Permanent Shelter in The Empire City:
Youth Experiencing Family Homelessness and Navigating the Homeless Industrial Complex with a Narrative Inquiry Approach

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https://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/invisible-child/index.html#/?chapt=1

"It's still wasn't a lot of time for me to like get used to the idea of it [shelter] because it's not that I haven't like stayed in the shelter before, **but this was permanent**." – Sophia

Problem and Rationale

- More than **111,000 New York City students**—approximately **one in ten children** enrolled in district or charter schools—were identified as homeless during the 2019-20 school year (Advocates for Children, 2021).
  - In the **Bronx, approximately one in six students was homeless**.

- **97% of families in NYC experiencing shelter-based homelessness are families of color (WIN,2021).**

- **32,700 students were living in City shelters**, while approximately (Advocates for Children, 2020)

- The length of stay for families in NYC shelters has increased, averaging **444 days in FY 2019, nearly 2 academic years**

- Chamberlin and Johnson (2011) examined 3,941 persons experiencing adult homelessness and found that at **35%, the greatest pathway by far into adult homelessness is through experiencing youth homelessness.**

Central Concepts, Defined & Enacted in Design, Research Approach, Theory of method/epistemology

- Building on Daiute's relational theory of development (2016), this study addresses the relational process of narrating.

- The study employs the concept of the narrative as a cultural tool to examine the interaction of societal, professional, and personal orientations in education (Daiute, 2014).

- Building upon the concept introduced by Fuller (2016) and Ring (2019), **The Homeless Industrial Complex** is an ecosystem birthed from racial capitalism that encompasses private industry, advocacy, and governmental institutions at municipal, state, and national levels that shape and control the everyday lives of youth experiencing homelessness with their families.
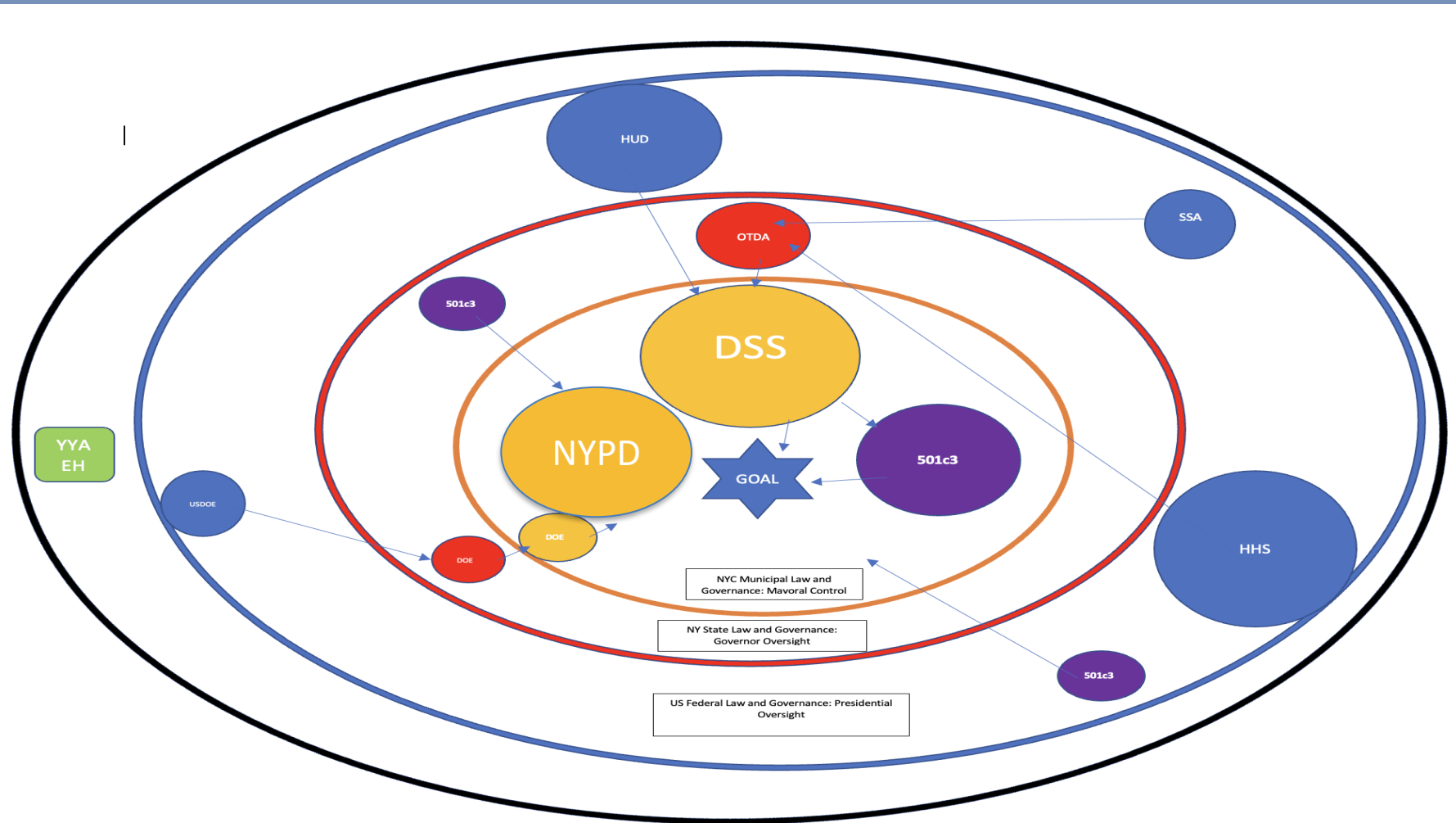
Theoretical Frame: The Homeless Industrial Complex as a Developmental Context in an Activity Meaning System

Figure 1

Institutional Actors of The Homeless Industrial Complex

NYC Municipal	New York State	National
o **DSS:** NYC Department of Social Services (Reports to Mayor) ■ Human Resources Administration ■ Department of Homeless Services (NYC Continuum of Care) o **NYPD**: New York Police Department o **ACS**: Administration for Children's Services o **DOE:** NYC Department of Education (Reports to Mayor) ■ Students in Temporary Housing ■ District 75 ■ District 79 ■ Community Schools o **501c3:** NYC Focused Non-profits Organizations (Reports to Board) ■ Shelter and homeless services providers ■ Other Community Based Organizations	o **OTDA :**Office of Disability and Temporary Assistance (Reports Governor) ■ NYS TANF ■ NYS Shelter oversight: ■ NYS Refugee services ■ NYS SSI/SSDI: o **501c3:** State level Homeless Non-Profits (Reports to Board) ■ Homeless Service Providers ■ Advocacy	o **USDOE:** US Department of Education o **HUD:** Housing and Urban Development ■ CoC Program o **HHS**: Health and Human Services ■ TANF ■ Medicare o **501c3:** National Non-Profits(Reports to Board) ■ Homeless Service Providers ■ Advocacy

Theoretical Frame: The Homeless Industrial Complex as a Developmental Context in an Activity Meaning System.

Hypothesis

The everyday stories of BIPOC youth in NYC family shelters shed light on the ways in which their daily lives are shaped by the policies and actions of the HIC. Furthermore, policies enacted by institutional actors of the HIC often result in the reduction of the individual autonomy and humanity of youth, and their families experiencing intersectional levels of marginalization, specifically housing instability.

Research Questions

1. What are the structures of the Homeless Industrial Complex, and how do they interact with BIPOC YYA in a family shelter in NYC?

2. What are the values that emerge as salient across expressions by the various participants in the Homeless Industrial Complex – institutions and individuals?

3. How are they echoing or resisting the structural dialogue they encounter?

4. In narratives of their experience, which collectives and institutions do the YYA characterize (mention and call out), and how do those characterizations interact with how the system narrates itself?

5. How do BIPOC YYA who made it through narrating their pathway and the network of obstacles and supports?

6. How might knowledge generated by youth voices about the HIC feed into more humane, youth-sensitive policies and interventions?

Methodology: Research Design

This study employed a narrative activity-meaning system research design (Daiute, 2015).

1. **Stakeholder expressions**
   - **51** Exemplary documents such as mission statements from **NYC governmental stakeholders, political plans on homelessness from federal and municipal executive branches, and state-based rules and regulations** were analyzed.
   - These documents provide expressions of viewpoints of institutional stakeholders that interact with families and youth experiencing homelessness.

2. **Youth Narratives**
   - I asked participants to narrative vignettes across three narrative genres, sharing their **Best/Worse experiences (6), Fictional accounts (6), and Epistle - letters (6)**. Values Analysis was then conducted across all 18 narratives – 3 from each of the 6 participants - to highlight varying aspects of the HIC.

Methodology Continued: Recruitment tools, interview protocol, other instruments

- Participants (n=6) were YYA **ages 18-27 who formally experienced homelessness** with their families in NYC family shelters while in high school from approximately 2006-to 2019 and successfully transitioned into permanent housing.

- Youth were recruited from homeless services providers in the **Bronx and Brooklyn**, who maintained contact with the students after securing permanent housing with their families.

- The small sample size was expected due to the complexity of this specialized population's challenges, high mobility, and limited "positive" system linkages to follow successfully transitioned youth.

Participants

Participant alias	John	Jane	Emma	Sophia	Mia	Olivia
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Race/Ethnicity	Asian/Afghan	Latino/Hispanic	Black/Latino	Black / Caribbean-American	Latino/ Ecuadorian	Latino/ Dominican
Length of Shelter Stay (Years)	0-1	2-5	2-5	2-5	0-1	2-5
Years since finding permeant housing	2-5	6-10	2-5	2-5	2-5	2-5
Highest Level of Education Completed	High School Diploma/GED	Undergraduate Degree	Some College	Some College	Some College	Undergraduate Degree
Highest Level of Education Mother Completed	Middle School	Undergraduate Degree	Some College	Some High School	Some College	Some College
Annual Income	Under $15,000	Between $30,000 and $49,999	Under $15,000	Under $15,000	Under $15,000	Between $30,000 and $49,999

Methodology Continued: Recruitment tools, interview protocol, other instruments

- **(Best/Worst Stance)** Can you please take a minute or two to think back on a memorable experience while you were living in shelter.
  - Please tell me about that experience in as much detail as possible. What happened? Who was there? How did everyone think, feel about it? How did it all turn out?
  - If there's another experience you would like to share the story of, please do now.
    - Can you tell me more?
- **(Fictional)** Imagine a high school student who is currently living in a family shelter like the one you experienced and is going through a challenging time. This person you are writing to can be an actual person or yourself at that time. If you don't want to write, you can dictate the letter aloud to the recording.
  - What advice would you give to them?
  - What are services that you think could be helpful for them?
  - What skills do you think helped you the most while in shelter?
    - Can you tell me more?
- **(Epistle)** Now, imagine a political leader such as the president, governor, or mayor, what would you say to them about the experiencing of living in shelter?
  - What should they do?
  - What role do they play?
  - Can you tell me more?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Analytic Strategies

Values Analysis Explained and Illustrated, with the process

- Values are "culturally specific goals, ways of knowing, experiencing, an acting in response to environmental, cultural, economic, political, and social circumstances" (Daiute, Stern, & Lelutiu-Weinberger, 2003,p. 85).

- Focusing on the values that emerge from institutional and individual actors reveal the complexity of the environments that are engaged in, and for this study that is defined as the HIC.
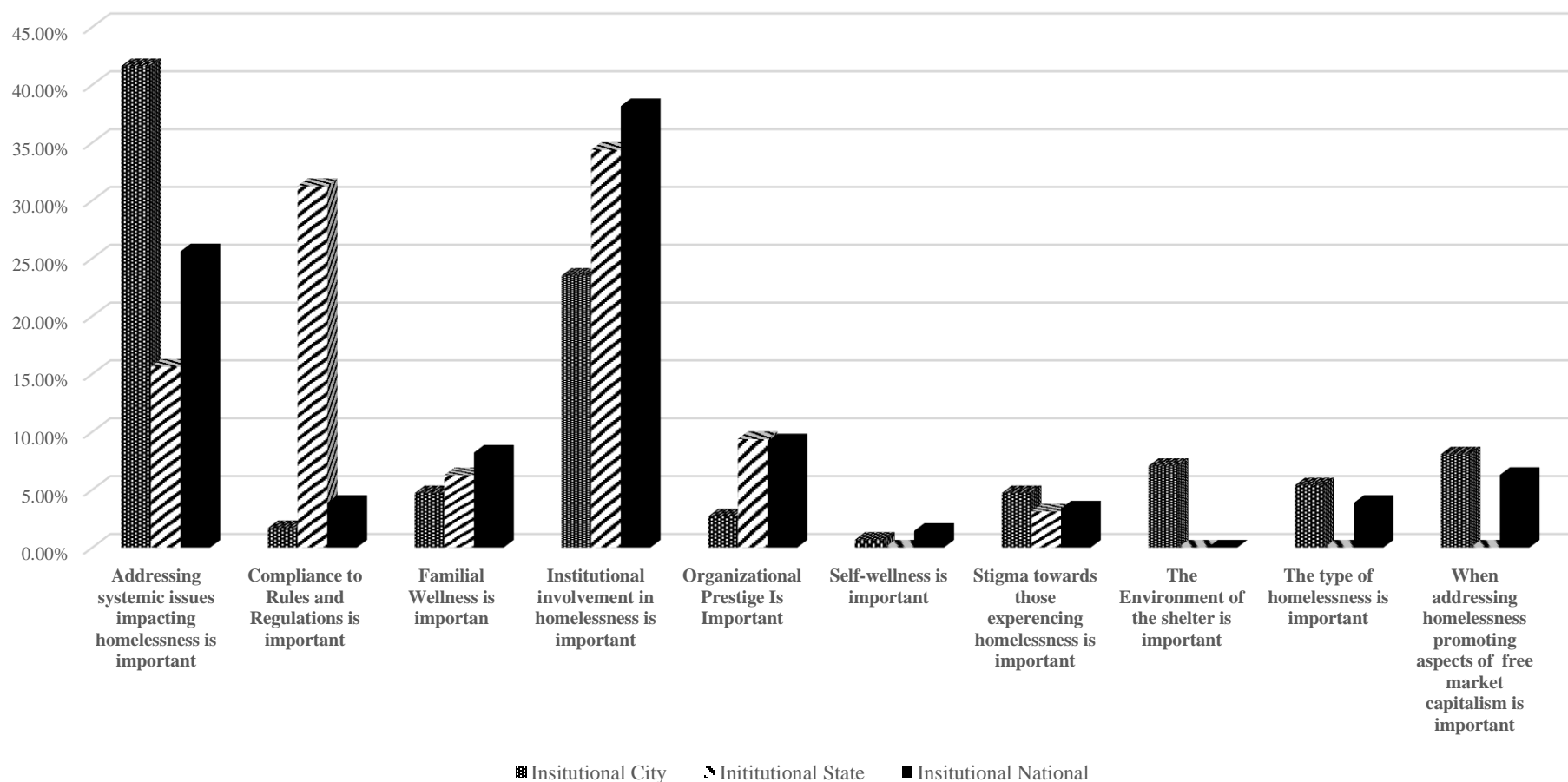
Values Selection

- I built the prominent values of the text from honoring what the stakeholder viewed as important to emphasize in **each sentence** of their respected expression.

- Through this process, I was able to identify the range of importance to construct the most prominent organizing values.

Analytic Strategies: Values Analysis

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1 Um, okay. Um, I'm trying to think, like what to talk about, um, like maybe our first day going in and like learning about everything, like all the rules or is that

| Compliance to Rules and Re... (54:1 U...)

3 Okay? I mean, I think that would be the most memorable.

| Compliance to Rules and Re...

5 I, you know, I grew up in a two family home until I was 16 from when I was born till I was 16.

| Familial togetherness (54:...)

7 Um, so going into a shelter was definitely a transition that I was definitely not used to.

| The environment of the shel... (54:...)

9 Um, at the time I was also pregnant.

| Familial Child wellness

11 Um, we had a house fire that displaced us.

| The type of homelessness i...

13 So it, it was a big transition going in and just knowing like all these rules, like, oh yeah, you can't bring in furniture.

| Compliance to Rules and Re... (54:...)

15 You can't have a TV bigger than this size.

| Compliance to Rules and Re...

17 You have to find in and out every time you come in and around the building, um, you can't stay out anywhere overnight.

| Compliance to Rules and Re... (54:...)

19 Like it was just so many rules

| Compliance to Rules and Re...

21 and like, it was frustrating being young and not being able to like, hang out with any friends, have anybody over, you know,

| Personal Peer Relationships (54:...)

23 just be comfortable really because you have all these restrictions on you.

| Compliance to Rules and Re...

25 Um, so just coming in and just kind of like realizing the crazy change that we were about to undergo for the next couple of years.
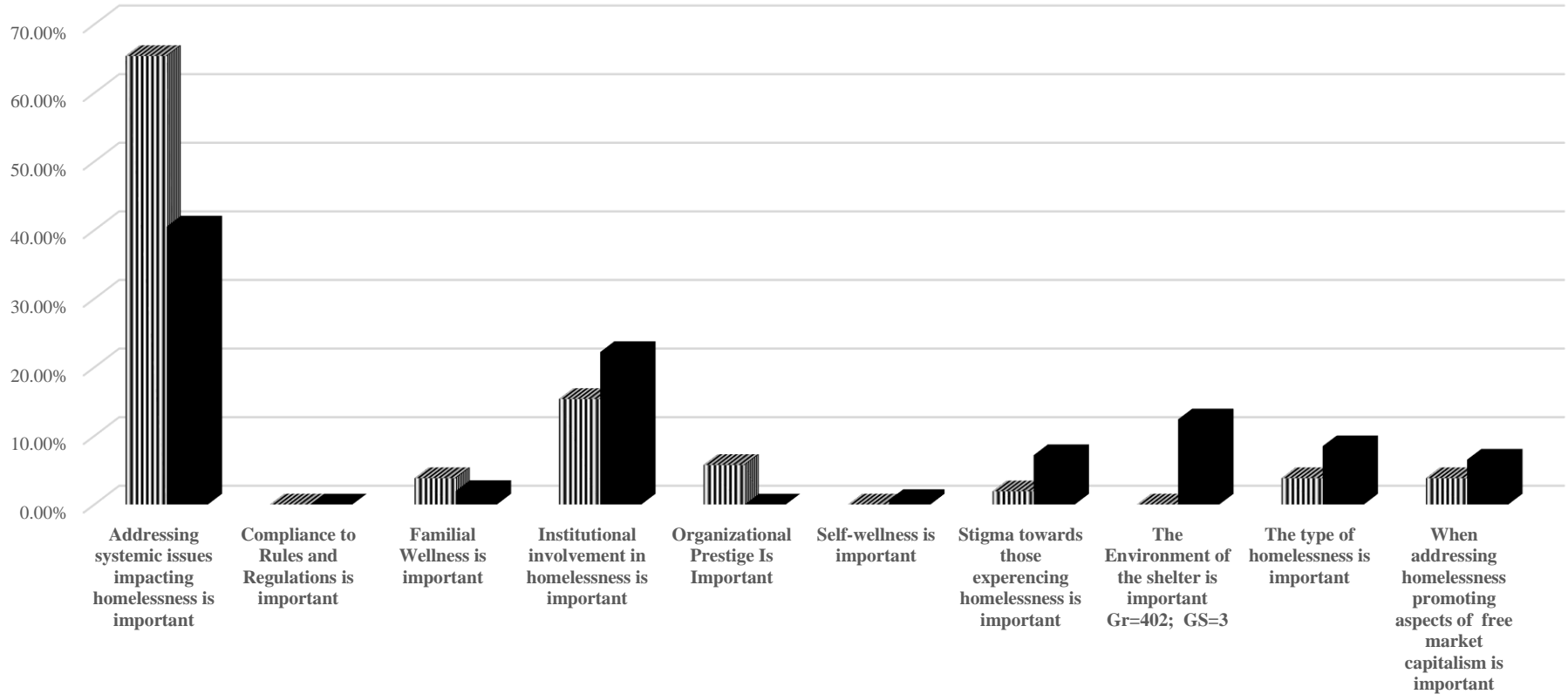
| Permeanence of shelter (54:...)

Findings (Institutional)

Preveleance of Values as % Across all Institutional Expressions

Legend: ▦ Insitutional City ⟋ Inititutional State ■ Insitutional National

Findings (Institutional)

Prevalance of Values Across Expressions of Executive Summary's by NYC Mayoral Adminsitration

Bloomberg vs. de Blasio
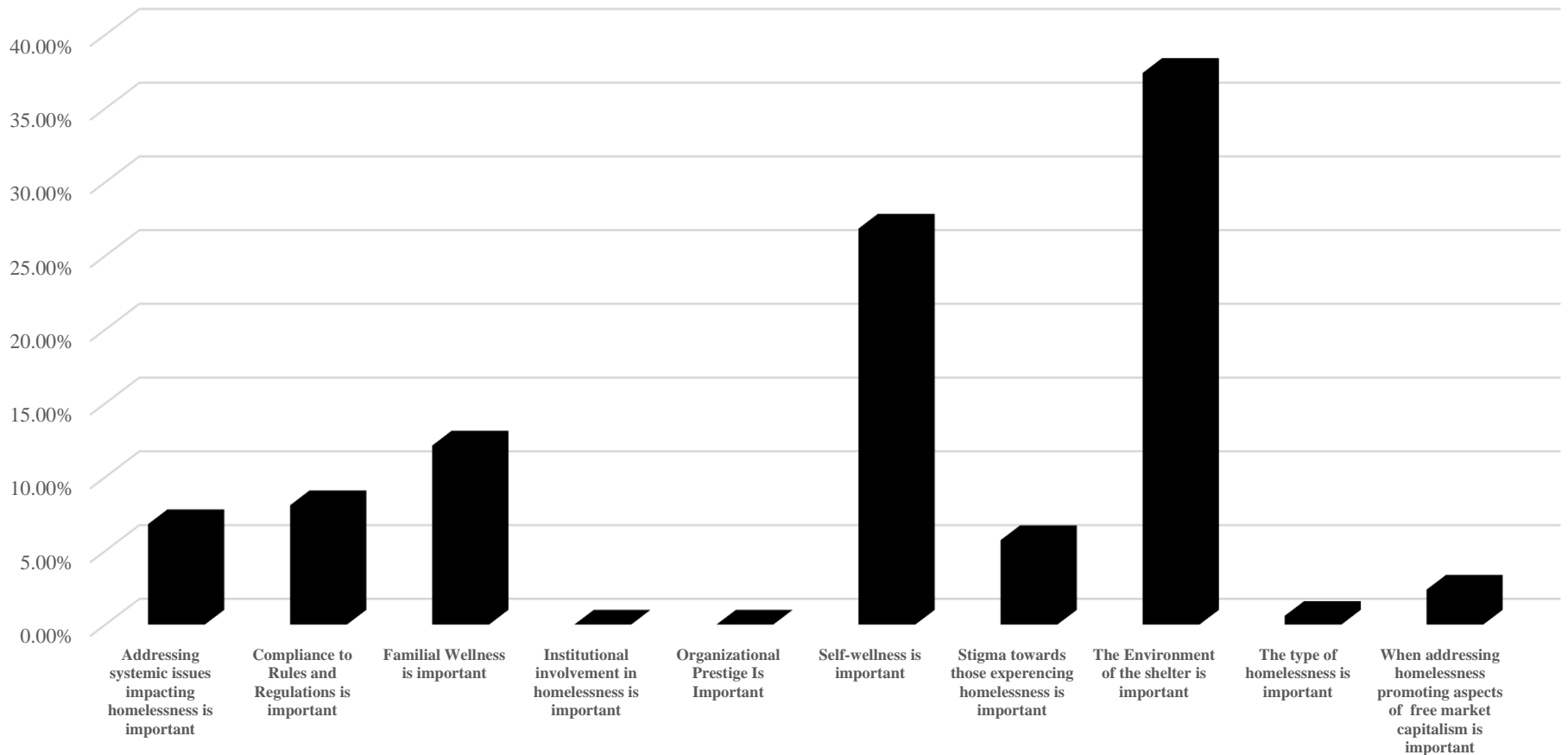
Bloomberg Administration

- **Today, the city's first line of response to nearly any type of housing instability – i.e., potential eviction, household tension, medical emergency, or falling behind on rent – is shelter.** Despite the fact that the shelter system was designed specifically to protect people from the streets, shelter has become the de facto, institutionalized response to wide-ranging needs – many of which could be better addressed with nuanced and more flexible interventions that help people stabilize housing, retain community ties, or transition successfully from institutional or custodial settings to community housing. (**Uniting for Solutions Beyond, 2004**)

De Blasio Administration

- The Rise of Homelessness in NYC From 1994 to 2014, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter census skyrocketed 115 percent. **At the same time, the City lost hundreds of thousands of affordable or rent stabilized units. This steady decline in housing affordability has driven many low- and middle-income families into homelessness**. The scale of this affordability crisis is vast: Between 2000 and 2014, the median New York City rent increased by 19 percent in real dollars and household income decreased by 6.3 percent in real dollars. In 2016, a family of three with a household income of $24,500 (equivalent to 30 percent of the HUD Income Limit for 2016) could afford to pay approximately $613 per month in rent and utilities—a figure well under half of the City's 2015 median gross rent of $1,317. **(Turning the Tide on Homelessness , 2017)**

Findings (Youth Narratives)

Prevalence of Values as % Across all Youth Narratives

Overall Environment of the Shelter

Physical Environment

– *"Yes, there's a lot dirt and people are using very old furniture."* John

– *"Well I think that one of, one of the services that I think is definitely helpful and especially right now is to have consistent access to the internet." - Olivia*

– *"So if the both of the elevators were broken down, that will cause me and some of the elderly people who also lived higher up to be forced to like, find other means of getting upstairs." - Sophia*

Social Environment

– *"When we, when we, when the complaint to the shelter people, you know, the people who are in charge of shelter, they weren't doing anything." – John*

– *"It was, it was literally like crabs in a barrel kind of living like everybody was just, you didn't, you didn't feel like I didn't feel genuinely from everybody, you, I really had to navigate the relationships very carefully because, a lot of times you never knew if that person, the person would be there for their last night." - Sophia*

Compliance to Rules and Regulations*: Emphasizing various forms of autonomy or lack of autonomy such as 1. Normative adolescent desire for independence 2. Social Domain Theory 3. Paternalism of the Welfare State.

– *"Like just being so like, I don't know, it kind of feels like in a way you're like a prisoner when you're in a shelter, like you don't have the freedom that you're used to, you don't have that space that you're used to, you know, like you go from being able to do whatever now." - Jane*
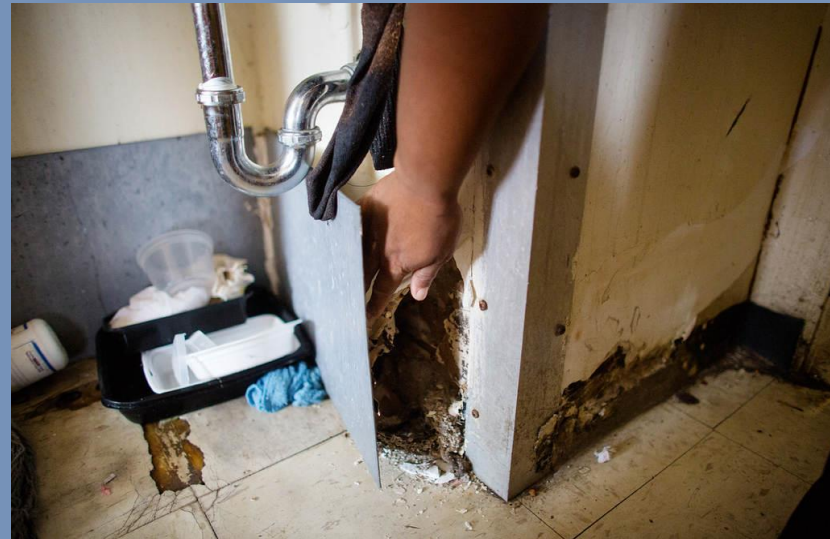
Physical Environment

Physical Environment

"And also there was some mice, like in the middle of the night, **the mice** was, they were coming from, from the, from the holes, you know, they were in the kitchen, like they came out of the kitchen like he came to the living room." – **John**

"Like I was pretty traumatized, **I hate water bugs and like rodents and everything.** So I just remember, like there was one time I was sitting in bed and my bed used to be by the window and like one flew in and I just like threw myself off the bed. Uh, yeah, no, not looking, no, it was not looking forward to that. So when I left, that was definitely one of the things that I was like, oh my God, thank God. I don't have to like deal with that anymore."   – **Jane**
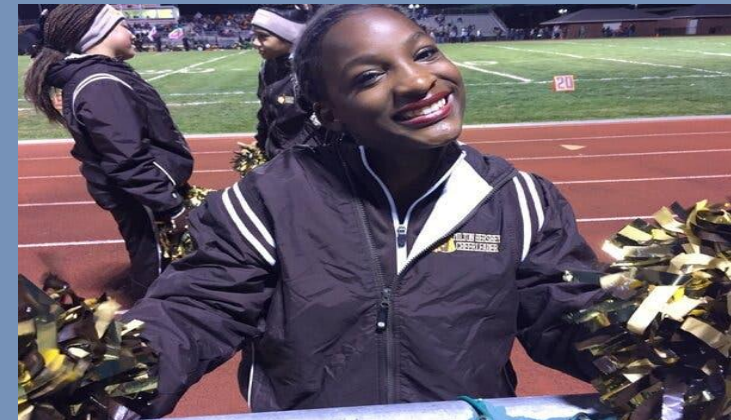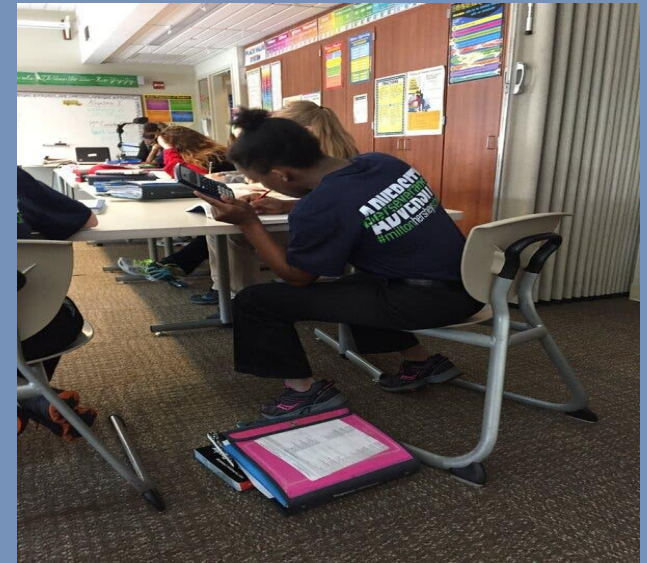
Self Wellness

- **Behavioral Health**
  - *" I find it that sometimes just talking to somebody you don't know can seem more of a relief* and telling other people you do know, cuz I do understand that that can have, uh, that can weigh heavy for a few people like telling somebody that they do know or are close to."* **- Mia**
- **Academic Achievement**
  - *"It was my first, it was around marking and period of time in school, like either end of the marking period and I got the highest GPA in the school."* **- Emma**
- **Peer Relationships**
  - *"I could have because I meant it just meant a lot to be able to go to a birthday, the party at that point and not being able to do so because of shelter restrictions was really disheartening."* **- Olivia**
  - *"Um, a memorable experience was actually being part of, um, the group for RISE and getting to meet a lot of other people going through similar situations and figuring out that they're just as frustrated as I was, and that they experienced the same thing I did with like complications with parents and, uh, had the same problems that I did."* **- Mia**

Expected Contributions and Extensions

This study can be used as bases for workshops and professional development activities with educators, social services workers, policymakers, and researchers who not only engage the HIC in NYC but in varying contexts nationally.

1. Human-centered research and policy
2. Centering structural racism in Homelessness research and policy
3. Centering youth, children, and families in dialogue on homelessness

Recommendations

1. **More research on youth experiencing homelessness with their families**
   – Mix method
   – Participatory

2. **Improve shelter conditions**
   – **Physical:** Building conditions, access to broadband internet, shelter location, unit Size
   – **Social:** Encouraging development and maintaining support networks, shelter-based behavioral health supports, shelter-based familial activities
   – **Increased Autonomy:** entry/exit policies, curfew

3. **Reduce average length of stay**
   – Make family homelessness infrequent and brief- 444 days to 90 days

4. **Increased opportunities for Peer-to-Peer interaction amongst Youth**
   – Youth Centered activities that explicitly target students ages 12-18 experiencing family homelessness
   – Youth empowerment program with support services and an environment that positive youth development

"**I lived in a shelter all throughout high school**. So from my actually from 9th grade to senior year, 12th grade" – Olivia

Discussion

Thank you for your time and focus. Your questions are welcome.

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