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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Xellex Z. Rivera

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Experiences of Long-Term Stay Among Homeless Millennials in New York City Shelters

by

Xellex Z. Rivera

MPhil, Walden University, 2019

MA, Manhattan College, 2012

BA, Livingstone College, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Walden University

May 2020

Abstract

The number of homeless millennials seeking shelter in New York City (NYC) increases nightly. Aside from seeking shelter services, millennial adults are also staying in shelters longer than the time allotted by the city. Their extended stay places a burden on city resources and taxpayers. Although there is research on the millennial generation and homelessness in NYC, more research is needed on the experiences of single, millennial adults who stay in shelters for extended periods of time. The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to explore the experiences of 4 long-term-stay millennials, 25 to 34 years of age, residing in single adult NYC shelters to understand how they explain and interpret their extended stays. Arnett's interpretation of emerging adulthood as part of generational theory provided the study's conceptual framework. The data were manually reviewed, organized, and analyzed using precoding from the literature, and themes emerged by clustering the coded data into collected categories. The themes that emerged from the analysis were limited exposure to housing resources and information, difficulty finding employment or jobs with a livable wage, limited engagement with shelter staff, poor socialization skills, and trauma. The study findings contribute to social change by helping human service professionals identify the challenges among millennials currently in shelter for an extended stay and barriers to exiting successfully. This information may help human services professionals and policymakers develop solutions for reducing long-term homelessness among this population.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the single mother of two girls who decided that failure was never an option. The strong woman who decided that she would rather work two jobs than let her daughters go without. The strong woman who sacrificed so much to make sure that I knew better—my mother, Reverend Denise L. Davenport. Where would I be with you, Thelma? This degree is for your sacrifice! I rest my doctoral degree on your shoulders and hand it over with thanksgiving.

Acknowledgments

I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.

—Philippians 4:13.

Without God, I am nothing! Thank You Jesus Christ for walking with me through every word, every paragraph, for staying up late with me and making sure I was clothed in my right mind to fight this battle of higher education. I would also like to thank the participants who volunteered to share their experience with me for this study. Your experiences allowed me the opportunity to share your stories to hopefully implement social change.

To my sister, China D. Brinson, a.k.a. Dee Dee—I never knew strength until I grew up wrapped in your protection. Every arena I walked into, you were front and center, screaming "Go Lexus" at the top of your lungs. Growing up with you has been so enjoyable. Thank you for making sure I read my articles, did my schoolwork, and competed with only myself. To my Auntie Deborah for giving me the motivation through watching you fight daily and being my weekend shopping and eating out partner. You are more than my aunt—you are like a second mother.

I have a lot of gratitude and respect for the faculty and staff in the School of Social Work and Human Services at Walden University. My educational journey at Walden University has been exceptional. The knowledge and skills that I acquired through this institution have been beneficial in becoming a scholar–practitioner. I am so honored to have worked with an awesome dissertation committee: Dr. Barbara Benoliel

and Dr. Sandra Harris. I greatly appreciate their support, dedication, and constructive criticism that has allowed me to learn and grow from their experience.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Millennials are defined as the cohort of individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). Sherber (2018) found that millennials have a more technologically savvy-driven mindset and a radical approach to life. For some millennials, their approach to life does not include the traditional societal norms of older generations such as legal marriage, raising children, owning a home, job stability, or corporate loyalty (Sherber, 2018). Millennials are the highest educated generation to date and have changed the way people work, with a greater reliance on technology (Sherber, 2018). This influential generation displays potential in society.

The millennial generation is the largest bachelor-degree-educated population in the United States to date, which should mean that they would have more career opportunities, corporate advancement, and financial stability as well as greater access to permanent housing (DeVaney, 2015). However, there is a concern related to the rise in millennial-aged people using shelter services for extended periods and staying longer than the City of New York's allocated time for temporary shelter housing (Goldfischer, 2018).

There are more individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 years seeking homeless shelter services in New York City than any other generation (NYC; Scott, 2018). In 2018, the total number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people in NYC was 75,323 with the average of 400 days in the shelters (Coalition for the Homeless, 2018). The number of single adults in NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters reached a new nightly record high 32 times between September 2018 and April 2019 (Coalition for the

Homeless, 2018). Although the Coalition for the Homeless (2017, 2018, 2019) statistical report does not break down age categories, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2019) stated that 2,493 adults ages 18 to 24 years were sheltered on a single night in NYC in 2018. Of these individuals, 53% were 21 to 24 years of age (McFarland, 2019).

The increasing rate of homelessness among this age group can be attributed to issues such as financial challenges, high student loan debt, and the delay in adapting to adulthood roles and responsibilities (Dreyer, 2018). The millennial generation is experiencing similar hardships to those experienced during the Great Depression as they relate to the economy and the job market (Essid, 2015). Similar to individuals raised during the depression era, millennials are challenged by factors such as a lack of reliable employment options, housing instability, and limited finances (Haneman, 2017).

The Coalition for the Homeless provides general statistical data on the state of homelessness in NYC. These statistics provide a snapshot of the daily census of shelter occupancy and individuals seeking services in the city. As of July 2019, 61,054 people slept in a NYC shelter each night (Coalition for the Homeless, 2019). There is an all-time record number of shelter residents with a 10% peak increase in homeless, single adults (Coalition for the Homeless, n.d.). The number of single adults in shelters has more than doubled since 2010, exceeding 18,000 for the first time in January 2019 (Coalition for the Homeless, n.d.). Although the statistical reports are not broken down by age groups, the NYC DHS (2018) reported an increase in young adult shelter intake after discharge from foster care.

Background

The need for extended shelter stays among millennial-aged adults in NYC is increasing (Clark, 2019). Although the city is mandated to offer temporary shelter to all who apply, each individual must participate in a structured, time-consuming intake process (Main, 2017b). Individuals who seek shelter are offered a conditional stay of 30 days in an assessment shelter, during which time they must provide documentation such as state-issued identification and previous housing history as well as information relating to medical and/or psychological conditions (NYC DHS, 2019b). After the 30 days, individuals are transferred to a general shelter to begin shelter services that lead to the housing process. The expected timeframe for staying in a shelter as outlined by the DHS is 6 months (NYC DHS, 2018).

Although the contributing factors that lead to the need for shelter stays are individualized, there are common trends that arise when focusing on how millennials end up in a shelter. One contributing factor is their age of maturity. As emerging adults learn to manage self-identity, this phase includes independence, and many may need more time to reach maturity (Murray, 2019). Haneman (2017) discussed additional factors such as lack of employment opportunities, unstable housing, and college debt that often affect how millennials are able to thrive in early adulthood. Additional causes such as increasing rent throughout NYC and the inability to live independently may also result in homelessness (Goldfischer, 2018).

Some millennials also may not be motivated toward life goals such as marriage and long-term career advancement and may also have a difficult time seeking

employment (Sherber, 2018). Some are entering the workforce with jobs and salaries that do not match their educational achievements, and the jobs available do not have a livable income, which can lead to homelessness when funds will not cover housing and other living expenses (Ferguson, Bender, & Thompson, 2015). These life stressors that were seen by other generations as normal adult challenges have resulted in hardships for the millennial generation and have contributed to the need for shelter stay as an alternative to stable, affordable housing (DeVaney, 2015).

Some millennial adults who have entered shelter are struggling with exiting shelter in a timely manner (Essid, 2015). Despite being engaged by shelter workers with attention to planning from the first day in shelter, some millennials find it difficult to claim or reclaim independence (Murray, 2019). After 6 months in a shelter, the amount of time assigned for engagement between social services and the client increases due to requirements regulated by DHS (NYC DHS, 2019b). As a part of the services, weekly to biweekly engagement with the staff is intended to motivate the clients to seek housing more aggressively; however, no additional resources or opportunities are presented to the long stayer—just the change in frequency of staff engagement (O'Flaherty, Scutella, & Tseng, 2018). These factors are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

A more in-depth understanding of the possible barriers that prevent millennial adults from exiting shelters in the allotted time is needed (Otokiti & Alabi, 2018). Understanding what contributes to the extended shelter stays among millennials in NYC shelters may provide greater insights into the development of probable solutions to shortening those lengthy stays.

Problem Statement

Longer shelter stays among millennial adults in NYC is a societal issue as the need for services creates a burden on the city's resources (Parsell, 2018). The goal of temporary shelters in NYC is to provide temporary housing assistance while helping individuals move toward independent living (Lemma, 2017). The NYC DHS (2018) reported that 1 in 4 millennials are staying in a shelter for over 6 months. These extended stays are putting pressure on city resources and may negatively impact service availability for other populations (Couch, 2014).

According to Yoonsook, Thomas, Narendorf, and Maria (2018), inexperienced case management staff, limited knowledge of available housing vouchers, and staff attitudes that make it harder to engage with young adult clients are some of the barriers that may prevent millennials from exiting shelters in the allotted time. Gaining insights into the background and contextual factors that are associated with extended shelter stay among a selected sample of millennial-aged adults experiencing homelessness may broaden the understanding of what causes their extended stays (Ha, Narendorf, Santa Maria, & Bezette-Flores, 2015). Although I did not find research on why millennials use shelters for extended stays, the aforementioned research on millennial adults' homelessness illuminates significant findings. Further research is necessary to gain a better understanding of how their experiences while in shelters contribute to the need for extended shelter. Further exploration of millennials' experiences as emerging adults may also provide insights into understanding their extended shelter stay.

Purpose of the Study

I conducted this qualitative, multiple case study to better understand the experiences of single, millennial adults, 25 to 34 years of age, that may contribute to their staying in shelters longer than the allowed stay. Through examining the experiences of millennial adults, I gathered information on the possible barriers, stressors, and life factors that contribute to their inability to leave the shelters. The findings from this study may help inform human services and other professions of the need for programming and services to support this population as they seek permanent residences.

Research Questions

The two research questions developed for the study include a question about the lived experiences of millennial adults during their stay in long-term shelters and a question about the participants' perceptions about the theoretical framework of emerging adulthood. They are

RQ1: What are the experiences of single, millennial adults staying long term in NYC homeless shelters?

RQ2: How do millennial-aged, long-term shelter stay adults describe their adulthood and perceive their future after their shelter stay?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on generational theory, developed by Strauss and Howe to address recurring generational cycles in U.S. history (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Arnett (2000) later added the concept of emerging adulthood to the discussions of generational theory. *Emerging adulthood* is a new term that describes a

phase between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood that encompasses late adolescence and early adulthood (Arnett, 2014). Generational theory does not speak directly to the millennial generation but includes the concept of emerging adulthood.

I used Arnett's (2000) emerging adulthood construct to guide this study. The emerging adulthood construct was appropriate because it covers the life span of the target population and is primarily focused on young adults who do not have children, do not live in their own home, and do not have enough financial stability to become fully independent (Arnett, 2000). It describes features of emerging adulthood such as exploration of identity, instability, self-focus, and feeling in between (Arnett, 2014). Applying the emerging adulthood construct to this cohort of millennials in shelters provided a framework for exploring their thinking about their situations. I discuss this theory in more detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a multiple case study design to conduct this study. Case study analysis is a descriptive approach used to examine a situation or institution in depth (Guest, 2012). I identified this approach as the best fit for gathering information regarding the extended stay in homeless shelters from a sample of millennials in NYC homeless shelters. This method was the best fit because it helps develop a complete picture of the participants as a case by allowing them to tell their own stories in depth and in their own words (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). The method allowed me to review their life experiences, including examining and analyzing artifacts that illustrate their stories (see Gubrium & Holstein, 2009).

Yin (2018) stated that a case study method can be one case or more. There were four participants in the present study, which allowed me to examine a variety of stories while collecting rich, thick data. There were male and female participants of various ethnicities. Participants were recruited from the populations of four large homeless shelters in NYC.

Thematic content analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify themes from the interviews. This approach emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns or themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible approach for analyzing rich, detailed, and complex data (Guest, 2012). I used the constant comparative method (see Glaser, 2014) when analyzing the data. This method allows relevant categories of meaning and relationships between categories to be derived from the data rather than initiating the process with predefined categories (Glaser, 2014).

Definitions

Barrier: For this study, a barrier is a deterrent or circumstance that limits a person from progress or completion of exiting a shelter (Lemma, 2017).

Emerging adulthood: The transition from adolescence to full-fledged adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

Homelessness: The state of being without a permanent residence or housing option (Hanson-Easey, Every, Tehan, & Richardson, 2016).

Homeless shelter: Any facility designated or approved by the City of New York for the purpose of providing temporary housing or shelter to persons without permanent housing (Coalition for the Homeless, 2018).

Independent living: The state of stability and the establishment of a stable and consistent living arrangement (Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, 2018).

Logged out: The point of the shelter experience when a client does not return to the shelter for curfew and is removed from the shelter roster (Western New York Law Center, n.d.).

Long-term stayer: A person who resides in a shelter in NYC for longer than 6 months (Stern, 2004).

Millennial: For this study, a millennial was defined as a person 25 to 34 years of age at the time of the study. This age range is encompassed in the Pew Research Center's definition of millennials as born from 1981 to 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

Assumptions

I made several assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that all participants would answer all interview questions openly and honestly. Second, I assumed that all participants would be able to provide insight into their experiences as it related to homelessness and their extended stay in a NYC shelter. I assumed that all participants would be able to identify why they were staying in the shelter longer than the allotted timeframe. Finally, I assumed each participant would have the opportunity to speak freely in a manner deemed respectable for all parties involved.

Scope and Delimitations

I primarily focused on the experiences of single, millennial-aged adults who were living in a shelter past the timeframe allowed. I limited the study scope to millennial-aged, long-term shelter residents in NYC. I determined the following delimitations: First,

ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, mental health diagnosis, or religious beliefs did not exclude potential study participants. Second, participants were excluded if they were categorized in their shelter status as *exit unknown* or *logged out of the shelter* between the time of recruitment and the date of the interviews. Exit unknown or logged out of shelter means that the client has not successfully completed his or her shelter program and left on his or her own. Last, each participant must have been in the shelter for at least 6 months at the start of the study. At that point, shelter residents are considered long-term stayers.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. One limitation was the location, NYC; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. The population was transient and reported dealing with a number of issues including their legal status, health, and employment, which may have limited their ability to participate in the study. There was a possibility that participants would disappear between recruitment and the interview date.

Significance

Increasing shelter use among millennials is a problem that induces personal and societal issues that can be perceived as negative in nature. Extended shelter stays among this population raise social implications that also contribute to a concern for society. The findings from the study contributed to filling the gap in what is known about why millennials are staying longer in shelters, specifically in NYC, and the barriers that might prevent them from exiting the shelter during the period allotted. By gaining insights from the participants, this study provided information that social workers, shelter workers, and

social service policymakers may use to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers to exiting shelters. Another goal was to use the participants' experiences to shape suggestions to future providers and advocates regarding social service approaches to better serve millennials experiencing homelessness. This study led to positive social change by providing greater understanding of the problem, which may lead to improved social service delivery, more effective programs, and better training for staff, which could reduce extended shelter stays.

Summary

Temporary housing has always been an option throughout NYC, but lengths of stay among the millennial generation have increased, causing the face of homelessness to change. With increases in shelter stays, resources are becoming limited. Why millennials' stays are increasing is little understood, suggesting the need to explore the reasons for becoming homeless among this population and the possible barriers to their exiting shelter. My goal in this qualitative, case study was to explore the lived experiences of long-term stay, millennial adults in NYC shelters. In Chapter 1, I described homelessness among single, adult millennials and the increased need for temporary shelter and extended stay. I discussed the conceptual framework I used to gain an understanding of the population. I reviewed the assumptions, scope and delimitations of the study, and the limitations. The significance of the study was outlined to find out why millennials are staying longer in the shelters in NYC.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature on the emerging adulthood construct that guided this study. The literature reviewed reflects key concepts regarding the experience

of millennial homelessness in NYC, the NYC shelter system, and factors that may contribute to homelessness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Millennials are staying in shelters past the time allotted as evidenced by the increase of long-term stays in NYC shelters (Ha et al., 2015). Extended stays in shelters have a negative impact on society. As a result, there is an increased need for city funding and resources that can affect case management opportunities while in the shelter (Ha et al., 2015). In this study, I focused on the reasons single, millennial shelter residents are staying past the allotted time. The demographic subgroup of millennials, ages 25 to 34 years, remains an understudied age group among the homeless population with the preponderance of focus being either on homeless youth and/or homeless elder adults (Hanson-Easey et al., 2016). This leaves a gap in the research on how this population perceives temporary shelter and how they exit shelter.

In Chapter 2, I define homelessness, temporary shelter, and how the services that shelters offer are being impacted by the growing number of millennials who are staying for extended times. The chapter starts with a discussion of the theoretical framework of emerging adulthood as the underpinning for the study. Next, I provide a brief background on the NYC shelter system, the shelter assessment process, and the services that are offered. I then discuss factors that millennials face that lead to their need for extended shelter. Last, I focus on factors that contribute to homelessness among millennial-aged adults.

Literature Search Strategy

I located literature to review by searching databases such as PsychINFO, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar. The search terms and phrases I used to locate relevant

literature included the following: *Millennial homelessness*, *homelessness*, *Millennials and shelter increase*, *NYC single adult homelessness*, *New York City temporary shelter*, *young adult homelessness*, *young adult shelter stay*, *shelter in NYC*, *Millennial generation*, *supportive housing in NYC*, *increase in shelter stay*, *sanctuary city*, *history of shelter in NYC*, *qualitative case study method*, *generational theory*, *delayed adulthood*, *emerging adult*, *Millennials and drug abuse*, *Millennials and substance abuse*, *why are Millennials homeless*, *cost of living in NYC*, *shelter cost in NYC*, *temporary housing options in NYC*, *mental health and Millennials*, *Millennials and the job market*, *NYC cost of living*, and *Millennials and drug use*. I compiled statistical data from the NYC DHS, the U.S. HUD, and the Coalition for the Homeless, an NYC-based nonprofit advocacy group to inform this review.

Theoretical Framework

Strauss and Howe (1991) developed generational theory to describe historical events associated with recurring generational characteristics. Arnett (2015) added the construct of emerging adulthood to explain a life span development theory from adolescence to beyond early adulthood. The construct of emerging adulthood was used as a guide for this study. Arnett (2014) proposed five features of emerging adulthood: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in between adolescence and adulthood, and a sense of broad possibilities for the future. This life stage is characterized by diverse experiences, lack of long-term commitments, unstable romantic relationships, biological changes such as puberty and hormonal development, and employment (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adulthood is the age period where there is nothing demographically

consistent (Arnett, 2016). Although each stage does not contribute to homelessness, the theory helps to understand this generation's development that may help explain why some are homeless at this time in their life.

Arnett (2000) further defined emerging adulthood as a period where a person struggles with identity, instability, self-focus, career possibilities, and feeling in-between. The construct explains this developmental period as a "role-less" role, where the emerging adult may engage in many activities and functions but stray from obligations and role requirements (Arnett, 2015). Individuals in this developmental stage may not consider themselves adolescents and may not see themselves entirely as adults either (Arnett, 2014).

Emerging adulthood differs from puberty, as puberty focuses on physical and hormonal changes, whereas emerging adulthood reflects the peak of physical health and performance (Arnett, 2014). During this time, a person is fully physically developed and equipped for sexual reproduction (Arnett, 2014). The brain of an emerging adult, however, is still developing into adult form (Arnett, 2016). Mature brain development includes the ability to process emotions, process social information, and plan and process risks and rewards, as well as decision making (Arnett, 2015). Arnett (2014) noted a certain amount of change and instability that emerging adults encounter, such as exploring different possibilities in love and work. Historically, emerging adulthood has been perceived as a time for preparation and socialization that is required to be independent.

Millennials as Emerging Adults

Emerging adulthood is the time when people should be able to assume greater responsibility for themselves while maintaining family ties that can assist them with their life transitions (Arnett, 2014). The concept of emerging adulthood is meaningful because it focuses on perspective taking, interpersonal understanding, and interpersonal negotiation, which will lead to self-understanding (Kilkenny, 2012). The age range of 18 to 25 years coincides with the final stage of neurological development; therefore, it should be a developmental period that focuses on life milestones and achievements (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2015). The period of emerging adulthood differs from other developmental stages as there is no age maximum that determines when it ends (Arnett, 2014). The components of emerging adulthood are relevant to this study because the components can be used to explain some behaviors of the millennial cohort. According to Arnett (2014), emerging adulthood comes to an end when people make a commitment to take on traditional roles. Young people are considered to have emerged into adulthood when they accept responsibility for themselves, make independent decisions, and obtain financial freedom (Arnett, 2000).

Emerging adulthood can also be seen in social relationships, or the lack thereof, by their limited socialization (McDonald, 2015). The concept of instability as part of emerging adulthood reflects a lack of commitment in terms of romantic relationships as well as a lack of commitment to a given job (McDonald, 2015). It is a societal expectation that adults assume roles in life that contribute to society, such as being a spouse or a parent (Arnett, 2000). Some millennial emerging adults, however, lack the

desire to assume such roles at the expected age range of 18 to 25 years and instead delay assuming these roles to 25 to 38 years of age (Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi, 2017). The delay of this transition can be observed in some of their decision-making such as moving back in with their parents, foregoing marriage, and frequently switching jobs (Horovitz, 2012). Emerging adults tend to find it difficult to stay loyal to employers and frequently change their jobs (Arnett & Tanner, 2016).

Despite being legally and cognitively adults, this demographic avoids three roles associated with adulthood: employment, marriage, and parenthood (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2015). Members of previous U.S. generations traditionally took on these roles by their early to mid-20s. Arnett (2014) stated that in most cases, an emerging adult does not pursue traditional roles until their late 20s to early 30s.

Homeless Millennials as Emerging Adults: Applying the Theory

Homeless millennials may not have the tools necessary to navigate through emerging adulthood, which may limit their ability to successfully exit shelter (Dittmeier, Thompson, Kroger, & Phillips, 2018). Emerging adults may face the stress of poverty, residential instability, potentially risky peer associations, disaffiliation from family, and dangers due to their environment (Kim, 2015). The construct of emerging adulthood is relevant to the present study because it describes why delays occur in some who are emerging into adulthood and may provide a framework for a better understanding of why some millennials who are entering homeless shelters are staying for an extended time.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Defining the Millennial Generation

The millennial generation refers to individuals born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019). Individuals in this generation were ages 25 to 34 years at the time of this study. This generation acquired its name because millennials were born during the turn of the millennium, when technology became more accessible to a larger population of individuals (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Some millennials refuse to live as defined by societal norms such as getting married, buying a house, starting a family, and more (Murray, 2019). Examples of these societal changes among millennials are the following:

- Millennials tend to be ambivalent about the responsibilities of adulthood (Sherber, 2018).
- Fifty percent of millennial adults are more likely than previous generations to be receiving financial assistance from their parents (Murray, 2019).

Millennials are between dependence and independence and are intentionally not taking on the full responsibilities that have been traditionally associated with adulthood (McDermott & Schwartz, 2013). More millennials are living with their parents longer than members of previous generations (McDonald, 2015), and there is a higher unemployment rate among millennials than among previous generations (McDonald, 2015). The goal of obtaining complete independence by owning a home was once a generational milestone, but it is not for many millennials. Many are returning to their parents' households with no effort to leave quickly (Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2018). Moreover, limited or poor employment conditions may contribute to their returning or

staying at home with their parents until they establish stability (Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2018).

Some millennials are challenged by other common life stressors such as homelessness, postcollege financial instability, loan debt, and job market struggles (Haneman, 2017), mental health issues (Twenge, 2011), and drug abuse (Sherber, 2018). These factors are aspects of this generation and are discussed as factors that may contribute to homelessness and extended shelter stays.

Homelessness

Homelessness is the lack of a stable living situation or residence (Howard, 2013). There are no definite causes of homelessness. Many factors that can lead to homelessness include unemployment, a challenging job market, decreases in government funding for public assistance and housing vouchers, housing market discrimination, mental illness, and deinstitutionalization (Byrne, Treglia, Culhane, Kuhn, & Kane, 2016). Common reasons for homelessness among millennials in NYC include rising rents and stagnating incomes (Dittmeier et al., 2018). Limited affordable housing options and a population with greater needs than provided can contribute to homelessness in the city.

The homeless population continues to increase throughout NYC despite efforts to move people into permanent housing (Shan & Sandler, 2016). An average of 15,000 single adults of all ages sleep in shelters every night in NYC (Coalition for the Homeless, 2017) with a 53% increase in single adults seeking shelter from 2015 to 2018 (Coalition for the Homeless, 2018). The length of shelter stays among single adults has increased by approximately 100 days since 2016 (Main, 2017b). These increases in shelter stays have

also contributed to the need to build new shelters as outlined in Mayor de Blasio's 2017 management report (de Blasio, 2017).

Millennial Homelessness

Millennials are seeking homeless services such as shelter or drop-in centers more frequently (Scott, 2018). In NYC, 46 in every 10,000 people were experiencing homelessness in 2018 (McFarland, 2019). The 2017 Coalition for the Homeless Annual Report for NYC noted an 82% increase in millennial homelessness in the city since 2007. In 2017, more than 60,700 people sought shelter in NYC; approximately half were millennials (Dreyer, 2018). As of June 2018, the Coalition for the Homeless reported an average of 12,000 single, homeless adults nightly living in NYC's shelter system.

Unprecedented numbers of millennials are seeking services through homeless shelters and are staying in shelters longer than the City of New York's allocated time for temporary shelter housing (Dreyer, 2018). Their extended stays are pressuring shelter resources by adding additional costs that may negatively impact other populations needing these funds for services, including the elderly and victims of domestic violence (Lemma, 2017). These issues reflect the research problem for the present study; little is known about why millennials are using shelters for extended stays and the experiences that may cause them to stay longer than the time allotted.

Temporary Homeless Shelters

Homeless shelters, traditionally used by people with limited resources, are places where people can seek shelter if they are displaced from their residences (Shan & Sandler, 2016). The goal of a temporary shelter is to work with homeless individuals to

transition from homelessness to stable, long-term housing (Fleck, 2012). There are over 100 temporary shelters throughout NYC (Shan & Sandler, 2016). The shelter system is a resource for those in need, but is costly to NYC residents (Main, 2017b). The system's design makes it easy to qualify for shelter, as everyone who seeks shelter is found eligible and provided a temporary shelter assignment. However, the housing market makes it difficult to emerge from the system (Lemma, 2017). In some cases, shelter stays can last for a few months, as expected, or a few years.

Most shelters reflect one of two models—rapid rehousing or housing first. The rapid rehousing model focuses on quickly rehousing individuals or families who experience episodic homelessness (Byrne et al., 2016). Rapid rehousing focuses on including participants in the housing process as long as their time spent homeless is not chronic and the frequency of their homelessness episodes is low (Byrne et al., 2016). The housing first model is a recovery-oriented approach that focuses on quickly moving people into permanent housing and providing aftercare services (Padgett, Hewood, & Tsembecis, 2016). This model's goal is to help homeless people create better options for themselves and to help them develop plans for exiting shelter (Bornstein, 2014). All NYC shelters use the housing first model to assist client engagement and develop goals toward housing.

Shelters in NYC follow the housing first model, which prioritizes long-term stayers as the cost of their shelter stays is higher (Bornstein, 2014). The housing first model focuses on establishing safe and permanent housing as the first priority for those experiencing homelessness (Padgett et al., 2016). Social services staff use the housing

first model by identifying homeless clients' needs and helping them determine how to move forward (Stefancic & Tsemberis, 2007). While in shelter, shelter staff are expected to engage new clients biweekly. However, long-term stayers are prioritized, and their engagement with social service staff is increased from biweekly to weekly (NYC DHS, 2019b).

Single, adult shelter services, the focus of this study, is a relatively small part of the NYC shelter system compared to the other shelter divisions. The single shelter division makes up 28% of the NYC homeless system (Goldfischer, 2018). Housing resources are limited or harder to obtain, making it more challenging to serve this population (Otokiti & Alabi, 2018). There are no major housing subsidy programs to help this population exit into stable housing (Fleck, 2012). The primary focus of NYC shelter social services is to assist all who apply with resources to assist with obtaining permanent housing (Ha et al., 2015).

The average cost of shelter for a single adult in the NYC system is $117 per night (Main, 2017b). The annual cost on the single side of the shelter to temporarily house each resident is approximately $40,000 (Main, 2017b). These costs place a strain on NYC taxpayers as the city relies on taxpayer money to fund the services provided by homeless shelters (Goodman, Messeri, & O'Flaherty, 2016).

NYC DHS had a $2,000,000,000 budget for homeless services in 2018, which represented an increase of $172,000,000 compared to the previous administration in 2016 (Clark, 2019). The New York City Office of Management and Budget reported that this increase in the city's budget would assist with maintaining homeless services, shelter

operations, and other necessities (Main, 2017b). The NYC DHS supported this increase in shelter costs by stating that it supports a new service delivery (Lemma, 2017).

New York City's Shelter System

NYC is a sanctuary city, meaning that all individuals who seek shelter are eligible to receive it (Su, 2011), which has resulted in increased shelter intake numbers across the board (Ha et al., 2015). More people are coming to NYC without permanent housing and seeking shelter services with the hope of receiving assistance (Goldfischer, 2018). Being a sanctuary city can contribute to overcrowding in the shelter system as undocumented residents flee to NYC for a new life (Wusinich, Bond, Nathanson, & Padgett, 2019). However, it also has a positive approach to tackling homelessness as it requires a person to go into a shelter and seek services to restabilize and return to the community (Parsell, 2018).

Temporary shelter in NYC is designed to assist those in need with tangible services that will lead to independent living (Lemma, 2017). Social services are offered onsite and include biopsychosocial assessment, mental health, social work, and case management that can assist with obtaining permanent housing (Main, 2017a). Single adults apply for intake into a shelter at the assessment location and are transferred to an official general shelter (NYC DHS, 2019b). If clients need mental health or drug abuse assistance, they are transferred to a Mental Illness and Chemical Abuse shelter (NYC DHS, 2019b). All placements are assigned by NYC DHS.

The NYC DHS was established in 1993 to assist New Yorkers with overcoming homelessness (Kim, 2015). NYC DHS provides a timeline of 6 months to every person

who enters shelter to participate in the process and take strides toward independent living (NYC DHS, 2018). After the 6-month mark, a person or family is considered a long-term stayer (NYC DHS, 2018). The social services department is expected to increase engagement from biweekly to weekly with the goal of ensuring independent living (NYC DHS, 2018).

Structure of NYC's shelter system. The shelter system in NYC has three divisions: single adult shelter, families with children, and adult families (NYC DHS, 2018). Each division has different criteria for the intake process. Single adult shelter was the present study's primary focus. The single adult division of shelter in NYC is experiencing a growth in millennials seeking shelter services (Main, 2017b). Every night an average of 500 or more people are received at a shelter assessment or drop-in centers throughout the city (NYC DHS, 2018).

The NYC DHS (2019a) considers a single adult as any person over age 18 years who seeks shelter independently without being accompanied by other persons. There is no application process, and a bed is provided the same day of intake. Once arrived, people are given a temporary placement for 30 days while they await a long-term shelter placement.

People who enter NYC shelters have options toward permanent housing that include supportive housing (formerly known as the single-room occupancy program), room rentals, and independent living options (Livingstone & Herman, 2017). Supportive housing refers to a collaborative dynamic of affordable housing. The support services are provided on site to help individuals strengthen their independent living skills with the

goal of transitioning to permanent housing (Livingstone & Herman, 2017). Supportive housing options include single-site residency as well as scattered-site residency (Livingstone & Herman, 2017). Some people exit shelter within the time frame by using resources provided by the city. Residents in the shelter are able to seek housing from the first day of shelter stay. Room rentals are not provided by the city but are offered as a housing option through private homeowners. In addition to the city resources, clients have the opportunity to move out of shelter independently by saving income and finding suitable housing. This option is frequently promoted to clients who are employed and financially stable.

Each housing subsidy or voucher has eligibility criteria. The timeframe in shelter to be eligible for a voucher is 90 days, which is half of the expected time allowed for shelter stay. All persons residing in a shelter are expected to apply for the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) option, also known as "the projects," where residents are provided a rent-subsidized apartment in buildings or private homes through the NYCHA-administered Section 8 leased housing program (Campuzano, Gonzalez, & Gomez, 2018). To obtain a city housing assistance voucher, a resident is expected to have been in the current shelter for at least 90 days and/or be deemed chronically homeless (Lemma, 2017).

Responsibilities of shelter clients. When clients enter the shelter, they are expected to follow a set of basic rules that govern their safety while in the shelter (Goldfischer, 2018). Following a set of rules, known as the code of conduct, promotes the safety of everyone in the shelter (Lemma, 2017). Shelter rules are designed to prohibit

behavior that would put clients and staff at risk (Dreyer, 2018). Failure to adhere to the rules can result in the loss or temporary discontinuance of access to shelter services. Some of the rules shelter clients are to follow include attending scheduled Independent Living Plan (ILP) appointments, housing search requirements, following facility rules concerning health and safety, and maintaining income saving requirements (NYC DHS, 2018). Shelters are typically dormitory style. Clients enter the building through a metal detector and are assigned a bed by number. If clients are late or miss curfew, they run the risk of not being able to return to their bed assignment and are reassigned a new bed. It is the expectation that every resident leaves the shelter by 9 a.m. daily and returns by 9 p.m.

All clients are required to actively participate in shelter services and take the necessary steps toward reunification back into the community through independent living (Lemma, 2017). All clients are assigned a case manager and a social worker when entering the shelter (Brown et al., 2017). The shelter staff work with clients to establish a plan to deal with hardships while in shelter by completing an assessment of needs and well as a history of trauma (Main, 2017a). Clients are expected to work closely with their caseworkers to be prepared to accept the first suitable housing (Lemma, 2017). Clients are responsible for developing, completing, and carrying out an ILP as well as applying for and maintaining an active public assistance (PA) case (NYC DHS, 2019b). PA benefits assist clients with the cost of their shelter stay and make them eligible for any available city housing vouchers (NYC DHS, 2019b).

Shelter facility standards are monitored by the Coalition for the Homeless (2017) to ensure that shelters are safe and livable. The Coalition for the Homeless also assists

with the Client Responsibility Unit, which is responsible for ensuring that clients follow shelter rules. If shelter rules are not followed or if the shelter process not complied with, a client runs the risk of being evicted from the shelter. The client can be sanctioned from shelter for a period of 30 to 90 days as determined by the unit for not complying with shelter rules and services (Coalition for the Homeless, 2017).

Factors Contributing to Homelessness in New York City

Although the present study's focus was not on the factors that contribute to homelessness, it is worthwhile to review some of them as areas of concern. There is no one criterion that can lead to temporary shelter stay as there are many factors that can contribute to homelessness in NYC (Main, 2017b).

Low incomes. Unable to manage with low income, the average New Yorker struggles to survive in NYC (Ginsberg & Beaumont, 2017). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that U.S. households spend up to 26% of pretax income on housing costs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The cost of living in NYC is at least 68.8% higher than the national average (Fields, 2015). The Metropolitan Council on Housing has called for a rent freeze in NYC as the need for affordable housing is one reason why the city continues to struggle with homelessness (Fields, 2015).

Low-wage jobs not matching education levels. The millennial generation is the largest generation in the workforce today. However, their salaries are disproportionately low compared to the national average and previous generations (Martin, 2018). Low wages, combined with educational debt incurred by some, could cause additional financial hardships and prevent millennials from independent living in NYC. Sluggish

salaries can stunt millennials' lifetime earning power and delay their being able to reach the same or a better standard of living as their parents (Trees, 2015). The average salary for a millennial is $35,592 a year, as reported by Martin (2018). With lower salaries, millennials may delay obtaining independent living arrangements and opt to stay at home with parents longer or seek housing in shelters as they become unable to rent their own living spaces in NYC.

Lack of affordable housing and high rental costs. The high cost of rent may be one of the leading causes of increased homeless shelter intake (Ginsberg & Beaumont, 2017). With many people unable to spend half of their income on rent, the housing crisis can contribute to additional life stressors that make it difficult to escape homeless shelters (Greer, Shinn, Kwon, & Zuiderveen, 2016). The lack of affordable housing in NYC contributes to the increased need for shelter stay among millennials (Meltzer & Schwartz, 2016).

In an attempt to curb the issue of high rental costs, the NYC Department of Housing Preservation offers rent-stabilized apartments for households by evaluating income levels and size (Schwartz, 2019). The rent amount is calculated by area median income established by the federal government outlining that a person must make one-third or less of the median income to be eligible (Fields, 2015). Rent must reflect only small increases over the years (Pastor, Carter, & Abood, 2018).

The cost of living in NYC is reported to be the highest in the United States (Meltzer & Schwartz, 2016). Available space for housing options has been declining in the city (Goldstein, Dowdall, & Weidig, 2017). The average rent for a two-bedroom

apartment is $1,850 in the New York metro area, and a two-bedroom apartment in the borough of Manhattan starts at $3,895, as reported by the U.S. HUD (McFarland, 2019).

College loan debt and financial instability. College can lead to significant student loan debt (Essid, 2015). Although there are many factors that can lead to homelessness among millennials, college loan debt and financial instability are among them. On average, millennials who go to college have an approximate student loan debt of $42,000 (Au-Yong-Oliveira, Gonçalves, Martins, & Branco, 2018). College loan debt is one aspect of the financial insecurities that have come to define this population. In addition, credit card companies prey on college students by offering giveaways to get them to apply for credit cards. However, students often know little about managing their credit, which can lead to high levels of debt (Tomaszczyk & Worth, 2018).

Millennials and the job market. Millennials are struggling in the current job market as is evidenced by their taking low-end jobs or jobs outside of their educational field or trade industry (Sherber, 2018). The number of jobs for 25- to 34-year-olds dropped by 71% in 2014, the same year that the number of young adults moving out of their parent's homes peaked (Johnson, Middleton, Quinney, Conolly, & Finn, 2018). Millennials have been unsuccessful in catching up to achieving traditional goals despite being the most college-educated generation (Stewart et al., 2017).

There are many challenges among this generation in the job market (DeVaney, 2015). Employers on average do not always require a degree, but in most cases require a specific skill (Metraux, Fargo, Eng, & Culhane, 2018). Despite having a college education, many millennials may have a hard time finding work because they have the

education but may not have the required skill. Although the application process has transitioned into being more technology friendly and convenient, the recruiting process is still a difficult undertaking. Those who did not have the opportunity to go to college are usually overlooked when seeking employment (Stewart et al., 2017). With all of these obstacles, a millennial job seeker may find it difficult to secure employment that pays a wage that will allow them to live independently.

Millennials and mental health. Mental health among the millennial generation may also contribute to delayed adulthood development and their risk of homelessness. Mental health concerns are on the rise in the millennial generation (Whitley, 2017). Although mental health issues are known among the homeless adult population, millennials' use of the Internet and social media on a daily basis can lead to mental health concerns (DeVaney, 2015). Millennials are believed to be dependent on technology and have many hardships associated with becoming an adult in a social media-driven world (DeVaney, 2015). Social media often prevents socialization because of a lack of face-to-face interaction, increased insecurity, disconnection, and low self-esteem (Stewart et al., 2017). Millennials find themselves on social media constantly and comparing themselves to one another (Bassett, Dickerson, Jordan, & Smith, 2016). The millennial generation feels smothered by pressures from society based on what they are observing in the lives of others on social media (Kilkenny, 2012).

Millennials are reported to have depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide at higher levels than past generations (Bassett et al., 2016). This demographic appears to be similar to the national norm, where approximately 1 in 5 millennials report having

depression by age 24 years as a result of seeking a level of perfectionism and pressures of social media (Bassett et al., 2016). The millennial generation's rate of depression is up 47% from 2009 due to life stressors, college experience, and excessive social media use (Vasquez, 2019). The stressors of life can influence mental health and the inability to cope with day-to-day activities. Additionally, struggling with mental health can impact a person's ability to cope with family and community, which could also result in leaving home and seeking temporary shelter (Dennison, 2016).

Millennials and drug abuse. There is a connection between millennial drug use and long-term shelter stay (Otokiti & Alabi, 2018). The culture of shelter in NYC enables drug use as there are no policies or procedures against usage (NYC DHS, 2018). Active drug use is known in shelters, but little engagement is enforced by social services to assist with rehabilitation (Otokiti & Alabi, 2018). Within shelters, testing is not a criterion for eligibility; therefore, limited accountability is used during the assessment process (NYC DHS, 2018). During the social service assessment process, if drug use is reported by the client, the case manager will work with the client to seek external services on a voluntary basis (NYC DHS, 2018). If a client refuses rehabilitation services, this does not impede his or her ability to seek housing options in the city (NYC DHS, 2018). Resources such as supportive housing provided by the city for active drug use and clients with a history of drug use is available, but treatment is not mandatory for shelter exit success (NYC DHS, 2018).

Drug use has been reported as one of the most common factors leading to homelessness (Asgary et al., 2015). Drug abuse, combined with mental health issues and

financial instability, can overwhelm the developing millennial adult and result in housing instability (Whitley, 2017). The average young adult is aware of all of the risks connected to drug use and drinking but typically still engages in both behaviors recreationally, not believing these activities will impact his or her future (Skeldon, 2018). Millennials may be using drugs as a tool to self-medicate to overcome life (Wall et al, 2018). The Coalition for the Homeless (2017) reported that substance abuse can contribute to homelessness as many people begin abusing alcohol or drugs after losing their housing.

Summary

The crisis of homelessness is nothing new, nor is the idea of generational struggles a new trend. Each generation has a legacy that promotes an understanding of why they live the way they do. There are social barriers that have influenced each generation such as the housing market, financial stability, mental health, and drug use. Despite efforts made by the city to address homelessness, it continues to be a problem. The change of focus to the examination of the experience of the long-term stayer can be beneficial to understanding how to reverse the trends for future generations. The millennial generation experience needs to be explored as it contributes to the shift in society. Living in NYC is expensive, as is the cost to house a person in a shelter temporarily. Single millennials are staying in shelters longer than the allotted time mandated by the city, which is causing an increase in the budgetary consideration of shelters. Despite being the most educated generation to date, the millennial generation struggles to maintain daily living skills and achieve traditional life goals. There are many contributing factors to shelter stay and that can prevent a millennial from completing

shelter stay. I examined the shelter system in NYC, the millennial generation, and the changes that have occurred when the two collide. Examining the experiences of millennials in shelters past the allotted time would be a step forward.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodology I used to examine the lived experiences of long-term stay millennials residing in a single adult shelter in NYC. I provide an outline of the procedures that I used to carry out this study. Theoretical concepts used to support the design are included in the outline details. Also, I illustrate issues related to study validity. To conclude, I report the ethical procedures that I used to conduct this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this multiple case study, I explored the experiences of four long-term-stay, millennial shelter residents to understand how they explain and interpret their extended stay in NYC shelters. My goal was to answer questions about their shelter experiences of residing in shelter more than 6 months and why they are still in the shelter for an extended period of time. In this chapter, I describe the qualitative, case study method I used to understand the participants' experiences. I also explain the participant recruitment methods and data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, I discuss all ethical procedures as they related to my role as the researcher and the protection and confidentiality of all participants' rights.

Research Questions

The two research questions developed for the study include a question about the experiences of millennials during their staying long-term in shelters and a question that explores the participants' perceptions related to the theoretical framework of emerging adulthood used in the study. They are

RQ1: What are the experiences of single millennials staying long term in NYC homeless shelters?

RQ2: How do millennial, long-term shelter stay adults describe their adulthood and perceive their future after their shelter stay?

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted a qualitative, multiple case study of four millennials who were long-term residents in NYC homeless shelters. Other approaches I considered for this study

were ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnography is typically used to examine culture and people from a systematic approach (Maxwell, 2012). Ethnography entails extensive exploration of the culture and the behaviors of the participants in a certain social situation (Maxwell, 2012). This design did not apply to this study as the focus was not on the participants' behaviors but rather on their experiences of residing in a shelter beyond the time allowed. Phenomenology is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). This approach appeared to be appropriate for this study; however, the study focus was on the experience as opposed to how people experience and comprehend a certain phenomenon (Maxwell, 2012). I did not choose phenomenology because I wanted to hear the whole story, not the specific phenomena. Case study was selected as the best fit to answer the research questions and to be able to explore the participants' experiences in their own words.

I did not choose quantitative research because such research is objective. Quantitative studies are best used for exploring or explaining relationships and events (Patton, 2015). Quantitative researchers ask "how many" or "how much" by collecting numerical data (Patton, 2015). Quantitative research would not be suitable for the study because I need rich, thick data for analysis of the experiences of the participants.

According to Yin (2013), a case study can be used to describe an event as well as to explore experiences. I chose a multiple case study as an approach to explore cases of homeless millennials and their experiences in shelters past the allotted time. I wanted to get the whole story from the participants to determine whether they may have had unique experiences that I would want to explore. The multiple case study approach allowed me

to gain insight into the experiences directly from the participants. I chose an explanatory case study method as opposed to exploratory because exploratory-type case studies are traditionally used for theory building (Baškarada, 2014). The exploratory case study method is used to explore situations where there are no clear outcomes (Baškarada, 2014). I interviewed four individuals who shared their experiences as millennials in a shelter and any barriers preventing them from exiting shelter within the 6-month timeframe. I also invited them to share significant artifacts such as documents, reports, letters, photos, or items that were significant to their experiences. Through this approach, I gathered information from the participants and gained an understanding of the background context from the interview question responses and the participant experiences.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, it was important that I clarified my relationship to the topic of study and my potential bias. At the time of this study, I was employed in the NYC shelter system's family division. This study involved participants from the single adult division. This division was not the location where I was working, but I had worked in the single adult division of homeless services earlier in my career. My current job function is program director. I oversee the overall day-to-day function and provide oversight of the shelter, including facility maintenance and social services. None of the participants in this study were current or former clients of mine, and all participants had the option to participate or not. There was no connection between the participants' shelter residency and the study. No one at the shelter knew who was chosen to participate in the study.

Furthermore, I work with 37 families with children and their social service workers to assist with being able to address the social, economic, and emotional wellbeing of the family. I have firsthand experience with both divisions of shelter services and have worked with certain stakeholders to ensure service delivery. I have not experienced homelessness myself, but I am passionate about the population and how to help them move beyond shelter to obtain and maintain stable living arrangements. I was aware of my career experiences such as direct service with clients deemed long-term stayers as well as management roles in shelter services and contained these experiences as necessary.

For this study, I used bracketing by identifying my previous experience, attitudes, and beliefs related to the study topic to limit my influence on data collection and analysis. I took notes during the interview process to assist with collecting and analyzing data. I noted my preconceived ideas about the topic in my researcher journal. I did a self-awareness check during data analysis and interpretation by asking my committee members to review the data and my analysis to ensure bias did not enter into the analysis. Member checking in qualitative research helps to improve study accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability (Yanow & Schwartz, 2006). Using member checking in the current study helped me to develop a list of what I needed to avoid or set aside to help prevent my personal biases from influencing data gathering and analysis.

Methodology

The population for this study was single millennials residing in NYC shelters. The participants were a purposeful sample of four 25- to 34-year-old adults who were in a

shelter for 180 days or more and considered to be long-term stayers. To recruit study participants, I posted flyers in public areas in front of shelters or in the surrounding neighborhoods. The flyers included information about the study, eligibility criteria, and my telephone number and email address.

Criteria for Sample Participants

Candidates were between 25 and 34 years of age, currently residing in a shelter for at least 180 days, and without children/dependents. Candidates in a shelter for 180 days or more are considered to be long-term stayers (NYC DHS, 2018). Candidates were in a shelter on a voluntary status. Voluntary status can be defined as a person who came into a shelter of his or her own will while involuntary means he or she is mandated or required to reside in shelter due to external supervision (Shan & Sandler, 2016).

Candidates were U.S. citizens and English speaking. This reduced the scope by not including recent immigrants or refugees who entered the city/state illegally and without having permanent housing. There are approximately 123 single adult shelters in NYC. I conducted the interviews offsite at a NYC public library. The location was chosen to protect the participants' privacy and for convenience as it was close to their shelters. Conducting the interviews away from the shelters allowed the participants to speak freely without being overheard by other residents or staff.

Recruiting

After I received institutional review board (IRB) approval, I posted recruitment flyers outside of NYC shelters. The flyers included study eligibility criteria and contact information. Potential participants could call or email me about participating in the study.

When they responded to the flyers, I sent an email or called to tell them who I was and describe the purpose of the study. If they expressed interest in participating, I set a time to meet with them prior to the interview, to provide them a Metro Card for travel, and a copy of the informed consent form. I arranged all interviews via text message. During the text message dialogue, eligibility criteria were determined. When a participant was deemed eligible, the interview was scheduled. All interviews took place before shelter curfew of 9 p.m., during the day, at the library.

Gaining Consent

During the initial face-to-face interview, I obtained written consent and collected demographic information including the participant's age, gender, and educational background. The participant received a copy of all signed documentation. Participants had the right to withdraw consent and cease participation in the study at any point. I informed participants as a part of informed consent that I was legally obligated and had a duty to report any indication of their wanting to hurt themselves or others if any they made any statements indicating this. The interview consisted of the questions outlined in the interview protocol form (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through semistructured, face-to-face interviews using an interview protocol as a guide. I conducted interviews individually with participants who met the inclusion criteria for participation. The questions were open ended. I collected all data using two recording devices, with one serving as a backup. Interview questions were designed using the literature reviewed for this study and my

knowledge of shelter experiences. I tested them on shelter caseworkers as an expert panel for validity, language clarity, and to ensure that the participants could easily understand them.

Rapport is the main goal in the first few minutes of an interview (Yin, 2018); therefore, I started each interview by building rapport to help the participant feel comfortable sharing all of information that was asked. During the interviews, I collected some information about their experiences before coming to the shelter, leading up to their stay in the shelter and while being in the shelter. This gave me a better understanding of the participants' experiences. I focused the interview questions on their current shelter stay and how they planned to overcome and leave the system. I asked follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. I recorded the interviews using digital audio and had the digital files transcribed verbatim by Rev.com (https://www.rev.com/), a web-based transcription service. No identifying information was provided with the files.

Data Analysis

Coding is the primary process for developing themes of analytic interest in the data and labeling them accordingly (Glaser, 2014). I used thematic content analysis to analyze the interview data, and I coded manually. I started the coding process by reading each transcript in full to familiarize myself with the content, as suggested by Gubrium and Holstein (2009). This helped me gain a better sense of the participants' experiences. Following Glaser (2014), I organized each statement by noting repetitions of terms in the data in order to describe the content. To identify similarities and differences found in participant comments, I wrote the codes out and grouped them by themes following the

steps detailed by Saldaña (2016). I used Microsoft Word and a white board to organize the codes for a visual projection of the codes. I used alpha symbols to group patterns from the data collected and analyze commonality. Groups were safety (Δ), socialization (≠), systematic issues (Θ), trauma (□), criminal justice (¤), and education (+). The themes emerged from these six groups. I consolidated the themes to ensure they were unique and did not overlap.

Ethical Considerations to Protect Participants

Walden University's IRB approved the research protocol for this study (IRB approval No. 11-08-19-0601534). Before each interview, I read and reviewed the informed consent form with the participants to ensure they understood it. I encouraged them to ask questions if they so chose. Each participant could decide whether he or she wanted to participate. There was no known potential for harm for the participants throughout the course of this study. If at any time participants experienced harm or voiced the desire to do harm to self or others, I advised them that I would provide a list of referral services to them. At the time of this study, I was a mandated reporter in my professional role as a shelter director. The study participants were made aware of this when I obtained informed consent. I considered all possible participant risks, including pregnancy, physical disability, substance abuse, and/or mental health and determined that all risks were minimal. I informed all participants that although I had no intention to do harm, sharing experiences can bring back painful emotional feelings. I kept all notes, transcripts, files, and audiotapes in a locked box in my home during the course of this study, and I am the only person with access to these materials. I used pseudonyms to

protect the identities of the clients. I will keep the audio recordings, interview notes, transcripts, and field notes for 5 years and then destroy them.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Researchers must ensure their findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. I took the following steps to ensure that the findings in this study reflected all elements of trustworthiness.

Credibility

In this study, I established credibility through data triangulation as I gathered data from four study participants. Participants shared their experiences in their own words, which enhanced the credibility of the data. They were encouraged to be candid with their responses. Member checking was conducted at the end of each interview by summarizing the information and then asking the participant if everything was correct. At that time, the participants were able to clarify, omit, or add to their responses before the interview ended.

Transferability

I ensured study transferability, or the process of applying the results of research in one situation to other similar situations (Boejie, 2002), by using a selective sampling method that required relying on my own judgment when choosing study participants. I also used rich and thick text descriptions to enhance transferability. These rich data and their subsequent representation in text helped to reveal the complexities and richness of the study, as per Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2006). To obtain the desired thick

descriptions, I included context from field notes and examples of quotations from the participants. I used open-ended questions to achieve elicit detailed answers. Transferability was enhanced by the variety of participants as well as the detailed contextual illustration. This gave readers the evidence that the study's findings could be applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations, as per Gubrium and Holstein (2009). I provided detailed examples of the questions used for data collection to help reflect the context of the study and to support transferability. Transferability is limited to the study sample, while reliability was assured by using an audio recorder to record the interviews and taking detailed notes.

Dependability

I ensured dependability of the study findings by being consistent in the methodology I used to gather, report, and analyze the data in this study, as per Baškarada (2014). I minimized ambiguities, errors, bias, and deficiencies (see Baxter & Jack, 2008) by establishing an audit trial to document the study process, and I documented every step of the process.

Confirmability

To reduce errors, I established a systematic protocol that can be repeated throughout the case study (see Baxter & Jack, 2008). Confirmability refers to the agreement to where results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I used two recording devices to ensure the accuracy of data collection and followed the interview protocol to confirm what questions were asked. I followed the same procedures for all of the interviews and for collecting all the data. I recorded any

artifacts reviewed and provided details that did not compromise the confidentiality of the participants.

I took notes after the interviews to document my feelings or thoughts. Through field notes, I was able to self-reflect throughout the study, making myself more aware of personal values and views (see Cope, 2014). This strategy helped to establish confirmability of the study findings coming directly from the participants and not be influenced by my input (see Cope, 2014). Confirmability was also established with member checking where the participant was able to confirm what was said during the interview at the end. I triangulated my interpretation with my committee chair and one expert in the field who was a faculty at Walden University.

Summary

My desired goal in conducting this multiple case study was to provide new information on the experiences of homeless millennials living in NYC shelters past the allotted shelter stay of 6 months to those who work in homeless services, including administrative and central office staff. In Chapter 3, I described the methodological procedures and data collection methods that were used to accomplish this goal. I reviewed the planned procedures for this study, including the criteria for selecting participants, the informed consent letter, the setup of interview sessions with those who responded, and the plan to conduct 60- to 90-min interview sessions. I discussed methods to ensure study trustworthiness. In Chapter 4, I discuss the study findings.

Chapter 4: Results

I conducted this study to explore the experiences of homeless millennials living in NYC shelters past the allotted shelter stay of 6 months. In this chapter, I discuss the study setting, any changes in the study conditions, participant demographics, the data collected during the study, changes in the research plan, analysis of the data collected, evidence of trustworthiness, and the study results.

Data were obtained from the perceptions, thoughts, and ideas of residents in three NYC homeless shelters. The research questions were the following:

RQ1: What are the experiences of single millennials staying long term in NYC homeless shelters?

RQ2: How do millennial, long-term shelter stay adults describe their adulthood and perceive their future after their shelter stay?

I conducted this study with four homeless adults—two males and two females—who were living in NYC homeless shelters. To provide background information on how they ended up in shelter, I asked all participants to discuss their experiences from 5 years prior to their shelter stay to the time of their interviews. I then asked them to provide detailed descriptions of their experiences while living in shelter and their perceptions of what prevents them from existing shelter stay. The participants were descriptive about their experiences. The research plan did not change. I reached the projected number of participants for this multiple case study.

Study Setting

I collected data for this study via face-to-face interviews from a sample of single millennials living in NYC shelters. I posted flyers near seven shelters, with a total of 150 flyers distributed. The participation criteria were that they had to be between 25 to 34 years of age and currently in a shelter for a minimum of 180 days. All interviews were held in the NYC Public Library, a location convenient for all participants as they all lived nearby.

Demographics

All participants were current residents of NYC shelters. The sample demographics are reported in aggregate to protect their identities. The participants ranged in age from 25 to 34 years. Three participants self-identified as Black, and one participant self-identified as Hispanic. One had completed the 11th grade, one completed high school, one had a GED, and one had some college-level education. All participants were residents in a single adult shelter with no dependents living with them. They all received some public assistance benefits such as cash assistance and food stamps or held minimum-wage jobs at the time of the study.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, I posted flyers outside of single adult homeless shelters in NYC. I planned to recruit four participants—two males and two females—and secured four participants. All participants had to be 25 to 34 years of age and living in an NYC shelter for a minimum of 180 days. Each participant responded to the recruitment flyer by texting the number on the flyer. Once potential participants responded to the

recruitment flyer, I arranged the interviews. I texted them back to set up the interview dates, times, and location. I obtained signed consent before the interviews commenced and advised all participants that they could stop the interview at any point and rescind their participation. The participants verbally confirmed their ages during the interview process. I conducted all interviews during the day, which gave the participants enough time to return to their shelters before curfew.

As previously stated, I interviewed each participant individually in a private room at a local library in November and December 2019. All interviews were digitally recorded and ranged from 45 min to 1 hour. I used Rev.com for transcription. After transcription, I manually reviewed and edited each document for corrections. I then transferred the transcripts into a Microsoft Word document.

I started each interview by introducing myself and the study purpose. By doing so, I built rapport with the participants and informed them that the interviews would be recorded. I also gathered demographic information on age, highest education level, and shelter stay length. I then asked the participants to describe their lives 5 years prior to entering the shelter. This provided some background on their lives before entering shelter, including how they got to the shelter. Some participants went back further than 5 years in their recollections, and I allowed them to speak freely. This information gave additional insights into the participants' experiences that may have contributed to their extended shelter stays.

To maintain rapport throughout the interviews, I used reflective listening and summarized the participants' responses. Reflective listening is the communication tool

used to seek understanding from the speaker's idea, then offering the idea back to the speaker to confirm the idea has been understood accurately (Arnold, 2014). When building rapport, reflective listening is essential for effective communication and promotes understanding between people (Arnold, 2014). These actions also helped the participants know I was listening and documenting correctly. The interviews were semistructured. I asked each participant the same questions but not necessarily in the same order.

During the interviews, I was conscious and mindful of my facial expressions. I was there solely to gather information on their experiences that led to being homeless and seeking shelter. The participants seemed eager to discuss their experiences and did not require much probing. However, I did use probing when statements were unclear or when I wanted to ensure the sequence of what they said. I collected rich and in-depth information through this process. While advised that they could do so if they wished, the participants did not bring any supporting documents such as letters, pictures, or documents to assist their descriptions.

Ethical Considerations

I followed the ethical protocol elements outlined in Chapter 3. Informed consent forms were reviewed and signed before data collection started. Before starting each interview, I reiterated that participation was voluntary, they could leave the study at any time, and they could ask questions before the interviews started. I informed all participants that their interviews would be recorded. Gift cards and Metro Cards were offered as tokens of appreciation before the interviews began. I stored all interview data

in a locked cabinet and all transcriptions and audio files in a password-protected electronic file. I will keep the interview data for a minimum of 5 years, after which I will shred all paper-based data and delete all recordings from the USB device.

Data Analysis

For this study, I used thematic content analysis, which allowed me to take different approaches to organize and categorize the data rather than a single method (see Mihas, 2019). I coded the data manually by identifying common topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that emerged from the data. I reviewed the data, broke down individual participants' statements into categories based on words of similar meaning in the content, and then coded the data.

I followed Saldaña's (2016) guidance on coding steps. I first coded the data into five categories based on content: similarities, differences, frequency, correspondence, and causation (see Saldaña, 2016). I used this sorting to better see the commonalities in the data. I then examined the categories for repeated key terms or words, and these became the codes. Using this process, I color coded each piece of data and used symbols to label the codes. I created a list of all codes created from the interviews and then regrouped the data. This resulted in six codes: safety, socialization, systematic issues, trauma, criminal justice, and education, which led to developing the themes and subthemes.

I then narrowed the analysis to group the codes into operational themes that reflected outcomes of the participants' experiences. For example, criminal background influenced employment, so it fell under the theme of employment. Thus, multiple codes were represented in the emerging themes. I reviewed the data iteratively throughout

analysis to refine and reflect on my experiences during the interview process and to examine how they might have informed theme development. I was mindful not to include my professional experience with the data collected. See Appendix C for the table of codes and statements that led to the emergent themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I took the following steps to maintain credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the information collected. The strategies reflected in these steps were detailed in Chapter 3.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of the data collected in this study, I performed member checking through the interview process and at the end of each interview. I used reflective paraphrasing of what each participant said and allowed them the opportunity to agree or correct me to get a verification of the accuracy. Each transcript was transcribed verbatim. All participants answered the same questions with minor probing. I used objectivity and reflexivity when conducting the interviews

I took notes during the interviews. This allowed me to verify that the information I obtained was correctly documented. When participants described their experiences before shelter, I wrote out the timelines and added key words using a Live Scribe smart pen and journal. This approach allowed me to simultaneously record and write notes, which I could review by touching the key words in the journal. To promote candid responses, all participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and would not impact their shelter stay.

I wrote reflective thoughts and feelings in a separate journal after each interview. I reviewed each interview by journaling my thoughts and emotions, reflected on their meaning, and examined what went well. This helped me to better understanding what was needed going forward. Journaling allowed me to make my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research as I used the reflective journal to assist the write-up of the research. As a part of debriefing, I reflected on what I noticed during the interviews, my bracketing steps, and what might I have done differently.

Transferability

To ensure transferability, I used purposive sampling, which is most effective when resources are limited, and gathered information-rich cases for this study. I enhanced transferability by using rich, thick descriptions from the participants. I provided detailed descriptions of the population and the sample.

Dependability

I used member checking throughout the interviews to maintain dependability by minimizing ambiguities, errors, bias, and deficiencies. I summarized the information verbally throughout each interview for clarity and accuracy. The participants could confirm, omit, or add to their responses before the conclusion of the interview. I documented each step of the process and shared this detail in my discussion of the findings.

Confirmability

The other three components of trustworthiness contributed to the confirmability of the study results. To further establish confirmability, I followed an interview protocol for every interview to ensure that I captured the participants' experiences with no influence from me. Member checking allowed me to establish confirmability of the study's findings from the participants directly and not to be influenced by my experiences or input. I discussed my interpretation of the data collected with my committee chair.

Results of Data Analysis

All of the study participants shared their experiences and reasons for entering shelter as well as their overall experiences limiting them from exiting shelter. I coded the interview transcripts and extracted themes from the codes. I identified five themes that reflected key factors study participants mentioned as barriers to exiting shelter. Each theme also had at least two related subthemes, as shown in Table 1. I discuss each theme after Table 1.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
Limited exposure to housing resources and information	Knowledge of eligibility criteria for housing resources and information
	Unaware of housing options
	Limited single-adult housing options
Difficulty finding employment or jobs with livable wage	Money/income/problems with public assistance
	Criminal background
	Inability to secure employment or obtain employment above minimum wage
	Insufficient education to find employment
	Education obtained and jobs available
Limited engagement with shelter staff	Engagement by shelter staff
	Decreased motivation toward goals
	Mental health/drug abuse
Poor socialization skills	Some family/friend support/no support system
	Limited interactions with friends and/or mentorships
Trauma	Foster care/adoption
	No authority or authoritative figure
	Foster care system/adoptive guardians
	Mental health/drug abuse

Theme 1: Limited Exposure to Housing Resources and Information

All study participants stated that they had limited exposure to housing resources and information. I combined limited housing resources and information into one theme because the participants reported that their shelter workers did not or could not provide information regarding the housing resources that they were eligible for when asked.

To recap, most of the participants felt that they were not provided housing information and resources. During the interviews, each participant indicated not being aware of housing resources by using phrases such as, “I am not sure” or “nobody told me

what my options are." One participant stated, "I am not sure what I am eligible for, I had a voucher once but it expired." Another participant stated, "I think I am eligible for something because I work, but nobody said anything to me." The lack of exposure to housing information was a barrier that contributed to them not being able to exit the shelter within the time allotted. All participants reported not knowing what their options were, which delayed their ability to exit shelter successfully.

Theme 2: Difficulty Finding Employment or Jobs With Livable Wage

With a constant struggle to survive in NYC, participants reported not earning a livable wage if they were employed. The participants who were working reported making minimum wage at $15/hour, which was not enough to sustain them in NYC. The participants referenced difficulties finding employment or jobs with livable wage throughout their interviews as reasons for their extended shelter stays. Some participants reported that they felt the system was designed to hold them back and that there were multiple loopholes preventing progression.

Several participants mentioned low wages as contributing to their inability to exit shelter as they were not able to secure affordable housing in NYC. One participant said,

> I work every day and make minimum wage, and still can't find affordable housing. I had a voucher, but the amount was $1,323 and I was responsible for $1,000. That was a lot. Not to mention I can't find an apartment but I want to stay in New York City.

Another participant said, "I am employed Monday to Friday, but I have to maintain a public assistance [PA] case, which could run the risk of me losing my job

because PA is not open on the weekend . . . then how will I get out of shelter?" This participant added, "I have to go back and apply to PA again so they can renew my voucher, but sometimes I don't have time because I work Monday through Friday."

Education was also identified as a barrier to finding employment. Some participants lacked the requisite education to secure employment; others had some college education but not enough to secure other than minimum-wage jobs. All participants indicated the need to return to school to be able to obtain a livable wage. One participant said, "I have a high school diploma, but finding a job is tough." This participant continued by saying, "the only jobs I can get are minimum wage jobs." Another participant mentioned having some college but not completing due to not being able to afford to continue school. The participant said,

> I went away to school but I did not finish. Since I've been in shelter, I want to go back to school to possibly get a better paying job, but the city won't help me with that.

In summary, all participants mentioned insufficient education as a hardship to finding suitable employment. Moreover, the participants expressed not being motivated or able to return to school to complete their education. Without education, the opportunities to obtain employment offering livable wages are limited.

Theme 3: Limited Engagement With Shelter Staff

Shelter staff are to help all residents seek and accept first suitable housing. They are equipped to work with residents to overcome any barriers to exiting shelter. Throughout the interviews, the study participants reported limited shelter staff

engagement and receiving no direction from staff on how to exit shelter as barriers to leaving shelter. One participant said,

> Nobody has the authority to run the staff except for the director, and it's like no matter who you go to, no one wants to help. Everybody has an excuse or come up with something, or go to this person . . . You go to that person, and they say, Go to this person.

Another participant said "I barely see my case manager because when I do she doesn't help me. She's very overworked."

While shelters have resources to assist with permanent housing, the study participants struggled with accessing information about eligibility, taking steps toward becoming eligible, and obtaining a housing voucher. Most of the participants were unclear on what their options would be. They indicated not feeling listened to by their case workers when engaged. They reported not being provided with resources such as employment-based vouchers and supportive housing options. One participant stated, "All my case manager is concerned about is updating my ILP [Independent Living Plan]. The housing specialist doesn't do much. I think they're overwhelmed."

The participants discussed not being frequently or consistently engaged by the social service department or provided housing resource information when answering the question "How would you describe your experience with your shelter worker?" One participant stated,

> My case manager is overworked. He doesn't listen to me. He just keeps repeating to me what's on the ILP . . . I've asked about housing resources, but my case

> manager never has any answers—He's only worried about me maintaining a PA case.

Two participants mentioned not having seeing a case manager or housing specialists in over a month due to high staff turnover. One participant stated, "One minute staff is there and the next minute they're gone." Another stated, "I usually have to go find someone to help me, they don't come find me. I just go to work and do my own thing."

Theme 4: Poor Socialization Skills

Lack of socialization with family and friends was a common theme among the participants. Without support from family and friends, participants described limited social interactions impacting their shelter experience. The participants' experience before the shelter varied as some came into the shelter because it was their only option. Some reported having no family or friend support, which was prolonging their ability to exit shelter. None reported being street homeless before entering the shelter. Participants reported house hopping between friends and family. One participant said,

> I was staying with my mother, then my sister – then things got hectic at my sister's so I left and that's how I ended up in shelter.

Another participant said, "I have never been street homeless, I just bounced around for a while." A few of the participants stated that they did not have family support or friends to help them exit shelter. One participant said, "I have friends, but not in New York. All my friends are in Connecticut or states that's close, but not that close." Another participant stated, "I speak to my mother and she knows I am in shelter, but she doesn't help me."

Theme 5: Trauma

Each participant reporting experiencing some sort of trauma before coming into shelter. One mentioned medical trauma, one referenced mental illness, and the others simply referred to past experiences. One participant stated, “After jail, I was diagnosed with bipolar, but I don’t believe them.” However, this participant further explained the desire of accessing supportive housing as a way out of shelter. One participant explained that a medical condition was the beginning of the downfall that eventually led to his shelter stay and causing hardship in shelter. Three participants said that they were raised in the adoptive/foster care system and left their homes to seek independence but ended up in shelters. They described negative experiences related to being raised in this system that contributed to their trauma. One participant stated, “I left my adoptive mother’s house around the age of 18 when I went for college. I went back after I was kicked out of school but couldn’t stay there.” This experience had a negative impact on the participant, as they reported being forced out of school and then unable to live at home.

The trauma participants reported happened before they entered shelter but was also a reason why they were still in shelter. One participant reported being diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder after being raped while in foster care and identified this as a contributing factor to being in shelter.

> I bounced from foster home to foster home because I was bad (chuckle). I was molested started at the age of 9 until I was 15. Then I started getting into trouble after that, fights, drugs, jail—that was my life until maybe the age of 22. I was

> diagnosed in jail with posttraumatic stress disorder . . . I keep asking my case manager if that will help me get housing. They never answer me.

To summarize, all study participants identified trauma as contributing to their difficulties in exiting shelter. Some participants reported mental health concerns, while others reported being raised in foster care systems and having a bad experience. Their experiences differed as they related to trauma. Some reported having the traumatic experience before entering shelter, while others reported having these experiences while in shelter and contributing to their inability to move forward.

Perceptions of Adulthood

At the conclusion of each interview, I asked the participant a series of questions that focused on the construct of emerging adulthood such as "Do you see yourself as 'full-fledged' adult?" "Do you see yourself as an independent adult?" "How do you see yourself as an independent adult?" and "How does it feel to be an emerging adult?" Both male participants described being an adult meaning that they were not dependent on another person. One participant said, "I am an adult, I don't depend on anyone." Another participant said, "I definitely see myself as an adult, I have been on my own since I was 18, nobody helps me." Both female participants stated that they were adults based on their ages but indicated the need to grow up or do more in life to be a "real adult." One participant said, "Age wise, yes I am an adult – but I definitely have some growing up to do." Because of no support from family or friends, all participants viewed adulthood as the ability to survive without additional assistance, not including public assistance or shelter assistance. One participant said,

> My mother knows I am in shelter, but she can't help me. There's no space for her at her place so I just do my own thing.

However, the women focused on becoming more mentally and physically stable to be successful in life. When asked questions regarding the construct of being an emerging adult, one participant said,

> I wouldn't say that we're delaying it. I would say everybody has their, I guess, own idea of emerging adulthood, like those things like marriage and stuff is not for everybody. Some people didn't even go to college . . . Some people say college . . . "I'm done after high school. I'm not going to no more school." I do want to have kids and get married one day, but I want stability first.

The participants connected their independence to limited or no family/friend support and then to their definition of being an adult. They did not have any insights on their future after shelter. They spoke to finding a way to exit shelter by using a housing voucher. However, they offered no detailed plans of action once housing was secured.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the results of the research conducted on the extended stay of homeless millennial adults currently residing in NYC shelters. I detailed the study setting, the participant demographics, data collection and analysis methods, evidence of trustworthiness, and the analysis results, including the identified themes and subthemes. The themes I discovered through the coding process provided insights for analysis. These themes included social services engagement, housing resources and information, family/friend support, and employment/livable wages. Other topics that were discussed

throughout the interviews but that did not fit into larger categories were education, medical/mental health issues, and parental inadequacies. The subthemes included eligibility criteria for housing, housing resources and information, some or no family/friend support, decreased motivation toward goals, not earning viable wages, lacking viable housing options, affordable housing, criminal background, substance abuse/mental health, and foster care/adoption. I discussed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I answered the research questions by summarizing the results of the data collected.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the key findings as they relate to the literature I reviewed for this study. This discussion is followed by sections on the study limitations, recommendations, and implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

I conducted this qualitative, multiple case study to better understand the experiences of single, millennial adults 25 to 34 years of age that may contribute to their staying in shelters longer than the allowed stay. I explored their experiences before and while in shelter as well as what they believe contributed to their extended shelter stay. I was motivated to conduct this study due to a gap in the body of knowledge on why millennial, single adults are staying in shelter past their allotted times. I was also motivated by my experiences working in a homeless shelter in NYC. In this chapter, I review the study purpose and present a detailed discussion of the themes I identified during data analysis. I also discuss study limitations and recommendations for practice and further research. I conclude with implications for social change.

Although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, extended stay among homeless millennials is a growing issue in NYC (Greer et al., 2016). Extended stays among this population strains the city's resources and can delay stability (Main, 2017a). From the experiences shared by the four homeless adults I interviewed for this study, I identified five themes that reflected barriers to leaving shelter: (a) limited exposure to housing resources and information, (b) difficulty finding employment or jobs with livable wage, (c) limited engagement with shelter staff, (d) poor socialization skills, and (d) trauma. Through their comments, I determined that, overall, they are in the shelter because shelter staff are not engaging with them as required, they were provided limited housing information, and they were unable to secure employment or find jobs with livable wages.

In addition, all participants provided their views on being a "full-fledged" adult or their emerging adulthood. Two participants considered themselves to be full-fledged adults despite their current circumstances. The other two participants said that they were still emerging into adulthood and had some growing up to do. All participants were able to describe how they saw themselves as adults and how this has contributed to their perceptions of their shelter experience.

Interpretation of the Findings

Six themes emerged from analyzing the data gathered through interviews with the four study participants. They spoke about their experiences before coming to shelter and while living in shelter that contributed to their extended shelter stays. I next discuss each theme and how they connect to the extant literature.

Theme 1: Limited Exposure to Housing Resources and Information

All study participants reported not being exposed to housing resources and information that might help them exit shelter. The participants also mentioned how the housing resources they were aware of did not match the cost of living in NYC. All participants stated that they struggled with exiting shelter due to the lack of affordable housing.

This finding is similar to those of Otokiti and Alabi (2018), who determined that the single adult shelter population has difficulty finding housing resources. Otokiti and Alabi also highlighted disproportionate increases in rent as a factor in extended shelter stay, as rent has increased significantly over the years in New York City. For those in shelter, this means longer shelter stay or considering housing options outside of New

York City. Clark (2019) stated that the cost of living varies by neighborhood. However, rent for a one-bedroom apartment can range from $2,200 to $3,000 a month in New York City. Vouchers for single homeless adults are awarded as low as $1,323 for a studio or one-bedroom (NYC DHS, 2019b). NYC DHS vouchers do not allow flexibility in the rental price, nor do they allow under-the-table deals (NYC DHS, 2019b). The voucher awarded to each resident does not permit rent sharing, and the rental rate must include utilities (NYC DHS, 2019b). However, a resident can explore sharing an apartment with another resident as an exit strategy by saving employment income and seeking rent options independently (NYC DHS, 2019b). No participant in the present study reported wanting a share an apartment, but they were seeking independent living such as a one-bedroom apartment; however, the awarded vouchers could not assist with that goal.

Overall, the core conclusion that can be drawn from Theme 1 is that the study participants found it hard to exit shelter due to housing resources not matching the cost of living in NYC. They were also not aware of resources to help them successfully exit. Therefore, participants were staying in shelter longer than the allotted timeframe.

Theme 2: Difficulty Finding Employment or Jobs With Livable Wages

NYC DHS requires shelter residents to secure employment as it has been determined that shelter residents would be able to move out of shelter with adequate employment. The present study's participants were either unemployed or employed at minimum wage. The participants who had employment reported having a hard time finding affordable housing options in NYC. Those with less than a high school diploma reported not being able to find suitable employment.

Staying in NYC puts a strain on the city's resources and limits the number of affordable housing options. It also promotes increased shelter use (Clark, 2019). Clark's (2019) study was similar to the current study as Clark determined that a lack of affordable housing options in NYC was leading to shelter use. There is limited space for housing in NYC (Goldstein et al., 2017). Clark further concluded that space for developing more affordable housing options is limited throughout the city. The current study's participants were aware of this hardship but chose to stay in NYC. The participants were either from New York State or NYC; however, some participants relocated to NYC to follow their dream and were willing to stay in the shelter until that dream was attained. None of the participants interviewed were immigrants.

This finding also reflects research by Young (2016) and Ginsberg and Beaumont (2017), who stated that the most common issue among homeless New Yorkers is affordable housing options, which contributes to extended shelter stay. Young stated that affordable living in NYC impacts all New Yorkers, but particularly those trying to exit shelter. The options for affordable housing to match income are limited throughout the city. The present study's participants were not open to seeking housing options outside of NYC. This was a new discovery, as some shelter clients are willing to take any housing options, whether in the city or outside of it, to exit the shelter (Myers, 2016). This was not the case for the present study's participants. This may be a new trend among homeless millennials in New York City shelter system.

Martin (2018) stated that millennials are delaying their independence and are handicapped by lower wages. Theme 2 suggested that the study participants are unable to

secure employment paying a livable wage, which is a barrier to their exiting shelter. Trees (2015) stated that sluggish salaries obtained by working millennials can stunt their lifetime earning power, which can delay the goal of living independently. Throughout the interviews conducted for the present study, low income was a common factor in not being able to afford to live in NYC. The minimum salary to live in New York City for a single person is roughly $40,000 per year (Semenova & Paget, 2018). However, the present study's participants reported making minimum wage of $15/hour, or approximately $31,200 per year. Education contributed to the ability to obtain higher income wages, reflecting similar findings by McDonald (2015). In addition, two participants reported being "work exempt," meaning not being tasked to look or find employment while in shelter, by NYC Human Resources Administration but not receiving income benefits such as supplemental security income or social security disability, therefore delaying their ability to exit shelter.

In conjunction with Theme 2, insufficient education was common among all participants. Not having an education above a high school diploma limited the opportunity to secure employment paying more than minimum wage. This finding is supported by Trees (2015), who stated that millennial job seekers struggle to secure employment that paid enough so they could live independently. Sherber (2018) stated that millennials were the highest educated generation to date; however, this was not the case among the present study's participants. With their limited education, they were unable to secure employment, which contributed to their extended shelter stay. Metraux et al. (2018) stated that some employers do not require a degree but do require a trade or

skill. However, the present study's participants did not report having skills that could help them obtain employment. None had completed undergraduate studies or training in a trade. This finding was not supported by extant research such as Sherber's reporting that millennials had higher levels of education and were equipped to tackle the job market. Low-paying jobs or the inability to obtain employment make it harder to afford rent in NYC, therefore extending shelter stay until adequate income can be attained.

Theme 3: Limited Engagement With Shelter Staff

All participants were long-term stayers in NYC shelters and were expected to engage with shelter staff weekly as per NYC DHS (2019b) requirements. Shelter staff are expected to engage residents as outlined to help address barriers to exiting shelter. Housing options should be discussed at these meetings (NYC DHS, 2019b). The participants reported not engaging with social service staff weekly and in some cases had not seen a case manager in over a month. There was no supporting research from NYC DHS indicating what needs to be done when there is limited social service shelter staff engagement. This is a shortfall of the shelter staff as client engagement promotes successful shelter exit.

Theme 3 relates to the research conducted by Yoonsook et al. (2018), who found that limited engagement with social service staff was a barrier to millennials exiting shelter. The present study's participants identified limited social services engagement as a key issue in why they were unable to exit shelter. They felt that if they were engaged more, they would be able to get more done.

The finding of limited shelter staff engagement is also confirmed by Shan and Shandler (2016), who found that inadequate staffing patterns can result in high caseloads for case management staff and contribute to their inability to promote successful shelter exit. Theme 4 also confirmed findings from Ha et al. (2015) that the shelter system would benefit from increasing staffing patterns across all providers so that shelter residents have more opportunities to work with their caseworkers on plans for successful shelter exit.

Theme 4: Poor Socialization Skills

Participants in this study reported having limited social network or support systems. They all reported having no family involvement or limited family involvement since entering shelter. One participant stated, "I speak to mom, we cool," but could not live at home. Some participants stated that they had contact with their family or foster family but that their families were not aware that they were in shelter. Another participant stated that he does socialize with friends, but they do not know he is living in a shelter. This made it hard to build and maintain social relationships and support, as the participant had to return to shelter by curfew. The finding of poor skills for socialization among homeless single adults in shelter reflects findings by Helfrich (2007), who suggested interventions for this population to help them develop the life skills needed to maintain residential stability after exiting shelter.

Theme 5: Trauma

All the participants mentioned some form of trauma, including being adopted and raised by foster parents, drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and medical concerns in their past that contributed to them entering shelter. They also explained that

their past trauma was a factor in their still being in a shelter. There is research to support mental health concerns and drug abuse in the millennial cohort. Whitley (2017) stated that mental health issues among millennials were on the rise and that they run the risk of delayed adulthood. In the present study, mental health issues and drug abuse were not contributing factors to extended shelter stay among millennial participants. The participants did not report heavy drug use but did report recreational use of marijuana on occasions. Millennials are aware of the risk of drug use but typically will engage recreationally (Skeldon, 2018). One participant reported being addicted to pain killers due to a medical condition before entering the shelter. However, during the interview, the participant reported not being on any addictive medications. Self-medicating to overcome life has been reported as a coping mechanism among millennial adults (Wall et al., 2018). Mental health concerns and drug abuse are eligibility criteria for exiting shelter and potentially moving into a supportive housing option in NYC (DHS NYC, 2019b). Supportive housing is a comprehensive way to help those who are eligible exit shelter in NYC (Shan & Sandler, 2016). Shelter staff lead the process toward securing supportive housing is led by the shelter staff as the individual's psychiatric evaluation must be input into the system and HRA must grant approval.

Mental health issues have been connected to social media used among millennials (DeVaney, 2015). However, the study participants did not mention social media use influencing their mental health or shelter experiences during their interviews. Although possible mental health concerns and drug use were discussed during the interviews, social media was not. Life stressors influence a person's mental health and coping skills to

navigate daily life (Dennison, 2016). Drug abuse/use and mental health were subthemes because they were not described as barriers to exiting shelter but were reported by all participants.

Emerging Adulthood Construct

I used the construct of emerging adulthood to undergird this study. This construct provided a framework for exploring the study participants' thinking about their situations. Researchers have found that millennials might not have the necessary tools for journeying through emerging adulthood, therefore limiting their ability to exit shelter (Dittmeier et al., 2018). This finding was important to the present study as emerging adulthood proposes five features of adult development: identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between adolescence and adulthood, and a sense of broad possibilities for the future (Arnett, 2014).

I asked all of the study participants about their perceptions of themselves as full-fledged adults and as emerging adults regarding their futures. This demographic intentionally strays away from three roles associated with adulthood: employment, marriage, and parenthood (Lapsley & Woodbury, 2015); however, this was not the case among the study participants. Two participants reported having children, but not under their care due to their living situation. One participant reported being married, and now divorced, and not seeking to remarry as a future goal. Another participant reported being pregnant at the time of the interview, unexpectedly. The participants were not intentionally straying from these roles but had already experienced them prior to entering shelter or while being in shelter.

When describing their perception of their futures as adults, the male participants connected adulthood to age. One said, “Yeah, I am adult. I am just in a bad situation and need some stability.” The female participants indicated the need to grow up more. All participants described their lack of stability as their primary focus, the desires outlined by Arnett (2014) as being a full-fledged adult. Their perspectives and experiences are supported in the research as while some do not see themselves as adolescents, they also do not entirely see themselves as adults either, which reflects Arnett (2014).

In summary, the study findings indicated that the study participants were not purposely delaying their adulthood. They all had previous adult experiences such as parenting, living independently, or marriage, and these experiences were no longer part of their future goals. Exiting their shelter stays and establishing more stability in their lives were their primary goals.

Except for traumatic experiences, all other themes identified from the participant experiences were reflected in the literature I reviewed for this study. As such, the study findings align with those in the literature I reviewed and affirm the body of knowledge regarding the experience of homelessness in the millennial generation.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation in the current study is that the findings and conclusion reflect only the experiences of four homeless millennials living in NYC shelters. Therefore, the study findings are specific to the millennial cohort and their experiences while in NYC shelters and are not generalizable to other generations or shelter settings. This study was limited to the demographics of the responding participants who may not represent other cultures

and groups who are represented in the shelter population, such as Asian, Native American, and other cultures were not included in the same participants.

The sample of participants were persons who volunteered to share their stories. This may not have represented the full stories of other shelter residents. Another limitation may have been time I had to speak with participants. Each interview was 45–60 minutes in length. If given more time, I may have been able to interview more homeless millennials. A longer prolonged exposure might have expanded the data available and stories shared.

Recommendations

The study findings indicate some areas for further research. First, homeless millennials remain understudied (Hanson-Easey et al., 2016), speaking to the need for more research in general related to their need for shelter, the experiences causing them to stay in shelter longer than the allotted time, and how their experiences and shelter stays can or are delaying their adulthood. Studying a larger sample and expanding the study timeframe may yield more robust findings.

Another recommendation is further exploration of the theme of traumatic influences contributing to shelter stay. This is a new finding as trauma was not a topic in the literature I reviewed. Factors contributing to extended shelter stay did not include trauma before entering the shelter, or while in shelter as a barrier or experience to exiting the shelter. Trauma appeared to be a common theme amongst all participants in this study, and if further explored could provide insight on the shelter stay experiences. Extended stay in shelter can be a result of pre and post shelter trauma. Another possible

research focus is systematic issues delaying shelter exit such as lack of housing resources and information that would lead to exiting shelter. More housing options and more affordable housing options may help to decrease shelter use among millennials. Further research on these topics could provide ideas for interventions or social service engagement while in the shelter that may help to move millennials out of the shelter in the allotted time. Findings from these studies may better equip the shelter staff to look individually at shelter residents instead of seeing them as a large group.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this study provided a better understanding of the problem of homelessness among millennials, which may lead to more effective shelter staff training and service delivery for client engagement. Also, the findings provided insights into a unique demographic that may help to reduce long shelter stays. Based on comments from the study participants, receiving the necessary assistance and follow through from shelter staff may help homeless millennials successfully exit shelter in the allotted time. If given adequate housing resources and information paired with education and social services during their shelter stay, homeless millennials may have the opportunity to obtain affordable living and stability. Livingstone and Herman (2017) stated that cities have a number of resources, and shelter residents can move out of shelter independently if engaged as required. Social service staff are on site to help individuals prepare to exit shelter successfully.

Study findings also suggested that the agencies governing shelters should examine their approaches to shelter services and how information and resources are disseminated.

Reevaluating service delivery can promote changes or slight adjustments in current plans that may help to promote shelter exits and assist the issue of homelessness overall. Developing a revised version of the housing first model inclusive of comprehensive and medical services could promote stability for overall self-care as well as housing. Implementing this model may help to decrease recidivism and promote successful exit from the shelter system. The present study's participants reported experiencing trauma and having limited education, both issues that should be addressed in shelter service plans to better promote shelter exit and stability. While tackling homelessness by exiting shelter is the goal, it is also important to ensure that former shelter residents can sustain themselves in the community independently, as many of the participants reported lack of social support and social isolation.

Shelter staff should tackle their sessions with shelter clients on an individual basis and not as a collective group. Long-term stayers should have weekly engagement with adequate follow-up and information, as outlined by NYC DHS, and services by shelter staff required should be enforced so that adequate services that promote successful exit strategies are provided to all shelter clients.

Conclusion

Homelessness can affect anyone at any age. Although there is research on barriers to accessing resources that can contribute to being in shelter, little attention has focused on the millennial demographic to gain a better understanding of why they are sheltered longer than allotted. Long-term stayers in shelters strain city resources, and shelters get overcrowded (Shan & Sandler, 2016).

I conducted a qualitative, multiple case study to gain a better understanding of a specific population—millennials—and why more of them are staying in shelter past the allotted time. The research questions that guided this study focused on the experiences of millennial, single adults in the shelter and their perceptions of their futures after their shelter stays. The participants' experiences varied as they related to barriers to exiting shelter and differed as they related to trauma before and while in the shelter. Based on the themes that emerged from analyzing the data from the study participants, I was able to answer both research questions that guided this study. I was also able to address the gap in literature that existed prior to the study by making new data available regarding the experiences of single, homeless millennials.

The study results helped to further the understanding of the experiences of single, homeless millennials currently living in NYC shelters as well as their perception of their future in adulthood. The findings may be of use to the NYC DHS and community-based service providers when engaging this demographic while in shelter and may better assist more successful exits. Positive social change may be created by employing the study findings to develop better-informed shelter staff services that focus on helping residents successfully exit shelter.

Temporary shelter is a key intervention for addressing homelessness. However, being exposed to the information and shelter staff engagement while in the shelter would promote how to exit the shelter. Housing resources that are viable and match the cost of living would also help millennials successfully exit homeless shelters. Single millennials who are provided the tools to enhance their strengths and motivation to overcome their

barriers may be empowered to exit shelter in the allotted time. Working with this population and understanding their histories can help to develop plans for exiting shelter and maintaining independence in the community. Engagement with millennials should be consistent in order to understand them in the context that could help build trust and increase support systems inside and outside of the shelter environment.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

INSTRUCTIONS

Good morning (afternoon). My name is ___. Thank you for participating. I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am conducting research on long term stay homelessness amongst millennial single adults. Today I am conducting an interview with you to gain an understanding of your shelter experience thus far. The purpose is to get your perception of your experiences before, and while in shelter. There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you genuinely feel. I am looking for a candid description of your experience. The interview should not exceed 60-90 minutes in length.

TAPE RECORDER INSTRUCTIONS

If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report which will contain all students' comments without any reference to individuals.

PREAMBLE/CONSENT FORM INSTRUCTIONS

Before we get started, please take a few minutes to read this consent ford. (Hand R consent form) (After R returns consent form, turn tape recorder on.)

Demographic Information:

Age: Highest Level of Education obtained:

Questions:

1. How long have you been in shelter?
    a. Where were you living prior to shelter stay?
    b. Describe your life , 1 year prior to entering shelter
    c. Did you have any alternative before seeking temporary shelter? (i.e. own place, roommate etc.)
2. Describe your support systems (i.e. family, friends)
3. Are you employed? (If not, were you employed before entering shelter?)
    a. How are you financially supporting yourself?
4. Describe your shelter experience to this point.
5. How do you feel being in shelter? How do you see yourself today?
    a. Describe any barriers that you are experiencing that is preventing you from exiting shelter at this time?
    b. What do you think you need to exit shelter?
6. How would you describe your experience with your current shelter workers (i.e. case manager, housing specialist)
    a. In what way has the shelter prepared you to move out?
7. What are some things that are preventing you from obtaining housing/stability at this time?
8. Do you see yourself as "full-fledged" adult?
    a. Do you see yourself as an independent adult?
        i. Explain to me, how you see yourself as an independent adult?
    b. How does it feel to be an emerging adult?
    c. What areas in your life do you feel you need to work on to be an "full-fledged" adult?
9. What is your goal to exit shelter?
    a. How do you plan to obtain those goals?

Appendix B: Codes & Statements

This table shows the codes that I used and examples of the participant's statements that fell under each code. Each code was then grouped together that lead to emergent themes.

Code	Statement
Criminal justice	"I got locked up for fighting."
	"Oh yeah miss, I am a two-time felon."
Shelter systemic issues	"Public assistance screw you around, because this is what the system does, so I keep on going and taking off of work. I have to keep applying for public assistance every time."
	"I have the medical documentation that I provide to the shelter staff but they still task me with finding a job and employment. They must think I am lying. I am in real pain all the time."
Trauma	"I was adopted."
	"Due to my medical condition, I am in constant pain. I ended up addicted to pain killers. It got to a point that I was stealing for my addiction."
Education	"I completed 11th grade . . . I want to get my GED but haven't gone to do it yet."
	"I have some college"
Socialization	"I don't really have friends here in NYC."
	"A lot of my friends don't know that I am in shelter, I am ashamed honestly that's why I have to get out sooner than later."
Safety	"I was going in and out of shelters because I didn't like it. People were always stealing stuff or fighting, or there's a lot of drugs and craziness."
	"I know what the clients are capable of doing to get through security. Like they can bring some stuff in there, because the security is not really thorough about their search."

(table continues)

Code	Statement
Support System	"I have friends, but not in New York. All my friends are in Connecticut or states that's close, but not that close."
	"I speak to my mother but she doesn't know I am in shelter. She helps me out when she can."
	"I was evicted from my apartment in Rochester, NY so I came to NYC for shelter"
Mental Health	"I have been in the system a long time, I was diagnosed with bipolar around 20"
	"I have depression, yeah"
Public Assistance	"I'm employed, but I have to keep my public assistance case open while in shelter. They always give you the run around"
	"I have an open PA case because I am in shelter, I wasn't on public assistance before this"
Low Wages/Income	"I work Monday through Friday making $15 an hour."
	"I can't work because of my medical condition so I am trying to apply for SSI/SSD"
Housing	"It's a housing voucher that you get from the city for a room or apartment, whatever you want. You just have to have the money for it, and I've had this voucher since I started working & nothing…"
	"And so now I have to go back and apply to PA again so they can renew my voucher, but sometimes I don't have time because I work Monday through Friday."
Motivation	"So when I got there, it was an eye opening experience. I was like okay, damn I don't know if I can deal with this for this long."
	"When I first got there, I don't know what to expect. I was thinking, okay this is just two steps back to make three jumps forward."
Adopted/Foster	"I've been in the foster care system since I was about 10."
	"I was adopted"