it was pushed on me. And I didn't understand a lot of this stuff in the religion. I understand it now from experience but not at that time. So I was just confused and I think I was going through an identity crisis, like I think that sent me to like an identity crisis that lasted a while.*

Her parents became frustrated with her obstreperous behavior and toward the end of her 9th grade year, her mother finally gave up trying to force her to wear her headdress.

Several stressful events began to unfold during her high school years that impacted her teenage years. Her step-dad was abusing drugs, her mother was diagnosed with cancer, she was dealing with symptoms of depression, and because of her defiant conduct she lost her mother's trust. Even with her family and personal strife, her mother had high expectations for her academically. Her mother instilled in her the importance of completing high school and pursing higher education. Harmony ended up graduating from high school with honors.

Harmony wanted to attend a historically Black university but choose to attend a predominantly White college at her mother's urging. Raised in a strict family, college gave her the freedom that she always desired as a teenager. She became disinterested in college academics and this behavior resulted in her being placed on academic suspension. She was expelled her freshman year. Since that time, she had attended two other colleges. Having to return home was a catalyst for her symptoms of depression to recur because she felt as though she had disappointed her mother.

> *I was just like wow, I really let my mom down and then that's when I tried to do whatever I could to get back into school but it got to a point where I realized I'm only doing this for my mom. My heart wasn't in it so then once again I repeated the same pattern-academic probation or whatever, suspension. I felt at that point like okay, two times in a row obviously this isn't meant for me. Honestly that kept happening for like four times, I would go back to get my mom to be quiet or just, just for reasons other than myself….*

She eluded to parental pressure to succeed as an antecedent to her depression. Her perspective of achievement was based off her mother's approval. At one point in the interview she mentioned *"I've noticed that that was a trigger for me, whenever I felt like*

I let my mom down it would lead me to major depression episodes so now I don't even really talk to her about school." As she got older, the wider the divide was between her and her mother. The contentious relationship was so severe that it contributed to her suicide attempt.

> *I just started going back and forth and then she's* [her mother] *like you know what, get all of your stuff and get out. Like she just goes to the extreme. So then I was really sensitive, so I started crying and I was like I hate you and blah, blah, blah, blah. Then a few minutes later I attempted suicide and she found me in a closet. I had slit my wrist and I guess she saw the blood everywhere and she called the hospital. Well she took me to the hospital and I stayed there for like two weeks and that's where I was diagnosed and that's why I've been trying my best to basically recover from all those years of depression. And it's not easy, I still relapse but I never, I don't get to the point where I attempt suicide.*

Harmony's experience with depression and suicide are quite common among Black young adults experiencing homelessness (Gattis & Larson, 2016). Female adolescents and young adults are especially vulnerable as they are more prone to develop depression (Moreh & O'Lawrence, 2016). With limited resources, many Black females who are homeless and experiencing depression may have few support services to help them.

A year later, in another heated exchange with her mother, she was kicked out of her mother's house at age 21. She credits the hospital staff for telling her about Youth Thrive. With tears in her eyes she said, "*If I never went to the hospital last year, I would probably be sleeping under a bridge".* Her statement was followed by a long pause, as she realized the grim reality of what could have been if she did not have supportive services.

It was at the educational department where I first met Harmony as she was seeking financial aid. Her depression had affected her motivation in school but now she believed she could manage the demands of school. She was determined to go back to

college for her own self-interest and had recently finished a semester at college. She was trying to enroll for the upcoming semester and had just quit her job as a co-teacher at a preschool to enroll in college full-time. Regrettably, finances were becoming her biggest enrollment barrier. During the last interview she informed me she had to withdraw the first week of school due to financial reasons. Weeks later as she and I discussed scholarships and other funding opportunities, she informed me that she had found a new job. She was intending to save money from the job so she could enroll in college the following semester to finish her degree in theater and drama.

Aaron's Narrative

> *I guess you could say I was living upper middle class, almost first- class lifestyle while living with my dad… My dad was making 6 figures, my step-mom was making 6 figures, so I was living that life. I was able to get as much as I wanted, I guess that upper-class type lifestyle and then I got kicked out. We got in an argument. I guess you could say really over a girl, a girlfriend at the time and he kicked me out. – Aaron, 19*

My first encounter with Aaron was in the learning class at Youth Thrive where we talked about his opportunities to travel overseas with his former company before this episode of homelessness. Two months would go by before I saw him again. He later told me he had been busy working two jobs. He also had gotten suspended from Youth Thrive for a few weeks for violating the food policy on campus. On the day of the interview, Aaron informed me that he was scheduled to leave the next day for college but wanted to participate in the study, so he agreed to complete the full interview in one session.

Aaron's parents were divorced and after a vicious custody battle, his father gained full custody of him when he was in middle school. At the age of fourteen, Aaron was kicked out of his father's house after a heated argument. Without a domicile, he stayed at the home of his girlfriend's mother for two months, and then stayed with his

mother for the summer. He finally returned to his father's house when the school term started but after a few months, he was kicked out again. This time, he decided to live on his own by using money he had saved to stay at a motel located close to his high school.

> *At that point I just said I can make it on my own. I'm not going through this ever again. And it was just like the first time was a wakeup call, but the second time was just like I wasn't dealing with it again. I wasn't even trying to, you know. I'm homeless but I went out and did it on my own. I was working, umm I had two jobs, and going to high school, and I was playing on the football team. I was just trying to make it work.*

Aaron only confided to the school counselor and assistant principal about his lack of housing stability. His pride kept him from telling others about his circumstance. Also, he did not want people feeling pity for him as though he was a charity case. He finally told his football coach his senior year only because he was having problems trying to balance everything inside and outside of school.

Prior to Aaron becoming homeless, he experienced a gap in his schooling due to the death of two immediate family members in New York. He was out of school for over five weeks as his family sought to take care of the deceased family members estate. It was shortly after he returned to Georgia, that his father kicked him out. The long period of him being out of school combined with experiencing homelessness took a toll on his grades. He went from being a straight A student in middle school and his freshman year to receiving his first C his sophomore year. His grade point average (GPA) dropped from a 3.9 to a 2.8 his sophomore year.

> *So it's not like I failed anything, but like that was my first time I had gotten a C, like ever, and that killed me. I was like a C in a class? Most kids would be like oh, that's fine. No, that was not fine.*

He diligently worked to improve his GPA and took several Advanced Placement (AP) and honor classes his junior and senior years which helped to boost his GPA. There

was one course his senior year, AP English, that caused him some difficulty because his teacher tried to fail him. He recalled:

> *She really didn't like me. She said I'd be the singlehanded person why you don't graduate high school. She said that. White lady, she probably about 20, or like 25, like she just graduated college, she was a substitute teacher the year before and it's her first-year teaching, like I say she was an extreme feminist, she really didn't like guys.*

He studied hard to prove her wrong and passed her class. That year, he also managed to get in a dual enrollment program to earn his certified nursing assistant certificate and some college credits. By the time he graduated, his GPA was a 3.1, but it frustrated him that his grades had dropped from an A plus to a B. He emphasized that his motivation to graduate was because of his pride. He wanted to graduate with his friends, and not a year later with his younger brother's class.

Aaron participated in a few extra-curricular activities, but credits playing football with giving him the most advantages at school. His athletic ability and size helped him earn a spot on the varsity team his freshman year. Being a football player brought him popularity and benefits not afforded to his peers. For instance, he boasted about getting extra lunch at school.

> *I was able to get two lunches and didn't have to pay for lunch at all. Other students, even if they were homeless or needed money, had to pay for lunch still. Or even with the free and reduced lunch, they would get a lunch but couldn't get as much or whatever. And for me, I didn't have free or reduced lunch. I wasn't classified homeless on paper. I had money, I was able to work and I was still getting free lunch because I was on the team.*

Recruited by several colleges, Aaron decided to go to college out of state on a football and academic scholarship. During his time in college he did not experience homelessness. The opportunity to go out of state, where he had family living, provided him with support and additional housing options. Although he stayed on campus,

oftentimes he would stay with family members on the weekend. However, shortly after his first semester, he left college. There were only a few Black students at the college, and he wanted to go to a school that had a larger Black population which resulted in his decision to leave school. He stated, "*I had to get around more Black people, I had to. The college had about 21 Black people on campus and I can honestly say I've only seen 5, so it's a pretty White dominated campus."*

After a brief stint taking online courses and moving between New York to stay with his grandmother and Georgia, Aaron eventually got a full-time job and an apartment in Georgia. Unfortunately, he ended up at Youth Thrive when his bank account was frozen and he could not pay his rent.

Since being in the shelter program, he has taken advantage of the educational and employment services. Outside resources have also helped him during this period of homelessness. He talked of how meeting with his former school counselor helped him get accepted to a state college. He commented, *"Like I went up there for one day and I was accepted that same day from him just making a phone call. I got accepted and then I just said I was going."* He was able to get a full-scholarship to a four-year historically Black university. He planned on receiving his undergraduate degree in biology, then attending Emory medical college to become a cardiologist.

Aaron's narrative differs from the other participant's in that he came from an upper middle-class background. He speaks of how he stayed in a gated community, had all the latest video games, and both parents were making over six figures. This upper-class background benefited him as he was able to save some money before he was kicked

out of the house. It is possible that his upper-class cultural capital, meaning his social assets, helped him network, travel, and get into college.

Although most research would suggest that most people who experience homelessness come from poverty or low-income families, there are several youths from upper class families that have been thrown out of their stable homes. In Ringwalt, Greene, and Roberston (1998) national study on youth who were thrown out of their homes, they found that among the sample of Black youth in shelters, 14.8% came from two-parent homes and 67% were not on family public assistance. However, most research on Black youth who are experiencing homelessness only depicts youth coming from low income broken families. This type of superficial coverage alludes to seeing Black homelessness as one collective experience. Aaron's story demonstrates there are upper-class Black youth who also experience homelessness, and although they may have better connections to networks, Blacks from the and support systems, they are not immune to homelessness.

Tasha's Narrative

> *I try not to let certain situations and stuff affect my bigger picture. Like I know clearly things happen and it's like homelessness can happen. Like clearly people are experiencing it for years but I knew that I wouldn't experience it for years. And I just knew that it was just a time in my life where I was. I still have to go to school, I still have to go to work, regardless of the fact that I'm going through homelessness. Yes I am sleeping in my car, it just has to be done for right now and that's okay because it's a day to day process. I have this bigger picture, so it's like as long as I wake up the next day, I still have to go to work and I still have to go to school and that's not gonna change till I graduate….it's just like I can't let that affect me because if I had stopped coming to school or had stopped going to work, then I would be much worse off and possibly still like experiencing that. Then it's just a fact that my school does have things in place to help. I think that just puts me in a better situation* – Tasha, 21

Tasha was a senior in college at GA A&T majoring in political science. She started experiencing homelessness the beginning of her senior year of college and has been experiencing homelessness a little under a year. This was her first episode of homelessness.

Tasha was a self-identified "radical Black queer feminist". She came from a two-parent lower middle-class household. She lived with her family in Tennessee and Indiana before they settled in Georgia her sophomore year of high school. She recalled making As and Bs in elementary and middle school, but her conduct was sometimes questionable.

> *I was always getting detention because I talked too much. I remember getting afterschool detention. In the lunchroom they put us on silent time. I got caught talking so that was always like the questionable part, like literally my entire school career.*

She continued to do well academically until her senior year of high school. The Advanced Placement courses she took were challenging and she hated doing homework. Her grades in those courses brought her grade point average down but she was able to retake the classes the next semester and passed. She graduated from high school on time with a 3.0 grade point average.

Her desire to become a lawyer and her parents' expectations motivated her to attend college. She decided to attend an in-state college because she wanted to be close to her family. Albeit, her family stayed close to the college, she opted to stay on-campus her freshman year. In her junior year, she decided to move off campus and share an apartment with her boyfriend. Initially the living arrangement worked until they could not afford the bills which resulted in eviction.

> *I was living with my boyfriend at the time and he's just horrible with money. And I clearly have horrible judgement (laughing) but basically, he couldn't pay the rent. I was paying a lot of other bills and stuff, so I didn't really have extra money to help. That's what he was supposed to be doing, and then I guess he like got short a paycheck or whatever and didn't recover from that. So basically, we ended up homeless.*

Her pride and independence prevented her from revealing her housing instability to her family or friends. In addition, she did not like the option of living with her parents nor did she believe that her parents, who had their own personal financial obligations, could sustain paying for her monthly rent. She responded:

> *My dad quit his job last year, like early last year, while my mom was actually out of work for a surgery she had….I mean clearly they weren't homeless or anything, but they weren't even in the best of situations, so it wasn't like I could be like, "hey can you help me?"...My mom, she gives me money randomly here and there or if I ask for it, but as far as being like "hey, can you like pay my rent?" They're trying to still pay their own mortgage, so it's like they wouldn't have been able to help me in that aspect, but they would have been like come home and I would have been like not gonna happen.*

Therefore, she chose to find other living arrangements. She and her boyfriend lived out of their car until one of his co-workers allowed them to stay with her. Conflict arose between Tasha and the co-worker, so she decided to move out.

> *I just had to remove myself from that situation and so I did go back to sleeping in my car for a little bit. Most times like when he got paid, we would try to stay in the hotels on the weekends or whatever. He had a friend who used to be his neighbor who would allow us to shower at their house. But then the daughter made up this whole elaborate lie about me, so then I was unwelcome, which I'm totally fine with. Like I said, I don't let things get to me as much because I'm not worried about them. I have a goal and I am going there regardless of anything else that happens in life. I was coming to the gym on campus, cause we pay a billzillon dollars for fees and stuff. I would go to the gym on campus and shower up there until the time that I wasn't like sleeping in the car.*

Tasha was working and in school but still could not save enough to find secure housing. Luckily, her college had a program that specifically catered to student who were experiencing homelessness. She was familiar with the program because she had helped

with the program, but she was still hesitant to reveal to the program staff that she was experiencing homelessness. It took her almost four months to finally decide to access the services from the college resource center.

> *I think just the actual moment in my life, for the first time, that I was like let me put my pride aside cause I'm a very private person. But clearly, I'm in this situation and there is the resource available for me to get out of this situation. And then just the fact that I'm like I can do it myself but it's gonna take longer or I could just be like ok fine help me please. So it was just the actual thinking and the actual willingness to put my pride aside. I clearly went back and forth for the longest time but it's just like if it's here, if it's a resource that we have, especially thinking about the people who don't have the resource, it's almost like fine I'll take advantage of it.*

She continued to say,

> *When I sent the director the e-mail, she basically was like you should come talk to me or you can go talk to another lady. I saw her [the director] and after just telling her, she just gave me this look and I was like I'm sorry cause I know her. I've been working with the homelessness initiative with the college program so I've known the director all this year. So to finally be like okay, I know the director is going to kill me, but I sent her the e-mail. She gave me a time to come and meet with the other lady, and literally that afternoon they put me in a hotel and I want to say like a week and a half, maybe two weeks later, they got me into housing on campus. It was a quick process and I was like ok, I can do this now.*

Although the program was helping with her housing, she was still not permanently housed but she realized that she was in a better situation because of the school resource. She admitted that without the college support program, she would still be trying to do everything on her own or she would eventually have had to move back with her parents because there were no viable homeless resources close to the school.

Tasha was able to find some stabilization because her college campus had a program specifically to help the needs of homeless students. Unfortunately, not all campuses have programs such as hers. It has only been in recent years that there has been gradual acknowledgement that there are college students experiencing homelessness. National research has shown the growing number of college students experiencing

homelessness. Over 14,000 students at community colleges across the nation are homeless or precariously housed (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, and Hernandez, 2017). Moreover, a large majority of them are Black. However, as Tasha stated, *"there is a lack of research on the Black community and Black college students experiencing homelessness"*. There is even less known about how many Black students, like Tasha, at four-year colleges experience homelessness.

Efforts are now being made by the federal government and some colleges to better identify college students who are experiencing homelessness. However, the data are sparse and there is relatively no known information about their completion rate (United States Government Accountability, 2016). Without knowing who these college students are and their academic outcomes, it is difficult to know how to fully address their needs. Fortunately for Tasha, her campus had supportive and housing services in place to retain college students experiencing homelessness.

Tasha decided to participate in the study after receiving a flyer from the college resource center's director. I met with her on campus, and she was eager to share her experience. She was the only participant interviewed from GA A&T. She was currently in college and only two semesters from earning her bachelor's degree in political science. She admitted that although it has been difficult, she has continued her schooling without any interruption. Recently, Tasha got a second job and has broken up with her boyfriend. After she graduates, she planned to possibly go into real estate for a few years before applying to law school to become a lawyer which was her career goal. She agreed to participate in the study because she wanted to share her story and saw there was a lack of research that conveyed the narrative of Black youth who are homeless. And as a future

lawyer, she wanted to use her voice and experience to fight for justice for oppressed groups.

In conclusion, intertwined throughout this chapter are the narratives of the participants and my experiences with the participants. Their narratives serve to give voice and humanize the participants by sharing a small portrait of their lives. By putting a story to their name, I hope to show others who are Black and homeless that they are not alone. In each case, I have attempted to address some of their issues of being Black and homeless and place it in relation to the literature and the larger society. The background information of the participants served to show the multi-faceted lives of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness in Georgia and to give readers a better understanding of what it may mean to be Black, young, and homeless in Georgia. Their stories show some of the challenges they faced in school, with family, and in society and while each participant's story differs, Chapter 5 shows some commonalities within their lived experience.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND THEMES

Although the participants in the study came from various backgrounds, each was affected by their financial and housing instability. The lack of resources impacted their lives inside and outside of school. Consistent with the literature review, for most of the participants, experiencing homelessness appeared to interfere with their school, finances, and social affairs at some point in their lives. However, the participants' school outcomes varied depending on their support and the resources available. For some of the youth, a strong supportive school community propelled them to succeed in completing their secondary education, while for other youth, school and other resources were not adequate to help them complete secondary or continue their collegiate education.

While the study examined the impact of homelessness on Black youth at two different programs in Georgia between the ages of 18 to 21, with a critical race theory (CRT) framework, I was able to explore the role race had on the participants lived experiences. The study was guided by the following questions:

(1) How does homelessness impact the academic achievement of Black youth in Georgia at programs for homeless youth?

(2) How do the youth at the programs perceive their lived experiences in relation to family, school, teachers, and peers?

(3) How do the youth navigate their status of being homeless within school and society?

(4) How do the youth perceive schooling will affect their current and future lives?

The answers to these questions were generated by analyzing the 14 participants' interviews and my participant observation data. Viewing the data through a CRT framework garnered five themes, Opportunity and Resource Gap, The Surrogate School Kinship, Survival and Economic Relationships, Invisibility and Hypervisibility, and Function of School. As shown in figure 3, four of the themes are disaggregated into subthemes. Opportunity and Resource Gap includes the sub-themes: grades, economics of schooling, racialized trauma, and system-involved youth. Surrogate School Kinship includes school personnel as protectors, parental teachers, and friends as supporters. Invisibility and Hypervisibility includes intentional invisibility, unexpected invisibility, and hypervisibility. Function of School includes lack of applicable knowledge and prerequisite for the future. Throughout this chapter, direct quotes from the participants' transcripts are used to illustrate specific themes and sub-themes. To give prominence to the participants' voices, the quotes are as authentic as possible. The wording has only been changed if clarification was needed.

Theme	Sub-theme
Opportunity and Resource Gap	• Grade • Economics of Schooling • Racialized Trauma • System-Involved Youth
Surrogate School Kinship	• School Personnel as Protectors • Parental Teachers • Friends as Supporters
Survival and Economic Relationships	
Invisibility and Hypervisibility	• Intentional invisibility • Unexpected invisibility • Hypervisibility
Function of school	• Lack of Applicable Knowledge • Prerequisite for the Future

Table 2. shows the themes and the sub-themes found from the data.

Opportunity and Resource Gap

Homelessness affected the participants at various moments in their lives. Some were able to continue their formalized schooling while experiencing homelessness, some dropped out of secondary school and college while they were homeless, and others became homeless after they finished secondary school. Regardless of when they started to experience homelessness, most of the participants in the study experienced some educational setbacks. The respondents' answers to the first question revealed their academic achievement was not only connected to their experience with homelessness but also connected to their home life prior to becoming homeless. In addition, racialized encounters they faced at school impacted their educational experience.

Lack of stability in their home denied them the educational tools and support needed to fulfill their academic potential and caused emotional distress that affected their

school performance and outcomes. As a result, their academic performance was disrupted by the opportunity and resource gap encountered.

Simply put, the opportunity and resource gap appears when a group of students does not have access to the same educational opportunities as others and they cannot afford or access the same resources as their peers. In my definition, the term includes any structural or institutionalized factors causing a group of students to have a disadvantage from their peers. This could include disparities in the quality of the school facility, teachers, curriculum, or the ways that community wealth, familial situations, or other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower educational outcomes for some students. It has been reported that students from low income backgrounds and Black and Hispanic students are most susceptible and impacted by the opportunity gap (Welner & Carter, 2013). Similarly, the participants in this study indicated academic performance was greatly affected by inequities inside and outside of school.

Grades

Most youth who experienced homelessness while enrolled in high school such as Rachael, Aaron, Pedro, and Tyler suffered a drop in their grades. Some participants were able to improve their grades and graduate on time with their cohorts but for others the stress of finding shelter, family instability, and school disenfranchisement prevented them from completing secondary school. When asked how homelessness affected his grades, Aaron stated, "*So my grades kind of slipped off. I guess my sophomore year from all that and then junior year it went back up a little bit."* He studied and worked diligently to improve his grades, but admits it was not easy because he had to balance work, sports, and school. Rachael also saw her grades drop when she became homeless her senior year,

but she was able to graduate with her class. She credited her self-motivation and desire to prove some of her peers wrong about her academic potential as the driving forces for completing school. Rachael and Aaron used goal setting to keep them driven in school, even when they became homeless. Both participants graduated with their peers despite being homeless.

Conversely, Rob was never able to recover from the negative impact homelessness had on his grades. He made As, Bs, and a few Cs before becoming homeless in 11th grade. He confessed "*when I hit the 11th grade, 12th grade, those were kind of hard rough edges for me, my grades slipped."* Securing income and finding shelter was his top priority. The mental distress of wondering where he would sleep at night disrupted his focus on school. Tyler also experienced mental and physical distress when he became homeless which led to a periodic decline in his academic performance at school. When talking about the impact homelessness had on his education he explained *"I mean, my grades definitely started to get lower. I mean I just wasn't feeling like myself."*

Economics of Schooling

Participants' financial situations greatly impacted how accessible formalized school was for them. The economic cost of school inhibited the academic progress of several of the participants. Most youth in the study lacked the financial resources to pay for higher education. They had to rely on outside resources for school funding, yet many of the participants were unaware of how to search and secure funding for school. Counselors, parents, guardians, homeless liaisons, and homeless service agencies were not able to provide the youth with the necessary knowledge to prepare for college. Many

of the youth were inadequately instructed about the requirements for school and were confused on how to begin the process to apply to school. While all participants, except Lil Red, were optimistic about going to college, most were concerned about the financial cost of post-secondary education. The financial stress and anxiety created a barrier for their continued schooling. For Pedro, he stated "*I know I should have went to college, which I'm trying to go to college, but I don't wanna pay another loan, it'll have to be like debit and stuff, no debt."* When asked if everyone in America is provided an equal opportunity to succeed, he linked the high cost of college with inequity, stating:

> *If high school free, why can't college be free? Why do we have to pay so much money to go to college? Why do we have to get loans, pay you back for college? Why we have to be in debt, like if high school free, elementary free, middle school free, why can't college be free? It should be equal, everything should be equal. It should never be a higher standard for this place, to this place, to this place, everything should be equal*.

Likewise, when asked the same question, Raven referred to the high cost of college, suggesting that there should be a better way to provide students' access to post-secondary education:

> *I feel like they [schools] tried to provide equal opportunities, my problem is just the money, 'cause school is very expensive. Umm yeah I feel like the cost of school would make anyone not want to go, like, they can't afford it. Now I think no one should feel like that, because if you really want to do something you shouldn't umm let something like that get in your way…So I'm not saying let people go to school for free but there's got to be like a better way. You do get loans if you have to, I don't recommend, it but if you have to.*

Pedro and Raven perceived the opportunity was there for them to go to school, but they realized the financial resources to access the opportunities were not easily available. Both participants understood that taking out loans could put them at a potential risk for higher financial debt.

Keshaa and Harmony were confronted with financial issues once they were in college. Keshaa could not re-enroll in college because she could not afford the college debt she owed. This was the primary barrier preventing her from continuing her post-secondary education. She stated, *"I've been wanting to go back to school but it's just the fact that I know that I had financial issues."* Since being out of college she has been arrested twice and experienced homelessness again. She feels like all of this could have been avoided if she was still in college. Harmony's pursuit for a college degree was also sidelined by financial woes. She had finally decided to pursue her college degree for her own self-interest, but a week after school started, she realized she would not have the funds needed to complete her semester of college. "*Financial aid has always been a barrier for me,"* she stressed. She planned to return to college the next semester but the delay in going to college has halted her plans to escape homelessness.

Rob's financial challenges were complicated by the fact that he had taken out federal financial aid to finance a fraudulent secondary and part of a post-secondary education. The school was able to exploit him by stealing the meager income he had and manipulating the trust he had in the value of educational credentials. Because the school took his federal financial aid money, he was expected to pay it back, even though the school was fraudulent. He did not have the financial means to pay on his school loan and he did not feel it was fair for him to pay the money back since he was scammed out of the money. He lost money and time by enrolling in a school that failed to provide him with the school credentials he needed for social and economic mobility. Referring to when he left the fraudulent school and became discouraged in returning to school, he commented

"*So that was a big, a big pause in my educational life because at the time I didn't know what to do."* He went on to say:

> *I was just naive to the whole incident 'cause I didn't know they had fraud schools. I didn't know there was a such thing and so when I found out there are fraud schools out here, I was like oh my god, so it was just a learning experience for me.*

In an attempt to eliminate the student loan he owes, he has hired a lawyer. He commented *"I'm so happy I have somebody that's helping me to get this discharge, so I don't have to pay this loan 'cause I know I cannot afford it right now."*

The economics of school was not just limited to those participants pursing a post-secondary education. Students attending high school were also affected by the economics of school especially when facing housing insecurity. Often participants had to earn money to survive while trying to focus on school. Rachael had to balance the demands of work and school her senior year, where she sometimes had to miss school because she was scheduled to work. Aaron revealed in his story how he was working multiple jobs, playing high school football, and attending school. He was able to balance everything until the end of his senior year. The demands of his job were overwhelming, and he had to choose between work and school. Fortunately, he had saved some money, therefore allowing him to focus more on school and less on trying to work. He recounted:

> *I don't really tell my coach about my housing situation. He didn't really know how bad it was until almost the end of senior year, when I really wasn't able to work because I need to focus back on grades and get back into school and all this other stuff.*

For Lil Red, income was more important than school. Repeatedly, she emphasized how making money was a priority by noting "*Right now I'm at the point of my life where all I want to do is get me a job, stack up some money, and be able to make it in this*

world. Money makes me happy." The income from her job as an exotic dancer afforded her the chance to stabilize her housing, income, and reduce mental stress. Although the job put her at a higher risk for exploitation, she felt she could not wait for the pay-off of graduating to receive school credentials. She needed immediate income.

Rob has constantly had to deal with financial stress since high school. He was able to get a job at a fine dining establishment but soon the demands at his job interfered with his school schedule.

> *I was kinda doing school and working at the same time but that just didn't work out too well, so I just continued really to work… I kind of did school and then work but it, it was really hard to balance because my restaurant schedule, they need you all the time, every day, anytime, spontaneous times. Somebody could be sick, and you have to come in, so it's kind of hard to work with my school schedule you know… but I was focused on working because I was homeless, and I didn't have anywhere else to go, so that was really my main focus at that time frame.*

These eight participants agreed that financial strains presented a problem for them to focus on schoolwork and continue their schooling. Pedro and Raven linked college cost to limiting people from succeeding in America. Both were attempting to enter college at the time of the interview and they needed outside financial assistance to attend college. Harmony and Keshaa had previously attended college and saw it as a pathway to escape homelessness. Rod also viewed receiving secondary and post-secondary education as a way to provide him with housing stability. While in high school, Aaron, Rachael, Lil Red, and Rod were faced with deciding on the necessity and cost of school, therefore do they choose going to school and sacrificing potential income for housing or choose a job and sacrifice earning their secondary school credentials?

Racialized Trauma

Some of the participants' academic progress was not just affected because of financial limitations, but also due to the inequality of teacher effectiveness. Several participants noted how racial encounters with teachers shaped their view on school. Some respondents revealed how some teachers had lower expectations of them because of their race. Aaron, Rachael, Keshaa, and Harmony each talked about how a White teacher negatively responded to them in class. Aaron recalled an incident when his Advance Placement teacher questioned his enrollment in her class because he was Black:

> *Yeah, I definitely got discriminated against… I guess the biggest time was my freshman year 'cause I was Black and in AP classes. Teachers were surprised that I was even in there. They didn't look at my grades or whatnot, they just was like "you're Black and maybe you should go to CP, college prep class". College preparation! Why I never felt so, you know disrespected. Like maybe I should go, but I'm here for a reason. That's where that pride came in. I wanted to prove her wrong.*

Her disparaging statement was upsetting and provoked him to respond angrily.

> *I told her to shut up. I said that, right there in her face. I said shut up and teach the class. And like I got in trouble for it but like it wasn't no referral cause I mean I was just speaking my mind when the situation came down to it. I was just straight forward 'cause I've never had a teacher say that to me.*

It was as if the color of his skin was supposed to dictate his intelligence level. Her insensitivity and bias drove him to work harder to prove her wrong. He continued in the class and aced the class.

Rachael told a similar story in Chapter Four where a White teacher tried to exclude her from class. As one of the few Black students at her school, her fourth-grade teacher tried to isolate her from the rest of the class during the discussion of slavery. The incident was the first time that she blatantly faced racism at school from a teacher. She still has a negative feeling toward the teacher as she proclaimed, "*I hate her*" while

explaining the incident. It was after her teacher's action that she became aware of her racial identity. It also was when she recognized that this might not be the last time she would be discriminated against in school and society.

Another instance of racialized trauma involved Keshaa being omitted from taking a test at school. She had previously attended a predominantly Black school in the city and transferred to a predominantly White school in the suburbs. When asked if she ever felt discrimination at school she replied:

> *Yes, in high school, yeah which is the reason why I didn't want to go back to Roger Young County because I remember being told umm oh, "we're having a test today, but you don't have to take it". Why don't I have to take it? Or being told that "oh, here's a different test for you". So I'm the only person in this class taking this test…I think it's based off of, oh you think because I came from another school district I'm stupid. Cause I mean I did come from the inner city.*

She also mentioned one of her worst moments in high school was when her AP English teacher refused to let her write about her "shero."

> *My English teacher said we could write on whatever we want to write about. I wanted to write about Assante Shakur and she wasn't going for it. She was like no. I don't know if it was 'cause she* [the teacher] *was a White lady or she just didn't want to hear that. I was like you said we could write about whatever we want. These folks in here writing about how much they love their momma, I don't want to write about my mother, I want to write about how Assante Shakur is awesome.*

She could not understand why it was not acceptable for her to write about someone whom she admired. This incident, along with feeling that some of the teachers devalued the education she received while attending a predominately Black inner-city school, contributed to her decision to drop out of public high school.

While three participants reported that some of their teachers were overtly racist, Harmony talked about how one of her teachers clandestinely exhibited racist behaviors. She expressed how a White teacher at her high school allowed a White student's

impropriety to continue by ignoring his behavior, even after she reported his racist remarks to the teacher. She explained, *"there was this White boy that used to go around the classroom asking all the Black kids, do you like rope? And I went and told the teacher, she did absolutely nothing about it."* The teacher's failure to act made her feel as if her grievance was invalid.

Critical race theory posits that race and racism are embedded in American society. This was exemplified as participants revealed the low expectations and racist behaviors of the teachers. The racial trauma inflicted emotional harm by causing some participants to question their own academic ability and feel devalued in school.

System-Involved Youth

In analyzing the data, only five of the fourteen participants did not drop out of high school at any point of their lives. The other nine participants at some point stopped their high school education. Apart from Lil' Red, a reoccurring pattern showed that all other participants who dropped out of high school were system-involved youth. Figure 4 shows that eight of the participants were either in foster care, incarcerated, or in mental health facilities. Me'k, Demetri, TeTe, Tyler, and Pedro were in at least two state custody facilities while Cali, Rob, and Keshaa were in one state custody facility.

Table 3. Participants in State Custody Facilities

Name	State custody	Dropped out
Aaron	No	No
Cali	Yes, Correctional Facility	Yes
Demetri	Yes, Correctional Facility, Foster care	Yes
Harmony	No	No
Keshaa	Yes, Correctional Facility	Yes
Lil Red	No	Yes
Me'k	Yes, Correctional Facility, Foster Care	Yes
Pedro	Yes, Correctional Facility, Foster Care	Yes
Rachael	No	No
Raven	Yes, Mental Health Facility	Yes
Rob	Yes, Foster Care	Yes

Tasha	No	No
TeTe	Yes, Correctional Facility, Foster Care, Mental Health Facility	Yes
Tyler	Yes, Foster Care, Mental Health Facility	Yes

Table 3 lists the participants, if they were in state custody facilities and type, and if they dropped out of high school.

Six out of 14 participants had been a part of the foster care system. All of them had been placed in the Department of Family and Children Services at a young age. While Me'k and Tyler were reunited with their biological parents, the other participants had estranged relationships with their biological parents. All of the participants who were not with their biological parents often held resentment or frustration toward their parents. Demetri had not spoken to his mother in over eight years. He explained the last time he spoke to his biological mother was after his grandmother's funeral.

> *I said I'm gonna give her a call but when I gave her a call, I called her by her real name. She was like stop playing. I was like I'm not playing and like she hung up…Later I sent a text message cause it really made me frustrated, and I just let all my feeling out in that text message. I was like I told the whole truth. I was like I don't see why you my mother, I wish I was never born by you, I wish somebody else was my mother, at times I don't even feel like you my real mother, like ya'll keeping secrets. You sitting here getting mad cause I'm calling you by your first name, you never acted like a mother in my life, none of that.*

Following the death of his grandmother and his estrangement from his biological mother, his grades dropped dramatically, and he started getting in trouble with the law.

Three participants, Tyler, TeTe, and Raven, mentioned going to a mental health facility. Raven was committed only once to a mental health facility while in high school. Tyler and TeTe had been committed to mental health facilities more than three times during their childhood years. Tyler was in and out of mental health facilities from the age of seven until seventeen. His mother would have him committed to the mental facilities usually when school was out, so he did not have to miss any school days. He explained, "*Well, I went to school, it's just like during certain periods of time like the summer and the winter and stuff like that, when school wasn't available, I would be sent to a mental institution."* Only once was he committed to a mental health institution while school was in session. He was checked into the facility for a brief period his 11th grade year. The facility had a school on campus so when he returned to public school he was on track with his peers.

Likewise, TeTe was able to stay on track with her peers at her school once she left the mental health facility. She was very familiar with state facilities, as she is the only participant that has been in all the state facilities. She bragged about her knowledge of the system.

> *Me personally, I've been in the system for a very long time. I've been in the system from foster care, to getting adopted, to going in and out of these places, so I know the system very well and I can work the system. That's one thing I'm proud of 'cause you gotta know the system and they got mad 'cause I knew the system… You see I kind of had mental health issues so whether or not I was in school or whatever, being that those places had a school, if I was really having a mental breakdown or whatever I had to go into one of those places, it was no choice.*

Although the participants' schooling was interrupted as they worked on their mental health issues, the curriculum offered at the facilities afforded the participants the chance to continue their education. From the responses of the participants, it seems that

being committed to mental health institutions did not interfere with their academic progress. However, the same cannot be said for participants who were in correctional facilities.

Almost half of the participants interviewed had been incarcerated. The charges and duration of time served varied but all of them stopped going to high school at one point of their life. Cali, Me'k, and TeTe found it difficult to return to school after being released from jail. Cali's school of origin would not readmit him because of the charges on his record. Because of her probation requirements, TeTe was prohibited from being around certain people at school. She decided it was best if she did not return to the same school. She planned to resume going to school but found out that having convictions on her record placed limitations on her school options. She shared how she felt when she applied for a program but got rejected because of her charges:

> *They don't really take adult charges or whatever so I could not actually get into that program or whatever. So, I don't know. I was kind of like well dang, when she told me no. I was like "why are you doing this to me right now, 'cause like I need this." And she's like "I understand", she's like you can be in the program, we can get you jobs and everything, she said we just can't enroll you in the school.*

Me'k dropped out of high school after being released from a detention center. When he returned to his cousin's house to live, he learned that his mother had moved to his aunt's house. So, he went to stay with his aunt and mom. However, he stated, *"the commute from where my aunt stays to my school was too far. So I wasn't able to get back into the school. Pretty much I was like okay, screw it, and I got a job."*

These three youth wanted to continue their education but the charges on their background and housing instability made it difficult for them to return to their school of origin. Even though the correctional facilities offered some form of educational learning

and training, schools may not always accept academic credits from detention facilities (Feierman, Levick, & Mody, 2010). Coinciding with the research, some of the participants completed courses while incarcerated but the credits were not accepted when they returned to public school, and they had to retake classes that they took when in the correctional facility.

Three system-involved youth did pursue other options to receive their secondary educational credentials. Keshaa and Demetri received their GED and Pedro received his high school diploma through his educational and vocational training program. While they earned their secondary school credentials, they were still feeling the ramifications of having a charge on their record. Keshaa emotionally described the challenges she faced when she tried to get a job.

> *It's hard for me to get a job because once they do that background check, even though I mean it doesn't show up as a felony right now, it shows up that I'm on probation, but then you know they gonna ask me "what are you on probation for?" And I have to tell them. So it's like hard to really function out here…. The jobs I want you either need experience, degrees, no felonies, clean background, then the jobs I don't want, they only pay like 8 dollars an hour, so it's like I'm in a lose-lose situation so.*

Even with secondary school credentials, the blemish on their record can limited their economic and job opportunities. Although a study (Black et al., 1996) indicated a GED or vocational program increases the employment chances of juvenile offenders, the participants in the study struggled to find and keep jobs that would provide them a decent income.

In summation, the majority of the participants' academic progress became stagnate due to factors inside and outside of school. These youth were not afforded the

same opportunities as their peers and had limited resources and opportunities that produced disadvantages in their educational outcomes.

Surrogate School Kinship

When participants talked about their lived experiences in relation to family, school, teachers, and peers, all participants mentioned someone other than their parents or guardians who played a significant role in their educational lives. Several of the youth like Demetri, Aaron, Harmony, Lil Red, Pedro, Rob, TeTe, and Tyler did not have a strong relationship with their biological parents or guardian. Many of the participants became homeless due to tumultuous home environments or being put out of the home by a family member. Lacking parental guidance or just needing to find support outside of the home, the participants found solace among school staff and school faculty and friends. Oftentimes people at the school were the ones who were constant in their lives. Their roles included being protectors, extended parents, and support systems for the participants.

School Personnel as Protectors

Some participants saw school as a safe haven. It was a place they could go to elude their trouble at home. At school they had teachers and staff who cared about them and offered empathy and comfort. Teachers provided participants not only with their educational needs but also supplied them with their basic human needs. In Tyler's story, he spoke of how his second-grade teacher protected him from the physical abuse he endured by a family member. Seeing Tyler distraught and bruised, she alerted the authorities and she stayed with him throughout the school day until she knew he was safe.

He also had teachers during his elementary and middle school years that protected him from the bullies at school.

> *I remember one of my middle school teachers, she helped me out a lot, you know. She would stop the bullying, you know. She'd even drive me home, I mean, if she had time she would. So it was really nice. I love my middle school teachers.*

Demetri viewed his middle school science teacher as more than just a teacher. She was his confidant. She was the one person whom he trusted in the school.

> *She was pretty much my real mentor and stuff like that. Someone I could talk to when I was actually having problems, I had no one else to turn to so I could actually call her and talk to her and she'll like calm me down or whatever, especially if I'm mad or feeling some type of way or if I'm just depressed and just down in the dumps, she was there to talk to me and built me up and stuff like that.*

Teachers investing time and energy were important to the participants. When teachers took time out of their normal routine to help students, the youth believed it showed that the teacher cared about them. Raven mentioned about having a teacher who went the extra mile to care for her. Talking about one of her teachers, she noted "*she's really involved, she even had numbers to our parents and she'd even like sneak and like give me a ride home. So, it's just that I like have someone who actually cares about their students."*

After getting locked up the first time and then returning to school, TeTe lost her academic drive. Recognizing her academic decline, her homeroom teacher who had known her for years reached out to her. He wanted to protect her from dropping out of school. Recalling the conversation, she had with her teacher, she recapped:

> *My favorite teacher, he's my home room teacher from my first two years in high school. He came up to me and even tho he wasn't my home room teacher anymore, he said, "I know you're going through something 'cause I know you. I may not be your home room teacher but you still have my class and your work is just not up to date. Are you still writing your poetry?" I said no. He said "see that's how you know something is really wrong 'cause you never not writing." I*

> *said I know. He said "I need you to get on top of your stuff." I said I need me to too, but I can't. He said "why?" I said cause I lost my motivation. Do you know how far behind I am in class? We have six periods a day, how the hell am I supposed to catch up in every muthafucking class? I just can't do it. My motivation is down. He said I can help you. So, then I tried.*

Some of the participants credited school counselors and administrators with helping them in school. The counselors at schools usually connected students to resources and provided them with guidance, especially since many may also serve the role as the homeless liaison for the school. For example, Aaron only revealed to his counselor and an administrator that he was experiencing homelessness. Both personnel provided him with emotional support and he continued to have a close relationship with them after he left high school. It was the connection with his counselor that helped him get a free scholarship to an HBCU (Historically Black College and University). Lil Red, Pedro, and Tasha were able to find shelter because of their school counselors providing them with housing information. As Pedro attested, "*I was with my program* [vocational and educational training program] *and my parents didn't want me back so they* [the counselors] *was trying to find a shelter for me to go to and they found Youth Thrive."* Even Tyler's former school counselor told him about Youth Thrive and arranged for his transportation to the agency, so he could be provided with shelter while attending high school.

School staff also watched out and cared for the some of the participants. When talking about people who had an impact on his education, Tyler spoke about some teachers and his favorite paraprofessional:

> *I had an ISP, she walked with me throughout the school to my classes and stuff like that. I enjoyed being with her. At times it was hard because she would just nag on me and nag on me but I always knew that she was just trying to help.*

School staff also kept Lil Red from harm. She had help from teachers, the school counselor, and the school janitor. She detailed a poignant moment about how the school janitor impacted her life:

> *One day she knew I didn't have nowhere to go and she let me stay inside the school. So she let me sleep inside the school and she said I'm going to make sure you are okay tomorrow. When I come in tomorrow, you come find me personally and if you have not ate or you just want to talk, I'll feed you and we can sit down and have a conversation cause I need you to be okay.*

Parental Teacher

Teachers were not only protectors for several of the participants, they also fulfilled the role of a parent. In the interviews, participants would repeatedly refer to their teachers with endearing terms such as mom, or dad, or father-figure. Many participants spoke of their teachers in high regards and oftentimes looked for the teacher's approval, like they would a parent. These teachers usually went beyond their job description and had a personal connection with the student. Similar to a close parental bond, participants shared intimate details of their lives with teachers. Like most parents, these teachers had high expectations and pushed the students to reach their greatest potential. For example, Keshaa tells of her bond with her math teacher.

> *It's like he pushed me… And it was like he was legit helping me because he wasn't my teacher. He didn't become my teacher until like 4th grade when he was my actually math teacher, so he knew me already. He already knew how to deal with me. It was like he was a family member, like I used to call him my dad, like on God, when I was in school. It used to make me happy.*

When their home lives were unstable, teachers stepped in to create stability and guidance. Participants were excited to talk about the happiness and comfort they felt when they were with their school parent. Rachael's story demonstrates how teacher-parents performed various supportive roles in the youth's lives.

> *There's like a few teachers that I actually trusted which were my special education teachers since I told you I do have a disability. So I did have to go to like small group. My special education teachers, they really help me. You know how people say "oh this is my mom, this is my dad" but it's not like their biological, it's like their fake parents, that's how they were. I had school parents. My school dad and my school moms. I love them to death. I love all of them because they've seen me grow so much and they've seen me achieve so much but they've also seen me at my lowest point of my life. They've seen me when I was crying about my ex and when my ex wanted me to do stuff that I didn't want to do. They were like my coaches and they would tell me like "Rachael, you need to think for yourself, you need to cut him off, you need to think of yourself". My school dad, he would pray for me. Every time I would be like dad I need you to pray for me. He would pray for me and it like changed my whole, like outlook. Yeah, they make me smile every time I think about them.*

Friends as Supporters

Friends were a reliable source of support and encouragement in school. When participants were having problems at home and school, having camaraderie gave them a sense of belonging. Friends were credited with encouraging them to stay in school, providing emotional support, and offering genuine companionship. Cali was the only person to discuss the negative effect of friends. He affirmed that it was his so-called friends who committed a crime that got him locked up for over two years. Other participants such as Tyler, Rob, TeTe, Raven, Demetri and Me'k emphasized the positive role friends had on their school experience. Me'k described his friendship with others as the best moments he had at school:

> *I mean of course there were times where I won awards and things like that but umm I'd like to say the best experience I had was when I was with my friends. It was when I was able to be myself and relax and just have a good conversation with my friends, those were the best times…And you know they also played other key roles in things like helping me sometimes with studying if I needed help studying. Umm also just helping me to just become a better person through the persona of friendship cause you got to realize everything is of course emotion but there's also personas. And friendship is a very important persona that needs to be played out especially during this time.*

Friends also became some of the participants' family unit. Because many of the participants couch surfed before turning to other forms of temporary shelter, friends were usually the first people they sought for shelter and help. The extended hospitality often resulted in the participants' bond with their friends becoming stronger than their bond with their own family. Rob talked about staying with his friend and his mom for five months after he left his aunt and uncle's house.

> *Oh yeah, me and him, it's so funny cause we look so much alike, we were like little twins. So his mom adopted me and people always thought we were real brothers cause we look so much alike and he just, he actually, he was real supportive of me… he's like a brother to me honestly, like a close brother.*

Demetri had a similar situation, where his best friend and her mother offered him shelter once they found out he was experiencing homelessness.

> *When I became homeless and my best friend found out, she kind of got mad at me. She was like, why you didn't tell me nothing, you could have been staying with me and stuff like that. She stayed with her momma and she was like "you could've come and stayed with me and my mom." And she told her mom and she had me on speaker. Her mom was like "he could come stay over here, you could come stay for however long you need." And I was like, naw, I don't wanna bother you. That's when my best friend said, "best friend if you don't get over here I'm gonna beat your ass. I will literally come out the house right now find you and drag ya ass over here." I was like man, chill out. Aight, aight, I'm be over there in a minute. So I ended going to her house. I stayed over there for maybe like two weeks, no, most I stayed over there was maybe liked 4 months.*

These examples show how friends were a vital support system inside and outside of school for the participants.

Many of the participants had broken relationships with their immediate family members. Nevertheless, school personnel and friends became their family unit. Having close relationships with school personnel and friends helped the participants navigate through school and society. These support systems were often beneficial by providing guidance, counseling, and offering housing when needed.

Economic and Survival Relationships

Relationships were an important part of the participants' lives. As participants talked about their social lives, it became apparent that there was a difference between the males' and females' reliance on the opposite sex. The male participants' reasons for experiencing homelessness were not associated to their involvement with a female or male partner, but interestingly, five of the six females told stories about how their housing instability was connected to a male partner or acquaintance. The five female respondents' narratives illustrated that the male figure was presumed to supply them with financial, housing, and emotional support.

Taken from the typology devised by Carmen Lynch and modified by Professor of Psychology Victor Daniels (http://web.sonoma.edu/users/d/daniels/lynch.html, n.d.), a survival relationship is when a person is overly-dependent on a partner for their basic needs to be fulfilled. The relationship can be physical as well as emotional and financial. It was repeatedly revealed in the data that prior to or during their experience with homelessness, female participants were dependent on males providing shelter and financial support for them. Keshaa and Rachael both stayed in abusive relationships with males because the males provided financial and housing security. Both experienced homelessness once they escaped their abusive domestic relationships.

Tasha was dependent on her boyfriend to secure housing for them. Her story illustrated how her boyfriend's mismanagement of finances resulted in both of them experiencing homelessness when he could not afford to pay the rent and they were evicted from their apartment. She continued to feel that his mismanagement of money was the cause of her homelessness. She mentioned *"I know, like my boyfriend at the time,*

was still caught up on this whole thing like, it's kinda his fault. I do kinda blame him." Instead of turning to family or friends for support, she decided to keep quiet about her financial misfortunes. She continued her relationship with him while they both struggled to make ends meet.

TeTe and Raven both depended on a male for housing security once they became homeless. TeTe was couch surfing and living on the streets before she met Demetri. When discussing her present housing situation, TeTe commented *"I'm staying with Demetri."* Although Demetri was also at Youth Thrive, he had temporary housing provided through another service agency. When they first met, TeTe told him about her lack of housing and he allowed her to move in with him. Her shelter was then dependent on his connection to the service agency. Likewise, Raven was tired of sleeping in uninhabitable spaces, so she used social media to seek housing security.

> *So in January, I kind of umm posted on Craig's List saying hey I'm homeless. Can someone help me etc blah blah blah…so I got a lot of like offers and all of them were males...I was able to pick out the ones that are "I know what you're doing this for". And so I tried to be as careful as I could. Umm there was this one guy, he said I could stay with him and he'll even give me a job, and he was going to pick me up like the very next day. So, I was like okay, I'll go with him, 'cause that night umm I was sleeping in a laundry mat and it's like I cannot stay another night like this, so I was like okay, I'll go with you. And I was with him for just a week and then I went to the city shelter and then I came to Youth Thrive.*

Although she only stayed a week with him and then went to a shelter, he provided a short-term solution for her housing issues. Even Lil Red moved in with her boyfriend and boyfriend's sister briefly for temporary housing but was forced to leave after her boyfriend's sister made a false accusation against her.

Contrary to the females housing issues, the males in the study stayed with friends or found their own temporary housing. The only female participant whose survival and

living circumstance was not attached to a male was Harmony. All other female participants' lived experience had some form of dependency on a male for their housing security.

Invisibility and Hypervisibility

The concept of invisibility and hypervisibility were discussed several times as the participants explained how they navigated through school and society. Usually invisibility in schools has been viewed as a negative connotation, however for the participants of this study, invisibility was used to reject the label of homelessness and to avoid being bombarded with sympathy and pity from others, especially teachers. The data also revealed that there was a clear distinction between the students intentionally assuming invisibility and the school deciding on their invisibility.

Juxtapose to invisibility, hypervisibility in schools placed an emphasize on the youth's marginalization. Specific identities, such as race, gender, and housing status, were highly magnified and deemed by the dominant society as deficient or deviant. Many of the participants felt they were prescribed an antagonistic identity by society that was incongruent with their own self-identity.

Intentional Invisibility

Tasha, Aaron, and Rob concealed their housing situation from school personnel until they had exhausted all other options. Invisibility was used as a mechanism to protect and conceal their housing instability from other people. Tasha admitted her pride prevented her from telling anyone about her lack of housing. Aaron also listed pride as his reasoning for not revealing his housing instability, stating "*Like I said pride, I wanted to make sure I could do it cause unless I'm on my face, flat, and can't move, I don't want*

nobody to really help me." Rob flew under the radar at school. Only a few teachers were aware that he was economically disadvantaged, but none of them knew it was to the extreme of experiencing homelessness. When asked if anyone at the school was aware of his housing struggles, he answered:

> *I never really told the teachers, I never really talked to the teachers about my personal problems. Really it was just the counselors that knew I didn't have much money. I was just real like closed off. I held stuff in. Too, it was a lot of people that I just didn't feel the need to tell my business to, so I felt like counseling was the only way that could help me and I could tell my stuff to.*

As unaccompanied youth, these participants felt they could solve their housing situation on their own. It was not until they were in dire need that they finally revealed their lack of stable housing to school personnel. They each have found temporary housing but continue to keep their housing situation hidden from most of their friends and family members.

Another way intentional invisibility was displayed, was by participants rejecting the term homeless. Unfortunately, the word homeless is associated with a negative stigma. Many people form biases and pre-conceived notions because of how homelessness is portrayed in media. In Whaley and Link's (1998) survey study on racial categorization and homelessness, they found that many White respondents had a strong cognitive belief that Blacks who are homeless are dangerous. Twenty years later, similar findings were reported in Donley's (2018) dissertation, especially among White women who strongly associated homelessness with danger. For youth between the ages of 18-21 who are emerging into new roles and identities, being connected or classified as homeless may incorrectly signify a "lower than" position in society or may be perceived as a threat to society. During the interview session many participants did not identify as homeless or

define the housing instability they had experienced as a form of homelessness. For instance, Cali's story in Chapter 4 begins with him explaining why he does not consider himself homeless, relating the term homeless with being lackadaisical. Although this was Keshaa's fourth time using Youth Thrive's shelter services, she maintains that she is not currently experiencing homelessness. She reported:

> *My grandma said I could stay at her house, but my issue was financial wise because I wasn't saving any money. I was spending money every day for no reason. So, I honestly came here this time, it wasn't on no "oh, I'm homeless, I need immediate help". Naw, it wasn't on that this time. I mean, I do need somewhere else to stay because I legally can't stay here at my grandma's house, but it was more so like "okay, I'm working, I'm going to save my money, I'm going to go somewhere where I know I'm going to be in a comfortable situation to a certain extent and I feel pretty safe."*

And there was Me'k in his profile story recalling his first account of housing instability with his mom. He believed that his first experience of homelessness did not count because he was with family and staying in a substantial place. Throughout the interviews several participants would say words like "quote on quote homeless" or "I don't really consider that homeless," to distance their lack of housing to other forms of housing instability.

Unexpected invisibility

Other participants experienced invisibility not by choice but because of other's failure to acknowledge their presence. They were neglected or ignored by school and society. A prime example of this is how Tyler was told by a new school counselor that there was no record of him being enrolled at the school. Without any school documentation to show to the new school counselor, he was rendered invisible by the school administration. He recalled trying to show proof of his existence to the school.

> *I'd seen my transcript. I had well over too many math classes that I had already completed, well over too much credit for math, science and history I had just enough. I had all the credits for every subject and it's like umm my first time going to his office, he told me that my transcript didn't exist…. I wanted to bring him the transcript, but I couldn't find it you know, just to show them I exist in the school you know, but it's like it didn't, it didn't work. I never found it….it made me feel sad you know 'cause I had been doing so well, focusing, staying to myself you know, and then for me to get told I don't exist in that school you know, it's like I just didn't understand.*

Furthermore, invisibility was not only found on a micro-level but reached into macro-level in schools. The invisibility in the curriculum was a perpetual complaint among the participants. Me'k, Tasha, Keshaa, Harmony, Lil Red, and Pedro were very vocal about the school curriculum lacking information on their history. Students were taught about White figures and White cultural events, but rarely were students taught and exposed to the positive aspects of Black and other racially marginalized groups cultural and history. Several participants felt as if their history was invisible and devalued in schools. Pedro summed it up best explaining:

> *We don't learn about our culture, what good things are in our culture, what have we done great in school. We learn about oh, slavery, slavery, slavery, slavery, oh Harriet Tubman a runaway, Martin Luther King got shot trying to lead a nonviolence organization, every time you hear about something about a Black person it's always going into a downfall, it's never an uprising thing you feel what I'm saying? If you take education upon yourself, you get more out of it. If you take education only from school, you're gonna to get brain washed and F-ed up cause school is not going to tell you about everything you need to know, it's just going to tell you about little things, basic things... and if it is something that they want you to know, it's who? Christopher Columbus. Who? Alexander the Great. Who.... if it's like Alexander the Great, umm Incas, Mayans, you hear a little bit about them, you hear a little bit about Martin Luther King. Like why can't y'all just give us the Black History you feel me. Why y'all got to keep giving us white history?...*

Pedro was keenly aware of inequality in his surroundings. On a Youth Thrive field trip to a governmental building, he was perturbed by the lack of Black representation hanging

on the wall and in the history exhibit. He brought this to people's attention which then encouraged other youth to also question why so few Blacks were represented.

Tasha expressed it was not only feeling invisible in the curriculum because of her race, but also feeling invisible because of her gender. She articulated during the interview *"Not only is there no actual history for the Black community, there really ain't nothing for Black women."* Harmony mentioned how invisibility of Black women continues into the workforce. She concluded that even after going to college, compared to her other colleagues, her abilities might be seen imperceptible due to her race and gender.

> *I saw in a percentage that Black women get paid the least of everyone. And it was just like so basically what you're telling me is I can spend all my money in college, I can make all the best grades, but based off of my body I get paid less. I mean I did the same amount of work as everybody else if not more because I'm already behind based off how I look but them I'm still being paid less because of how I look and it's very, I feel like it's discouraging.*

Hence, invisibility on the macro level was mainly connected to their racial identity and not their housing identity. Many participants felt left out of the school curriculum due to their racial identity, but some female participants also saw their gender as a marker for invisibility.

Hypervisibility

In contrast to invisibility, many of the youth felt that they were more closely observed with suspicion because of how they looked. Many of the female and male participants voiced that people automatically made false assumptions based off their marginalized identities. This hypervisibility in society was often interpreted as based off negative stereotypes. Not surprisingly, most of the participants connected hypervisibility to their race and housing status. Take for example Aaron's answer about how society views him. *"Most people assume just because I'm Black that I'm out on the streets doing*

something I have no business doing or I'm over at some girl's house living up underneath some girl." His identity is masked by the fact that people only see him being homeless and Black. Keshaa expressed the same sentiments by saying:

> *I know for a fact that society will see me just based off looks. You gonna think I'm a hoodrat, I got tattoos, dreads, nose-piercings, okay. Just by appearance, I'm Black, so Imma hood rat. Oh, she want to go to school but she ain't in school so she broke, she a hood rat, you know.*

Harmony's response to the question, how does society view her, was similar to the stigma associated to homeless persons.

> *I mean I guess from the outside looking in, it's not a pretty picture since I'm Black, homeless, I only have a high school diploma, it's probably…they don't really look at me with, they probably don't look at the potential, they just look at what I am right now.*

She added:

> *Like people just automatically assume that you are this bad person who doesn't know how to make right decisions, like they don't ask you your story, they just make assumptions, and they look at you like you're not worth anything and they treat you like you're a criminal. Like even some of the staff here like they talk to you like you're beneath them. It's like when you're in a position where you expect people to care more, it's like they don't care at all. Well, it's like you choose to be homeless. They look at you like "well you made your bed, now lay in it" and they don't even know what happened to you.*

Female respondents also talked about the Black female body being hypersexualized in school and society. Rachael explained that in her high school, *"a White girl walks around in shorts, none of the teachers, none of the principals would say nothing, make sure you don't say nothing to the White girl. A Black girl walks in school with some shorts, instant ISS [in school suspension]."* Keshaa viewed her gender, race, and housing status as making her more prone to sexualized request. She explained:

> *As a Black female I get asked all the time am I a prostitute? Like 30 times yesterday, literally. And it's like wow, people think cause you don't have what you feel that you should have, so you should have sex for money.*

All of the participants encountered some form of invisibility or hypervisibility while trying to navigate school and society. The participants perceived they were either ignored or scrutinized because of their race, housing status, or gender. For some youth it was all three identities that intersected to create an unfavorable experience in school and in society.

Function of school

Based upon the participants' responses to questions about school, there appeared to be a conflicting view about the value of school. All participants knew that they needed educational credential to get farther ahead in life, but most felt that school did not adequately prepare them. Their education was occurring mostly outside of school, especially when it came to learning about life skills.

Lack of Applicable Knowledge

There was a consensus that school did not prepare the youth for their current or future goals. Most viewed school as a social gathering but not a place to learn useful information. Pedro, Rachael, and Tyler agreed that school did not prepare them for the harsh realities of the world. When asked if school prepared her for her future, Raven responded "*No, it should teach us to be adults not all this extra shit."* She followed up with:

> *I never took any of the classes that would prepare me for my future. It's just they gave us no life skills and they just did nothing to prepare us. It was just the general subjects you would never, probably won't go anywhere with them.*

Aaron concurred with Raven, adding that the high school curriculum was mundane.

> *Honestly, high school did not prepare me for life. High school was a crutch like I mean like high school make you think that life is going to be easy breezy and no matter what they said, words mean nothing. I hope teachers understand this,*

words mean absolutely nothing…. Everything I have learned in school has done nothing for me. I say things from 8th grade, 9th grade maybe but after that it was just repetitive information.

Lil Red, who had just dropped out of school, felt that school did not contribute to her growth as a person. School only taught useless information and did not help her learn life skills and how to take care of adult responsibilities. She had to learn a lot of lessons from personal experiences because the school curriculum failed to prepare her for adversities and adulthood.

It didn't teach me anything but the stuff that we need to get an education, which is not helping us with our everyday life. It didn't teach me how to stack my bread and get me a house and make sure that all my bills are paid off so a month or two when my bills are due they won't tell me that they're evicting me or cutting off my lights because I didn't put enough money down to save my bill. It didn't teach me how I have a car note and gas prices going up and I have to pay for utilities of all of this stuff just to stay in that area. It didn't teach me how to do rent. It didn't teach me how to be guarded with my heart, you know they need classes like that, they need social issues type of classes that teach you how to be ready for yourself. It didn't teach me none of this so all the years I've been wasting myself trying to figure out what's the Bermuda triangle and how do I dissect the stop sign outside? How do I add up an isosceles triangle, how do I find the square root of x? That's not telling me how to go on that job interview and sit in there and say hello my name is Lil Red. I'm here for an internship, because I want to work into your music factory. The reason why I want to do this is XYZ. They didn't teach me none of that. It didn't teach me how to better prepare myself with the skill that I have. It didn't teach me none of that. I did, school didn't. School's not giving us all the resources that we need to survive in the world, it's just giving us what we need to do to go to college or to get that next degree which is okay, but to me a degree is nothing without your background and foundation…. it's just unnecessary, some of the stuff that they have in school that we don't need.

Tasha, who was a senior in college, also felt her primary and secondary education was worthless. In response to the question about how well school prepared how for her future, she had this to say:

Middle and high school were just a total waste of time. Middle and high school don't really teach you anything as far as life is concerned. It puts you on a schedule, that's about the best thing there is. Certainly, I mean, you do like learn things from teachers who just you know drop nuggets of wisdom, but the course

> *work is just unnecessary. College has been a lot more helpful like preparing for life just as far as the different experiences but then I still feel like there's a lot of life that you just have to do yourself and that's how you learn.*

Keshaa and Cali both linked their school instruction to the school to prison pipeline theory. They viewed school as an institution that separates the educational goal of Whites and people of color. The school system was a mechanism to punish Black children and profit off their failure by placing them in prison while the school system accommodated White children. To elaborate on Keshaa's claim, she explained:

> *Honestly, I feel like public school is the pipeline to prison that's just how I feel, for a little Black kid… Basically, this for example, you going tell me when I'm going, you tell me when Imma eat, what Imma eat, what Imma do, how Imma do it, and I have no choice; prison same thing. Only difference is you get to go home.*

Cali's view on the school to prison pipeline related to how the prison system and school system pre-determine the fate of Black males during the time they are in elementary school. He stated:

> *By the time a Black male hits the 3rd grade, they already taking surveys to see how many jails and prisons to build for Black American men. So, like really, I look at that as they really don't care, they just trying to make money off of us. They don't say okay, there's a White kid, this a Black kid, this a Mexican kid, they are all in the same grade how many jails and cells should we build for "all of them". Instead they just say we going to look at this one group right here. Okay out of this group of 20 Black males, 18 of them will go to prison, you know what I'm saying. So that's going to be how many beds we need. They don't look at it like okay, it's a group of 20, this a group of 20, this a group of 20, out of all 60 of them at least 35 of them will go to jail.*

Continuing the dialogue of profitability in the school system, Harmony differentiated the value of school and education by responding "*I think I don't see a value in school, I think it's only education that I see value in. Because school is just a business, education is the knowledge and knowledge is power."* She did not learn in school vital life skills except for the importance of social interaction**.**

I think it taught me what not to do in life. I feel like I could have learned more life skills in high school rather than just learning from bad experiences, but I think most of it was just me learning from bad experiences. They could have taught us how to do your taxes, they could have taught us how to open up a bank account. They didn't tell us anything about stuff that's going to actually help us in life. I think I learned mostly by social experiences most times, which is important.

Although most participants did not believe school adequately prepared them for their future, TeTe, Demetri, and Rod were satisfied with the instruction they received from school and believed it prepared them for their future.

Prerequisite for the Future

While most of the participants had negative feelings toward school, all expect Lil Red, felt it was still important for them to earn their educational credentials. They realized that even if school does not fully prepare them for life, it will possibly prepare them for their careers and social and economic mobility.

When asked how homelessness has shaped Harmony's ideas about school she answered:

It makes me want to go to school more cause I know what it like feels like to feel as though you're worthless because I'm homeless, and I feel like that would just be my ticket out the door. It just made me want to go more.

Rachael concurred that obtaining educational credentials advances one's likelihood of social mobility. She expressed that *"you can get so far when you have your high school diploma and when you have your college degree, what!?? You get so far in life!*" Demetri viewed education and school as one in the same, and just like Harmony and Rachael, school was an avenue for gaining a higher position in life. Fervently, he communicated:

Education is everything. Even if you are homeless, I feel like you get an education, that will change your life, that'll change your situation in life. It's just you

gotta push yourself to get it. Don't never let nothing down you or stop you. Even if you're homeless, in the bottom, education will get you out your situation, it got me out mines.

Even youth who did not have their secondary credentials conceded that school credentials were important to have if they were to secure economic stability. Illustrated by TeTe, she explains:

> *l was like, you know, I can't do nothing without a high school diploma. I was like even if I have to get my GED and I've been telling my mom for the longest how I feel about getting a GED. Now that I'm on the edge and I'm finna turn 19 and everything, the GED is my motivation right now*

Other participants like Tyler, Cali, Me'k, and Rob did not have their GED or high school diploma, but they wanted to complete their secondary education because they equated school credentials as a way to provide financial stability and better job opportunities. For example, Me'k was quoted saying:

> *I see the value in school as it is a doorway to better things, …. you know you go to school, you get your high school diploma, and you don't even have to go to college, you can still get a pretty good job and have a pretty good home, good vehicle, good family, and have a pretty good life.*

Tasha, who was close to graduating college, also attested to the benefit of school in her life. She declared "*Going to school is how you know one day I will be in a much better position and I won't have to consider going through homelessness again, but rather how can I help other people not experience homelessness."*

Hence, most of the participants recognized the importance of finding their own knowledge outside of the school building. And while many of the participants were not necessarily satisfied with the curriculum at school, they did feel the need to complete school to gain social and economic mobility. There appeared to be a consensus that obtaining secondary and post educational credentials gave them a potential means of

escaping homelessness and becoming financially secure. In fact, although most respondents did not have the resources or the financial means, they aspired to go to college. Many shared the same sentiments as Demetri who stated "*I feel like education will get you far in life. Like I always had that thought, I always had that dream, like, I do want to go to college.* This goes to show that furthering their schooling was a top priority and viewed as a necessity in life.

This chapter revealed some of the shared experiences among the participants and sought to address the research questions by showing connected themes between the participants. Gathered from the narratives in Chapter Four and the five themes from Chapter Five, which included opportunity and resource gap, surrogate school kinship, survival and economic relationships, invisibility and hypervisibility, and function of school, the data revealed the complexity the participants faced in and outside of school. Homelessness for these youth was more than just a housing issue. There were social structures and hierarchies, biases, and institutional factors that impacted how they experienced homelessness. As exemplified from the participants' quotes in this chapter, several factors inside and outside of school created economic, social, and educational hardships. Their unfavorable housing circumstances, lack of financial resources, and the instability in their family structure affected their educational performance. But with supportive school personnel and supportive peers, the participants were able to maintain a positive connection to school. Perhaps these social relationships encouraged them to see the need for school credentials despite feeling the curriculum was irrelevant to their lived experience. Outside of school, participants continued to encounter challenges based on

their homeless status along with other identity markers. Housing options varied based on gender whereas race, gender, and housing status affected how one was viewed in society.

By telling the story from the voices of the youth, one can see how fourteen individuals shared lived experiences. It was not just homelessness that connected them, but other issues that intersected their lives. In the following final chapter, I will discuss and conceptualize the five themes to expand the connection between homelessness, race, gender, and class and to examine how the participants' narratives add to the existing literature on homelessness.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Race is overlooked in the discussion about homelessness yet, race plays a significant role in how homeless people are treated and viewed in society, especially for Black youth (Donley, 2018; Whaley & Link, 1998). Research evidence indicates Black people are disproportionately represented in the homeless population (Howland, Chen, Chen, & Min, 2017; Lowin, Demirel, Estee, & Schreiner, 2001; Rog & Buckner, 2007), although most educational studies on homeless youth amalgamate the population without recognizing that other factors besides economics might affect their experience in school and society. To remedy the homogenous view of homelessness, the current study was designed to expand the knowledge regarding the diverse experiences among Black youth in Georgia by offering participants a dialogic space to share their intricate life narratives.

The purpose of this study was to examine the various lived experiences of fourteen Black youth between the ages of 18-21 who were experiencing homelessness at two different programs in Georgia. In addition, the study sought to understand how their schooling experience affected their present and future lives as they transitioned into adulthood. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, the study relied on the narratives of the participants and my observations at the programs sites to answer the following research questions:

(1) How does homelessness impact the academic achievement of Black youth in Georgia?

(2) How do Black youth who are homeless perceive their lived experiences in relation to family, school, teachers, and peers?

(3) How do Black youth navigate their status of being homeless within school and society?

(4) How do Black youth who are homeless perceive schooling will affect their current and future lives?

Overall, the research revealed the following five major conclusions connected to the research questions: 1) Participants' academic performances were greatly affected by inequitable resources and opportunities inside and outside of school. 2) People at school often played a greater role in the participants lives than their family. 3) Females experienced housing options differently than males. 4) There was a stigma attached to being Black and being homeless that imposed societal and school limitations. 5) Although school did not provide them with needed life skills, they still valued earning educational credentials. In this final chapter, I will expound and provide an in-depth understanding of the major findings by critical race theory and intersectionality frameworks to address the research questions. The chapter will then proceed to present implications of my findings and provide recommendations from the voices of the participants, followed by limitations and suggestions for further research. I close the chapter with a conclusion of the study.

Inequitable resources and opportunities inside and outside of school

Many studies have examined how low attendance (Buckner, 2008; Canfield, Nolan, Harley, Hardy, & Elliott, 2016; Rafferty, 1989, Woods, 1989) grade retention (Masten, 1990; Rafferty, Shinn, & Weitzman, 2004; Wood, Valdez, Hayashi, & Shen,

1990), school mobility (Buckner, Bassuk, & Weinreb, 2001; Julianelle,& Foscarinis, 2003; Nunez, 2001; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989), living arrangements (Deck, 2016; Howland, Chen, Chen, & Min, 2017; Low, Hallett, & Mo, 2017) and low testing scores (Cutuli et al., 2013; Obradovic et al., 2009; Stone, & Uretsky, 2016; Uretsky & Stone, 2016) contribute to poor academic achievement among homeless children and youth. These abundant risk factors primarily focus on students' outputs-or their response to instructional environments thereby placing the blame on students. As a result, students who are experiencing academic performances are often portrayed as academic deficient (Howard, 2010). This notion contributes to a dominant narrative that homeless youth are uneducated and uninterested in school. Furthermore, it advances the argument of meritocracy, that hard work and studying will overcome any academic shortcomings, by blaming failure on the student. Regardless of background, effort and ability are championed as the qualities needed to overcome any educational obstacle. What is often overlooked in academic and non-academic milieus are systemic disparities and underlying environmental inputs-or the societal influences that impact the academic outcome of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness.

Environmental stress has been found to impact the schooling of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Armstrong, 2010). Likewise, this study revealed societal influences greatly affected the participants' academic achievement. Moreover, it was inequities, especially opportunity gaps and resource gaps, that interrupted their academic performance and educational outcomes. Inequities in their home and school environment played an important role in how they approached their choices in life. Many participants admitted it was the lack of resources that caused disruption in their formalized schooling.

Grades and academic performance declined, not because youth lacked the effort, but because they had to endure the stress of not having a permanent place to stay and not having adequate resources or viable job opportunities to financially support themselves.

Emerging research is beginning to focus on opportunity gaps, particularly among diverse populations (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gorski, 2017; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012). Milner (2012) argued that many educators believe hard work will be rewarded, while failing to acknowledge that systemic and institutional structures may obstruct the opportunity and success of some hard-working students. Similarly, Lewis (2012) maintains that the United States dominant society takes the stance that:

> the society as a whole should be concerned with equalizing educational outcomes between sub-populations of the society only insofar as equal outcomes are a proxy for fair educational *opportunity*. This kind of view has been widely held across US society for some time, where some form of *fair opportunity* is thought of as an intrinsically attractive normative ideal, but equal outcomes are not (p. 131).

While the conversation of educational opportunities is emerging in the academic literature, there is little discourse about the resources gap. Darling-Hammond (2013) stated that "educational outcomes for students of color are, however, at least as much a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, both inside and outside of school, as they are a function of race, class, or culture" (p. 79). I would argue that for the respondents in my study, it is opportunity gap PLUS resources gap that restricted their academic potential. Individuals not only need the opportunity but also the resources to benefit from the opportunity, and vice versa, making educational opportunity and resources mutually inclusive.

Factors outside of the students' control, such as bias within teachers' expectations and beliefs, economic disparities, family dysfunction, and residential instability all contribute to educational variance in resources and opportunities. One supporting finding comes from Faulkner, Marshall, Stiff, and Crossland (2017) who found teachers' misconceptions about black students' math ability, limited their opportunities of being placed in advanced courses. This finding mirrors the experience of Aaron from the study. He came from an upper-middle class family, had the intellectual resources, but a White teacher tried to deny him the opportunity to enter an advanced placement course due to the color of his skin. On the other hand, a few of the youth had the opportunity to attend post-secondary institutions but did not have the financial resources to obtain their post-secondary educational credentials. Additionally, the resources gap is not limited to monetary means, but can also include family and network support, effective teachers and administrators, and teachers' expectation of students.

Because of a lack of opportunities and resources, participants often had to make crucial sacrifices in their lives. Their choices were based off survival and basic instinct. Participants applied a term I call *survivor cost*, where the youth must evaluate the economic outcome of their choices. In other words, when an individual is deprived of his or her basic human needs (water, food, sleep, warmth, shelter and safety) the individual must prioritize and evaluate what is most important to exist. For some youth, this meant prioritizing work before school to survive. If they did not work, they did not have income which decreased their chances of having a place to sleep or food to eat, essentially basic human needs. For youth like Rob, school maybe reluctantly sacrificed because survival is more important. Despite foregoing their educational credentials at the time, and contrary

to the dominant traditional view of meritocracy, the youth worked hard to earn financial gains. Yet, without the opportunity and resources available to their counterparts, they still faced school and societal inequities that limited their well-being.

People at school often played a greater role in the participants' lives than their family

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge should not just be limited to content knowledge. Teaching encompasses more than just showing up to work, providing instructional information, and assessing information. There is an emotional humanistic factor that is needed, especially when working with Black youth experiencing homelessness because they have unique affective needs (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011). Many youth experiencing homelessness cannot connect with their families (Smart, 1991) consequently, other people are needed to provide care and support. Positive relationships among school personnel and peers at school played a significant role in the participants' lives. Teachers and school administrators' roles were expanded outside of their usual duties to include the role of a parental figure or provider. Many participants reflected on how an educator devoted time to get to know them. Teachers were praised for going the extra step and in some instances, breaking protocol to show they cared by driving a student home and providing financial help. Nel Noddings (2012) posits "From the perspective of care ethics, the teacher as carer is interested in the expressed needs of the cared-for, not simply the needs assumed by the school as an institution and the curriculum as a prescribed course of study" (p 772). Caring was a vital feature in the student-teacher relationship.

Nodding has done much work on theorizing care (1984; 2002; 2012; 2013). She emphasizes how care is a reciprocal process, a carer (care provider), and cared-for both must participate in the act of caring. While caring is an important quality in teaching, the act of caring can vary from one culture to another thus teachers should not frame caring as a color-blind (Thompson, 1984, 2002, Wilder, 1994) and socioeconomical-blind concept. Students have different caring needs. Studies investigating how students define care have reported racial and ethnic groups differ how they describe a caring teacher (Haynes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Tosolt, 2009). Participants related caring teachers and friends as being encouraging, providing positive feelings about oneself, a persistent motivator, confidant, and as being helpful in providing resources. The dependence and communal relationships they developed with teachers and friends opposes the dominant American culture of individualism and competition. This further suggests that Black youth on the extreme end of poverty, have distinct culture needs that differ from many of their counterparts. Therefore, teachers need to be aware that caring needs can vary across racial and socioeconomic lines.

As evident from the narrative of the participants, caring was not just attached to motivation or being nice to the youth. Instead, caring was strongly attached to other-parenting (Cage, 1997; Williams, 2018) and fictive kinship (Fordham, 1996). Other-parenting is when a person who is not a child's parent takes on a parental role and fictive kinship is the extended family outside of one's biological family (Williams, 2018). Teachers were referred to in enduring terms such as "other mother or father", and "school parents". By the same token, peer relationships were just as significant as brotherhood and sisterhood transcended biological connection. These fictive kinships were essential

for the Black youth in the study. Notably, many of the participants relied on their fictive kinship connection to provide them with temporary housing and basic human needs.

An interesting finding from this study indicated it was not only teachers and friends who cared for the students but also other school staff. Lil Red spoke of how the custodian of the school she attended offered shelter at the school so she would not have to sleep on the streets. Literature has overlooked the important role of school staff. Custodians, secretaries, bus drivers, and paraprofessionals often have direct contact with youth who are experiencing homelessness. Their role in helping youth should not be ignored, as they often have resources to help youth. Drawing on research on resilience among Black youth (Dang, Conger, Breslau, & Miller, 2014; Ennett, Bailey, & Federman, 1999; Hurd, & Zimmerman, 2010), these natural mentoring relationships provided social networks and connected them to resources such as a shelter and educational supports. These relationships appeared to provide emotional support and strengthen the participants' self-esteem and self-worth.

Gender difference of how Black youth navigate housing options

The pathway to homelessness differed for Black females than Black males. Specifically, Black females seemed to have stronger economic dependences on males. This finding is significant because although researchers concluded that the experiences of men and women differ (Calsyn & Morse, 1990; Evans & Forsyth, 2004; Baker, 1994; North & Smith, 1993; Rukman, 2010), these studies focused on older homeless populations. Furthermore, previous studies have rarely explained how racialized gender and class-based roles account for the differences among Black youth housing options. An exception is the quantitative study by North and Smith (1994) conducted over twenty

years ago in the Midwest, USA. They found that White females (5.9%) and Black males (4.4%) were more likely to stay with a romantic partner than Black females (3.4%) during their homeless experience. The majority of their respondents were between the ages of 24-55, so perhaps age, time, and location account for the different results compared to my study which showed all but one female participant exhibited some form of economic and emotional dependency connected to a male. Two females became homeless after leaving an abusive situation, one became homeless after her domestic partner did not pay rent, and two opted to move in with males to escape living on the street. This reflects the larger society which shows that Black females are more likely to experience teen dating violence (Ahonen & Loeber, 2016; Henry & Zeytinoglu, 2012; Nicodemus, Davenport, & McCutcheon, 2009); and have a higher residence eviction rate (Desmond, 2012) than Black males.

Most females' housing was predicated on the choices of a male. And while research shows that women who are unemployed increase their chance of homelessness once they separate from their partners (Baker, et al, 2003), several of the female participants were employed during their relationship with the males but their earnings were not significant enough to support them once they left their male counterpart. In addition, compared to Black males in the study, females had more formal education. However, their educational credentials did not provide them with enough income to find substantial housing on their own. It could be argued that Black males may have less options for housing, however, Black females who are dependent on a male for housing are more susceptible to exploitation, domestic abuse, and eviction.

Looking at the social hierarchy, each participant's race, gender, and class intersected to create a different pattern of homelessness. Historically, patriarchal attitudes and racialized gender roles often place Black women as devalued beings. Women are taught to be submissive, seen but not heard, and dependent on males to take care of them emotionally and financially. Not only can this reproduction of inequality make Black women vulnerable to homelessness but also sexism and racism decrease their earning potential and increase their dependency on males. Combined, these -isms (race, sex,) have been documented to show that Black women encounter economic barriers due to their race and gender (Settles, 2006; Brown, 2012), while adding classism presents another layer of oppression. This is a key concern because male dominated systemic structures and limited economic resources appeared to impact female participants' trajectory into housing instability.

The social stigma associated with homelessness, race, and gender imposed educational and societal limitations

Homelessness is a socially constructed concept. The term has various meanings and can be viewed on a spectrum. Homelessness can have different meanings to different people and different cultures. Although it is commonly associated with people lacking shelter, the term has been used for people who are precariously housed, couch surfing or doubling up, and even sometimes applied to people living in mobile homes. As a consequence, homelessness covers a vast array of housing or lack of housing situations (Blasi, 1990) which prevented some youth in the study from knowing what constitutes a person's housing situation as "experiencing homeless". Thus, several of the youth were not able to properly benefit from educational resources outlined in the McKinney Vento

Act (MVA) because they did not know they qualified for the services. Prior research from Aviles de Bradley (2009) supports the finding as she concluded that Black youth were not always informed about the MVA. Had youth been knowledgeable of the MVA and other educational policies, they may have been able to advocate against being forced out of school.

The ambiguity of the term homelessness has also caused governmental programs and policies to differ on who and what determines homelessness (i.e., U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, McKinney Vento Act). Therefore, it is not surprising that many participants in the study did not consider their housing situation as "homeless". From their perception, living at the shelter and couch surfing often negated them from being "homeless". They often formed strategic ways to separate their current circumstance from "true homelessness" as evident when one participant stated he was not homeless since he was working and did not need the resource as much as "the others." His belief is comparable to the participants in Boydell, Goering, and Morrell-Bellai (2000) study who found that people use homeless hierarchy as a coping mechanism. That is to say, to avoid being stigmatized he tried to disassociate his housing situation from the other youth by explaining how he was more well-off than "them." This demonstrates that marginalization occurs with-in groups experiencing homelessness. In addition, the housing at Youth Thrive and GA A&T were not typical shelters but more like dorm-style living. This reduced the feel of a shelter and made several of the youth feel as if they were at a group home or with community friends.

The participants' rejection of the label "homeless" is common among Black youth, as Ensign and Gittelsohn (1998), Hickler and Auerswald (2009), and Ellis's

(2012) work showed similar findings. Albeit, there has been little focus on why the term is rejected among Black youth. Several reasons appeared from the participants' narratives. They included pride, shame, avoiding the stigma of laziness associated with homelessness, having somewhere to stay (usually temporary with a family member or fictive kin), and viewing their housing instability as a temporary situation as to why they were not considered "truly homeless". Also, while not explicitly stated, it could be that Black youth have to contend with the stigma attached to their skin color so adding another social stigma like homeless would be an additional identity that would produce oppression by the general society. They can hide their housing status easier than their racial status as it is more difficult to tell a person's socioeconomic status than it is to tell their race. Therefore, the participants appeared to identify and navigate society through their salient identities of race and gender than being "homeless". Many even discussed how being a different race while experiencing homelessness would elicit a more positive response from the general public. One participant, Pedro, talked for over ten minutes about how Black people had a greater economic hardship than White people.

Another issue is the misnomer homeless which is intersected with other identities that create preconceived notions about an individual. Referencing Boydell, Goering, and Morell-Bellai, (2000) and Parsell's (2011) work, Terui and Hsieh state "Homelessness is a perpetual, knotty issue located at the intersection of multiple social issues, including health and wealth disparities as well as social and structural injustice" (p. 688). For youth in the study, their ascribed behaviors were based off stereotypes about their race and gender. They mentioned how they were misjudged primarily because of their race, gender, and sometimes class status. For instance, Lil Red mentioned how she was

misconceived as a Black man although she did not ascribe to those labels and several of the females revealed how they were viewed as hypersexual beings because of being Black, female, and experiencing homelessness. However, the youth displayed resilience by not ascribing to labels forced on them by society. They constructed their own identities despite their adversities and saw homelessness as a temporary situation. This finding may suggest that defining their own identity and rejecting certain labels functioned as a coping mechanism and represented a source of strength.

Equally important, inside of school, participants perceived their salient identities were not acknowledged. The educational system applied a colorblind approach which invalidated the participants' history and experiences. The standard curriculum was taught from a White, middle-class, male dominant perspective which conflicted with their lived experiences. Usually there is a minimum force on incorporating discussions on racial, religious, and sexual orientation minorities, but rarely do schools address socioeconomic inequities or champion the cultural capital of people from low-class standings. Unfortunately, many schools also expunge the cultural capital and knowledge of Black youth.

Educational credential important but curriculum irrelevant

There has been a tendency for society to revile people who are experiencing homelessness without looking at structures and systems that contribute to the causation. Besides lack of work ethic, lack of interest in school is attributed as the reason many Black people experience homelessness. But recent research is starting to refute those claims (Aviles, 2009; Ellis, 2012; Rahman, 2014) to demonstrate Black youth who are experiencing homelessness value education. In particular, participants in the study

perceived it was important to earn educational credentials. Even youth who were not currently in school believed it was important to get their secondary and post-secondary credentials. Regardless of family dysfunction, most spoke of family members ingraining the importance of school throughout their childhood. Others commented on how school personnel and school friends' emphasis on school influenced how they viewed the value of education.

While there was a strong affinity for school among the participants, there was also a mistrust in the educational system's curriculum. Evidence revealed most Black youth did not agree with how the subjects were presented in school. Statements made during the interviews implied that there was a conflict between the educational material taught in schools and the educational material needed for "survival on the street" and their cultural and economic growth. Schools' exclusion of these Black youth's educational needs created systemic education deprivation, which deprived Black youth of needed cultural, social, professional, and economic skills to successfully prepare them for the world and their communities. Youth who experience housing instability and who have limited parental networks, usually rely on the institutional competencies of the school to supply their educational needs (Rahman, 2015), but when schools fail, youth have to look for outside sources to help them learn basic skills. Many participants had to learn economic, professional, and cultural skills on their own or through their own lived experiences. Applying for jobs, learning about their own ethnic history, learning how to cook, learning how to balance work life and school life, were just some of the skills they had to learn without the help of schools. They learned how to overcome adversities and educational shortcomings by connecting with social networks and organizations, invoking spiritual

guidance, maintaining an "I got to make it" mentality, disproving stereotypes about them, and having hope for a positive future. Conversely, their future was mainly connected with going to college. This may suggest that even if Black youth who are experiencing homelessness are averse to the structure of school, they still see educational credentials as a way of gaining stability and as a needed tool for their social and economic mobility.

Implications

The main goal of my study was to explore the lived experiences of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness as they transition into adulthood. My study offers suggestive evidence that school has a large impact on the lives of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness. School serves a dual purpose as a place for learning and a place for youth to gain positive social networks. Understanding the participants' lived experiences can better serve those youth and uncover important implications for educators, policy makers, and service agencies. By changing how we view these youth, from defective to resilience and hopeful, there also must be a shift in how we address homelessness among Black youth.

Implications for educators

There is a social stigma attached to the word "homeless" and for Black youth who might already have a stigma attached to their racial identity, the term "homeless" is not an additional label they want attached to their identity. Also, in communal communities such as the Black culture, moving around and staying with different family members and kinfolk may not signify couch surfing but a conventional way of living. Therefore, it is imperative that educators realize the term "homeless" varies among different cultures. Labels and connotations matter, so using terms such as housing instability, insecure

housing, or residential mobility takes the label off the person and places it on the situation, which appeared to better address the conditions of Black youth in the study.

Also, findings from the study indicated school personnel had a positive impact on the participants. While the MVA is the governing educational policy used to support youth experiencing homeless, educators' lack of knowledge about the policy impedes the full implementation of it. Also, Black youth experiencing homelessness have cultural and economic needs that may differ from other racial groups. Thus, better professional development training on the MVA, along with addressing homelessness from a holistic approach can better sever students and create a more culturally sensitive school environment.

Implications for policymakers

The study's conclusion suggests a change for how policies should address homelessness. People who experience homelessness are not a homogenous group, hence homelessness cannot be addressed or solved with a one-size fits all method. Historical and present-day bias and discriminatory practices towards Black people need to be considered when addressing homelessness, because homelessness is an issue convoluted with power and systematic inequities that create marginalization and limited opportunities. Therefore, policies should be tailored to address systemic failures and economic disparity in the Black community. Black youth in the study encountered adversities not only due to their housing situation but to other systemic and institutional inequities (race, gender, state facilities, etc.). Combating inequity will require policymakers to not view homelessness as an "individual" problem but as a systematic

problem. They will need to reflect and review the systematic breakdown if they are to truly address issues that lead to Black youth experiencing homelessness.

Implications for shelters organizations

Most homeless shelters main goal is to provide immediacy as people usually come first and foremost for food and shelter. School is not considered a basic need but by recognizing that educational credentials may help Black youth become stable and open more economic opportunities, staff at shelters can work to improve youth's educational future. Because youth transitioning into adulthood have various educational trajectories (secondary, GED, post-secondary tracks), creating partnerships between shelter organizations and different educational programs and services can help youth continue their educational journey with limited interruptions. In addition, shelter organizations along with policymakers and educators ought to attend to Black youth's cultural needs by implementing culture competent practices, not just reinforcing White middle-class values. These agencies must be sensitive to the cultural needs of Black youth.

Recommendations

Applying the critical race theory tenets of social justice, transformation, and experiential knowledge, I believe it is imperative to prioritize and validate the voices of the participants. Because they have experienced homelessness and the focus is on their lives, they are the experts on the topic. Therefore, the proposed recommendations are from the voices and perspectives of the participants.

- Teachers should have patience with students, you never know what they are going through or the stress a student may have outside of the school. (Aaron)

- Demonstrate sympathy and empathy, students who are experiencing homelessness are normal people, too. (Rob)
- Do not sugar coat information. Students want to know about real life experiences outside of school. (Rachael, Tasha, Demetri, Cali, and Aaron)
- Make the curriculum relatable. Students want to be able to connect the material to their lived experiences. (Rachael and Aaron)
- Teach basic life skills that youth will need in their future such as how to prepare taxes, budgeting classes, cooking classes, and how to fill out applications for housing, especially since their parents' or guardians might not have the taught them. (Raven, Tasha, Me'k, Keshaa, Demetri, Cali, and Aaron)
- Educate the youth on how to apply to college and how to financially prepare for college. (Pedro)
- Conduct home visits or at least know what type of neighborhood the student lives in so you can have an idea of what goes in their home life. (Harmony)
- Provide resource and community services packets at school for students who are experiencing homelessness. (Lil Red)
- Establish support groups at schools or in the community for youth that are experiencing homelessness. (Lil Red)
- Check in on a student's emotional and mental state. Homelessness can be stressful, and students need to know that someone cares about their mental and emotional health. (Me'k and Lil Red)
- Establish programs at post-secondary institutions to provide support to help youth graduate. (Tasha)

Limitations

I should stress that my study has been primarily concerned with the lived experience of Black youth in Georgia between the ages of 18-21 who are experiencing homelessness. The findings are based off the participants' responses. The limited focus only suggests this is how it might look for participants with similar characteristics. It should be stressed that this is a qualitative study and it does not generalize the findings to all Black youth who are homeless.

My study is not without limitations. The participants recruited only included people who were part of a specific homeless service agency and one college campus in Georgia. Black homeless youth who were living in uninhabitable places were not contacted for the study. Therefore, the finding and concerns for this subgroup will potentially differ. In addition, I was only able to recruit one participant from the four-year college. The participant, Tasha, faced different challenges from the other students. It would be interesting to see if other students at different colleges face the same or different challenges as she did.

Although I built positive relationships with the participants, two people chose not to answer certain questions possibly due to the sensitive nature of the questions of or fear of how they would be portrayed (Savin-Badgen & Van Nieker, 2007). I tried to reduce their anxiety by letting them know that the information shared was confidential and I asked the participants to choose their own pseudonyms for the study. While this reduced some stress, there were still some personal details they chose not to reveal.

Future Research

There is still much to discover about homelessness and Black youth. Most research that has examined race and homelessness has recruited youth from shelters. To my knowledge there are no studies that have looked beyond Black youth in shelters and their school experience. This is an area that needs to be furthered studied because youth living in uninhabitable places are potentially at a higher risk of poorer educational outcomes since they are highly mobile and must survive on the street. With little information on this population, it is difficult to know what impact education and race plays in their lives.

Another topic missing in the literature on homelessness are the stories from Latino/a youth and Asian youth. Critical race theory has expanded to include LatCrit and AsianCrit, to examine the experiences of other racialized groups which could be used to analyze the schooling experience of these groups. As more schools in America become racially diverse and the Latino/a and Asian population grows, schools and homeless support agencies may see more of these students entering their facilities. Therefore, it is valuable for research to address how school and support agencies can address the educational and cultural needs of these youth.

Conclusion

In this study, I have presented the narratives of fourteen Black youth who are experiencing homelessness. Their stories are filled with family conflict, involvement with state systems, school challenges, and instability. Their stories also included accomplishments, surviving and overcoming adversities, striving to earn educational credentials, and hope for the future. Each participant's story was different and their

pathways to homelessness varied but there were some common themes highlighted in Chapter 5. In this concluding chapter, I applied a critical race theory and intersectionality lens to analysis the findings which revealed that the participants' lives were complicated by not just their housing instability but by other system failures (family, school, child welfare) and systemic inequities (race, gender, class, etc.). However, what I saw in all of the participants was a glimpse of hope, of knowing that their situation was temporary, and having ambition to achieve their personal and professional goals.

It is my greatest hope that readers will understand that individuals experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group. Even within-in racial groups, such as the Black youth in the study, they lived very multifaceted lives. Because a primary focus of the study was to examine the participants' schooling experiences, I wanted to be sure I had youth from various educational pathways participate in the study. I used their words and shared their stories to allow a new narrative of Black homelessness, one that shows the resilience and challenges of Black youth and debunks many of the negative portrayals of Black homelessness.

Black homelessness is not a disease, it is not always permanent, it is not an individual problem, and it is not a personal defect. Homelessness happens when society has limited opportunities and resources for its people. Homelessness in the Black community is also perpetual when institutions like schools, create unfair barriers, create explicit racial and economic insensitive policies, implement bias practices, and maintain~~s~~ claims of neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy. If schools are really to be the great equalizer, schools must be equitable and available to all students because for many of the youth in the study, school was the one pathway for economic and housing stability.

School must also be affordable to provide youth with the secondary and post-secondary opportunities they need for social and economic mobility.

Throughout this study I was often reminded of my privilege as a Black female in a graduate program. I looked at many of the participants and heard their stories oftentimes wondering how I would respond if I was in their shoes? How would society view me if I was experiencing housing instability? Would I even have the strength and resilience as they do to survive? It was easier to imagine the "what if" than to face the reality that Black youth have an 83% higher risk of reporting homelessness compared to other racial groups (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017). I knew the statistics about Black youth experiencing homelessness, but it was not until my participant observation that I recognized the prevalence of it. Presently, as an education coordinator and researcher at a program that serves predominantly Black youth experiencing homelessness, I am hoping to continue the conversation about how we as educators, researchers, policymakers and the community at large can contribute to the eradication of homelessness.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

SHARE YOUR STORY....

Are you an African-American or Black youth between the ages of 18 and 21 and considered homeless?

Where you enrolled in a Georgia high school while you were experiencing homelessness or coach surfing?

If you answered **YES** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study about school and homelessness.

The purpose of the study is to examine the schooling experiences of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness in metro Atlanta. Participants will be asked to share their schooling experiences and discuss how it has shaped their current lives and future during two 60-90 minute interview sessions. The interviews will be conducted and completed within a week. Participants will be compensated for their time.

If interested in participating in the study, please contact Nichole Murray at enichm@uga.edu.

This study is being conducted by Nichole Murray, a graduate student at the University of Georgia.

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Margaret A. Wilder, Social Foundations of Education, University of Georgia; mwilder@uga.edu.*

Risks and Discomforts: There is minimum risk related with the study. This includes: emotional risks such as feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness, guilt or anxiety, or embarrassment from questions asked during the interview. Also, any information disclosed about current abuse, neglect, suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts will have to be reported to the Director

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Are you an African-American or Black youth between the ages of 18 and 21 and considered homeless?

Where you homeless at least one year while in high school in Georgia?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study about school and homelessness.

The purpose of the study is to examine the schooling experiences of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness in metro Atlanta. Participants will be asked to share their schooling experiences and discuss how it has shaped their current lives and future during two 60-90 minute interview sessions. The interviews will be conducted and completed within a week. Participants will be compensated for their time.

If interested in participating in the study, complete the attached questionnaire to see if you qualify and email it to Nichole Murray or if you have any questions about the study please email Nichole Murray at enichm@uga.edu

This study is being conducted by Nichole Murray, a graduate student at the University of Georgia.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Margaret A. Wilder, Social Foundations of Education, University of Georgia; mwilder@uga.edu.

Risks and Discomforts: There is minimum risk related with the study. This includes: emotional risks such as feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness, guilt or anxiety, or embarrassment from questions asked during the interview. Also, any information disclosed about current abuse, neglect, suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts will have to be reported to the Director of Support Services or the Director on call.

Questionnaire

The purpose of the study is to examine the schooling experiences of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness in metro Atlanta. The questionnaire below is used to ensure you meet the eligibility requirements for the study. Complete the questionnaire and

answer the questions honestly when choosing your response. Please email completed response to enichm@uga.edu

1. What is your racial/ethnic identity?* (click on *choose an item* to see options)

   Choose an item.

   If Other, please specify:

2. Were you born in Georgia? ☐Yes ☐ No

3. Did you attend a Georgia school for at least a year while you were experiencing homelessness? ☐Yes ☐ No

4. If yes, during which level(s) of your education? (check all that apply)

   ☐Elementary School (K-5) ☐Middle school (6-8) ☐High School (9-12)

5. Are you still experiencing homelessness? ☐Yes ☐No

6. How old are you? (click on *choose an item* to see options)

   Choose an item.

7. What year are you in college? (click on *choose an item* to see options)

   Choose an item.

I certify that the information provided here is accurate.

Initial in ☐ box Date Click or tap to enter a date.

***American Indian or Alaska Native** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
Asian – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent.
Black or African American – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
Hispanic or Latino- A person having origins in Mexico, Puerto Rico, South or Central America, or other Spanish culture or **o**rigin.
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands
White – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
Race Without a Home:
A Study of Homelessness and Educational Experiences Among Black Youth

Researcher's Statement
My name is Nichole Murray and I am a graduate student at the University of Georgia. I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Margaret A. Wilder*
Social Foundations of Education
Department of Counseling and Human Development Services
(706) 542-6488; mwilder@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to understand the schooling experience of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness. The aim is to provide Black youth an opportunity to share their experiences of how being homeless and Black is impacting their transition to adulthood.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …
- Share information about your schooling experience and homeless experience. Questions will ask about your relationships with teachers and friends, issues of race, and the impact school has on you.
- Participate in two 60-90 minute interviews.
- Have your interview audio recorded.

Risks and Discomforts
- There is minimum risk related with the study. This include:
  - Emotional risks such as feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness, guilt or anxiety, or embarrassment from questions asked during the interview.
- You may skip a question or stop at any time. Your request will be honored and respected.

- If any information is disclosed about current abuse, neglect, suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts, this information will have to be reported to the Director of Support Services or the Director on call. You will be directed to a crisis hotline and/or counselor.

Benefits Include:

- Provide information on the reality of Black youth who are experiencing homelessness in Georgia
- A chance to tell your story about your lived experience

Incentives for Participation

Participants who complete the study will receive a $9 Marta card for their participation in the study. Participants that are not able to complete the entire research study will receive a pro-rated Marta Card for their participation.

Audio/Video Recording

The interview will include audio recording to ensure accurate account of the interview. The recording will start once the interview session begins. The recorded interview will be transcribed. All identifiable information will be removed to keep the information confidential. After completing the transcription, all audio recordings will be destroyed. The transcribed documents will be kept in a password protected secured file.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview recorded. You may not participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

All information shared is confidential unless you share suicidal or homicidal thoughts, or there is reason to suspect abuse or neglect. Participants will be allowed to select a pseudonym which will be used in place of their name to protect their privacy. All audio recording will be kept in a secure location and destroyed after the completion of the study. All electronic records, including transcribed documents, will be password protected to ensure confidentiality. The researcher will not release any identifiable information to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate or decline the study will not affect your services at the Covenant House.

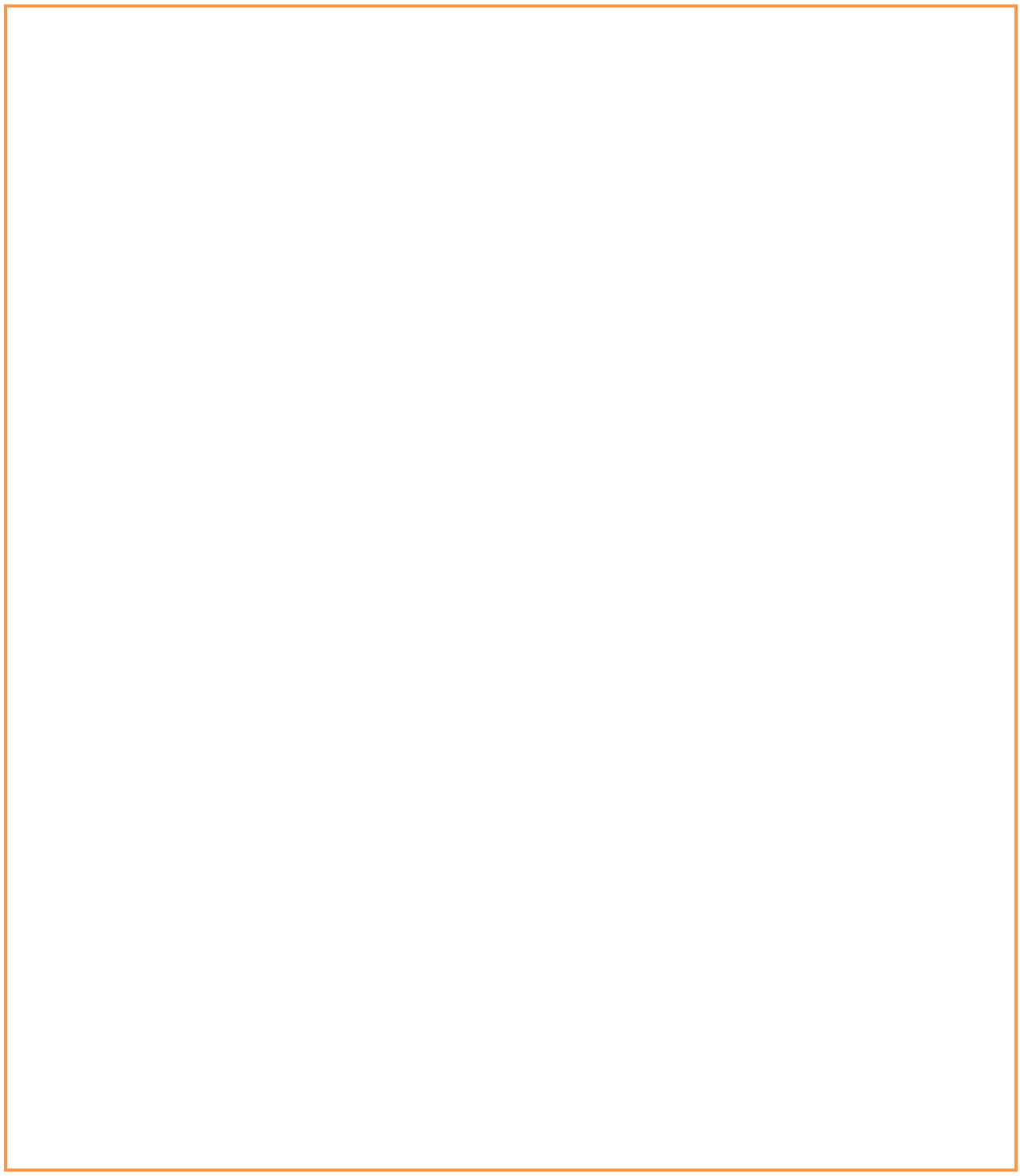
If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a

written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. If you have any questions during the time of the study feel free to ask the researcher.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Nichole Murray, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now or any time after the interview session. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706-542-3199 or irb@uga.edu. You will be given a copy of the consent for your personal records.

APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL



Drawing of space observed.

Date:

Time Start _____ Time End_____ Total

Mins_____

Site _____

Descriptive (objective)	**Reflective (personal)**
Environment-*What is the atmosphere of the site? Location of where activities/events occurring?*	
Activities/Events-*What activities/events offered? Who is offering events? Participant turnout?*	

Social interaction-*Who are youth interacting with? Interaction with staff? Interaction with me?*	
Behavior-*how are youth conducting themselves with staff, actions with other youth? Youth's behavior in educational programs? Instructors' behaviors toward youth in educational program?*	

Nonverbal cues-*How youth are communicating through facial expressions, gestures, body movement*	
Vernacular-*language or slang used*	

Education programs-*are youth actively participating in programs, interest in program by youth, program turnout, climate of classroom/educational building*	
Expected but did not see-*things that are not visible; things that are not happening*	

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date_____ Time_____

Participant_____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This interview will include questions about your schooling and life experiences. The interview will take between 60-90 minutes. All information shared is confidential and you will be asked to provide your own alias for the study. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy.

Your involvement in the study is voluntary. If you feel discomfort at any time, you may skip a question or stop the interview. Feel free to take a break if needed. Questions you may have about the study can be answered before or after the interview. So first let's start with your background.

Background/Profile Questions

How old are you? _____

In what city and state where you born? _____

What high school did you attend? _____

Where was your high school located? _____

What was the racial make-up of your school(s)? _____

What is the highest school level you have completed? _____

Are you still in school? _____

How long have you been homeless? _____

At what age did you first become homeless? _____

Did you experience homelessness with your family or were you on your own?

_____

Where did you lived before you became homeless? _____

Did/Do you participate in any extracurricular activities? _____

Did/Do you work while you were in school? _____

Are you employed? _____

What was your favorite subject in middle and high school? _____

What was your least favorite subject in middle and high school? _____

Interview Protocol

For this reason, the purpose of my study is to examine the schooling experiences of Black youth who are homeless in a large city in the southeastern U.S. I intend to shed light on how Black youth's schooling experiences have shaped their current lives and their possible futures.

My study aims to discover how Black youth who are homeless interpret their educational experiences and how advocates can better serve this population. The study is guided by the following research questions:

(1) How does homelessness impact the academic achievement of Black youth? *[School]*

- Can you tell me about your experiences in high school while you were homeless?
    - What do you remember most about school?
- Tell me about your best experiences in school?

- Tell me about your worst experiences in school?
- What resources or services have been helpful to you in school?
- How well did your school prepare you for your future?
- Can you explain the role education plays in your life?
- Do you think school provides everyone with an equal opportunity to succeed in American society?

(2) How do Black youth who are homeless perceive their lived experiences in relation to family, teachers, and peers? ***[Family, Social]***

- Can you provide examples of any person at school who influenced you? (Friends, Teachers, Staff)
    - Tell me about your relationship with them? How did they influence you?
- What was your social life like in school?
- What did your family think about you going to school?
    - Did they encourage or support you?
    - What or who inspires/motivates you to going?

(3) How do Black youth navigate their status of being homeless within school and society? [Society, Identity]

- How would you describe yourself?
    - When did you first notice your racial identity?
- How do you think society views you?
- How do you think being Black shaped your ideas about school?
- How do you think being homeless shaped your ideas about school?
- What are some issues that you face being a homeless Black female/male?

- Do you feel your homeless experience would be different if you were another race/gender?
- Explain if you have even been discriminated against? In school?
- Can you describe the circumstances that led you to become homeless?
- What do you think it takes to overcome homelessness?

(4) How does the schooling experiences of Black youth affect their lives presently?

[Future]

- Given your housing circumstance, what are your priorities in life now?
- What value do you see in school/education?
- What do you want to be professionally? Are there any barriers or obstacles preventing you from achieving this?
- Can you tell me how school did or did not prepare you for the things you want to do in life?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What do you think teachers or the educational system can do to improve education for homeless youth?
- **Artifact/Document---**Can you explain why this is important and what does it represent to you?

APPENDIX F: STAFF/CASE MANAGER SCRIPT

Hello *(youth's name),* I would like to talk to you about possibly participating in a research study. A graduate student at the University of Georgia, Nichole Murray, is examining homeless Black youth and their schooling experience in Georgia. The goal of her research is to show how Black youth's schooling experiences have shaped their current lives and their possible futures and how advocates can better serve homeless youth in schools. To be eligible for the study you must be an African-American or Black youth experiencing homelessness between the ages of 18 and 21 and have been homeless at least one year while in high school in Georgia. Participants will be asked to share their schooling experiences and discuss how school has shaped their current lives and future during two 60-90 minute interview sessions. The interviews will be conducted within a week. Participants will be compensated for their time and the study is voluntary. There is minimum risk related with the study. This includes: emotional risks such as feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness, guilt or anxiety, or embarrassment from questions asked during the interview. Also, any information disclosed about current abuse, neglect, suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts will have to be reported to the Director of Support Services or the Director on call.

If you meet the criteria and are interested in participating, you may complete the sign up form with your name and the best day and time for you and Nichole to meet on site. She will go over the research study with you and answer any questions you have about the research. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me or Nichole.

You can also contact the principal investigator for the study, Dr. Margaret A. Wilder, from the Social Foundations of Education department at the University of Georgia at mwilder@uga.edu

Thank you.