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“(I WANT TO) CHANGE THE WORLD”: AN ANALYSIS OF FUTURE ORIENTATION OF
HOMELESS YOUTH IN ATLANTA

by

ANA LABOY

Under the Direction of Eric R. Wright PhD

ABSTRACT

The Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment 2015 is a survey of homeless youth (14-24 years of age) in Atlanta, examining their needs as well as demographic characteristics. This paper looks at the relationship examines a relationship between demographic characteristics and individuals future orientation.. While age, race, and gender do not seem to influence the future orientation of homeless youth, their lesbian and gay youth had a statistically significant difference in their future orientation score than their straight and bisexual counterpart’s individuals. It is important for sociological literature to combine both strength based examinations with needs based examinations, to help local service providers learn about their population.

INDEX WORDS: Homeless, youth, future orientation, Atlanta

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ANA LABOY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Masters of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

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Ana LaBoy

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December 2017

DEDICATION

For the homeless youth who shared their stories, energy and lived experiences with us while we were on the street conducting interviews. And for those who struggle with housing every day. You are more than your circumstance. You all are resilient, strong and amazing.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYCNA 2015
HUD

Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment 2015
Housing and Urban Development

1 INTRODUCTION

Homeless youth have been under-researched and underserved throughout the United States. Due to the lack of previous research on homeless youth, most of the literature concentrates on problems homeless youth face. Homeless youth often have experienced social situations including abuse in childhood, previous bullying attempts, close friends committing and attempting suicide and involvement in the sex trade (Kidd and Shahar 2008). They also have negative mental and physical health issues with loneliness, suicidal ideations, negative health status and substance abuse (Kidd and Shahar 2008; Thompson et al. 2010). Homeless youth are extremely hard to reach and engage in service. Youth find many social services to be out of touch with their wants, which include flexible, individualized, non-judgmental services (De Rosa et al. 1999). The homeless services concentrate on older adults and families, which have vastly different needs and wants than youth.

Some clinical professionals argue for a strength-based perspective be used when dealing with vulnerable populations, both when concentrating on clinical treatment and also when discussing research endeavors (Saleebey D 1996; Weick et al. 1989). Strength-based perspectives focus on positive attributes of individuals to assist them in creating a more positive future. The strength-based perspective theory posits that by focusing on strengths, you are more likely to engage individuals than when you focus on their problems (Weick et al. 1989). One way in which homeless service providers can use a strength-based perspective is to look at an individual's future orientation, which is defined by this thesis as an individual's plan for their future, including their interests and goals (Nurmi 1991). An individual with a strong future orientation will have attainable goals for their future, with planning and motivation to encourage their achievement (Nurmi 1991). Future orientation is a malleable aspect of resilience, which is

defined as a unique characteristic (including attitude, coping mechanisms, or adaptation) that helps to ease negative life experiences, or more concisely, positive outcome or attitude in an adverse situation (Ahern NR et al. 2006; Bender et al. 2007; Kidd and Shahar 2008; Kolar, Erickson, and Stewart 2012). When providers can use a strengths-based perspective, such as future orientation, they can connect better with individuals, and also will be able to tap into an integral part of getting individuals out of homelessness.

Using the Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment 2015, this thesis answers the following questions: What is the range of homeless youth's future orientations? Moreover, what kind of variations do we find future orientation based on social location? As an exploratory study, this thesis has two main goals. First, to help to fill the gap in the literature pertaining to homeless youth and future orientation. Second, to give another view of homeless youth in the Atlanta area using a strengths-based perspective. While it is important in an academic context to delve into the complexities of individual experiences, it is more important in a policy perspective. Looking at individual's future orientation and positive attributes gives a humanizing factor to the very real and pervasive problem of youth homelessness within the City of Atlanta. The discussion of strength-based initiatives can lead to better policy decisions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Counting Homeless Youth

Traditionally, homeless youth are counted in the regular Point-In-Time (PIT) counts that are required by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Throughout the United States, during the third week of January in every odd-numbered year, HUD requires areas to do a systematic overnight count of homeless individuals who do not have stable residences. This includes individuals who may be living on the street, abandoned buildings, shelters, or extended stay hotels (National Alliance to End Homelessness 2012). The PIT count gets basic information from homeless individuals, including demographics and previous homeless history. The numeric data then translates into money from HUD-funded homeless prevention grants. However, these counts systematically undercount homeless youth, as youth who are homeless are very different in their habits than adult homeless individuals (Sulkowski and Joyce-Beaulieu 2014). In recent years, a few cities throughout the country have made concerted efforts to count homeless youth separately in systematic counts to help with the underfunding of homeless youth prevention services. However, homeless youth continue to be an understudied, undercounted and misunderstood population, making them extremely hard for service providers to reach.

2.2 Strength-Based Perspective

Many service providers, in their frustration over the difficulty to reach homeless youth, have argued for a strength-based perspective when serving homeless youth. The strength-based perspective argues that “individuals do not grow by concentrating on their problems” but by instead concentrating on their strengths (Weick et al. 1989). As sociologists, we argue that massive systemic problems can lead to problems such as homelessness. The strengths-based perspective gives a way in which researchers and advocates can look at and talk about

populations influenced by these systemic factors (Laursen 2000). Researchers have used the strength-based perspective for individuals with mental illness for many years, and have recently expanded the perspective to other groups, such as troubled youth and impoverished families (Maton et al. 2004; Weick et al. 1989, 1989).

Some social workers and other service providers are known to use the strengths-based perspective when dealing with their youth clients (Laursen 2000; Saleebey D 1996; Weick et al. 1989). Using the strength-based perspective takes away “deficiency language” (Goolishian 2017; Laursen 2000). Using positive language and attitudes towards populations give them better and more creative outcomes. The strength-based perspective gives more power to clients dealing with adverse situations, allowing them to dictate aspects of their future (Saleebey D 1996).

Future orientation is an integral part of the strength-based perspective when dealing with homeless youth. Homeless youth want to engage with providers who concentrate more on positives rather than negatives, and who work as partners with them to achieve their future dreams (De Rosa et al. 1999; Fest 2003). Youth have been proven to flourish in environments that concentrate on their assets and future rather than any deficits that they may have, and develop flexible, encouraging environments (Amodeo and Collins 2007; Catalano et al. 2004; Fall and Berg 1996; Kidd and Shahr 2008; Wyman et al. 1993). Additionally, a homeless youth who experience post-traumatic stress disorder respond best to the strength-based perspective (McManus and Thompson 2008).

The strength-based perspective can concentrate on a variety of different positive aspects of an individual’s life, which can include but is not limited to their creativity, obstacles they have overcome, and their dreams for the future. The literature on the strengths-based perspective encourages providers to concentrate on something positive within vulnerable populations.

2.3 Future Orientation

Future orientation is one way in which providers can use the strength-based perspective. An individual's future orientation, as defined earlier as an individual's plan for their future, including their interests and goals (Nurmi 1991). Providers can help to develop treatment plans and encourage services based on an individual's future orientation and encourage the development of positive future orientations for youth.

Future orientation is a malleable concept, which can be encouraged or discouraged depending on the context in which an individual is found within (Aspinwall and Staudinger 2003). Individuals can develop a strong future orientation when they have a support system of individuals who encourage them to develop small goals to reach a healthy future goal. An individual's initial conception of future orientation develops from norms within their childhood household (Nurmi 1991). Other social systems and programs throughout an individual's life can change their future orientation in a positive or negative way (Amodeo and Collins 2007; Catalano et al. 2004). Thus, an individual's future orientation changes throughout the life course and is dependent on social support systems and life events that present themselves.

A strong future orientation has three aspects: the motivation for future goals, planning for those goals, and evaluation of their future life (Nurmi 1991). Although individuals can think positively about their future, a strong future orientation includes not only plans for the future but the ability to execute those plans (Nurmi 1991). Those with a strong future orientation have been found to have a lower likelihood of risky alcohol and drug behavior, spend less time depressed and have better-coping skills (Epel, Bandura, and Zimbardo 1999; Robbins and Bryan 2004). Homeless adults, specifically, with a stronger future orientation have been found to join programs that assist in housing and job placement (Epel et al. 1999).

Future orientation has been studied with housed youth and homeless adults, but not with homeless youth. Future orientation is an aspect of resilience, which is an important part of an individual's resilience.

2.4 Resilience

Scholars of resilience take two stances, one on an innate and natural resilience that cannot be developed or strengthened and another of a more malleable form of resilience that can be harnessed and developed through social interactions (Masten 2001; Masten and Obradovic 2006). These two revealing views and scholarship that is a combination of each make it difficult to come up with one succinct description of how resilience can be measured. Resilience can take on many forms depending on the scholarship, but individuals who have resilience usually have two important characteristics, first a positive interaction and view of the world around them and second, the ability to plan a future that overcomes any adversity they may be facing, also known as a strong future orientation (Ahern NR et al. 2006, 2006; Connor and Davidson 2003; Kolar et al. 2012; Kurtz et al. 2000; Lindsey et al. 2000; Masten and Obradovic 2006; Monn et al. 2013; Rew et al. 2001; Thompson et al. 2016; Wagnild and Young 1993).

Unlike future orientation, resilience has been studied sporadically with homeless youth. For homeless youth, strong social support networks, including adults who can help youth to navigate tricky peer relationships, help to strengthen a youth's resilience. (Kurtz et al. 2000; Lindsey et al. 2000). It is important that youth are guided into healthy relationships that encourage their future goals and aspirations to increase their resilience measures. (Kolar et al. 2012; Kurtz et al. 2000; Lindsey et al. 2000). Individual youth also report in studies that it is important to maintain a positive attitude and look towards future goals in order to remove themselves from the negative consequences of homelessness (Bender et al. 2007; Kidd and

Shahar 2008; Kolar et al. 2012; Kurtz et al. 2000; Lindsey et al. 2000). The studies of homeless youth concentrate solely on youth who have constant contact with service providers and are currently housed (Bender et al. 2007; Kidd and Shahar 2008; Kolar et al. 2012; Kurtz et al. 2000; Lindsey et al. 2000). Studies have not been done on youth who are homeless or those who may not be in direct contact with providers.

There are many different ways in which scholars argue to measure resilience in youth. According to Ahern's methodological assessment, there are three scales that have been proven to measure resilience the best for housed youth; the Resilience Scale (RS), The Adolescent Resilience Scale (ARS), and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Ahern NR et al. 2006). The top three scales for resilience all concentrate on the fluidity of resilience. The Resilience Scale looks at five different traits: perseverance, equanimity, meaningfulness, self-reliance and existential aloneness to define resilience (Wagnild 2009; Wagnild and Young 1993). The Adolescent Resilience Scale looks at three different topics: novelty seeking, emotional regulation and positive future orientation to define resilience (Oshio et al. 2003). Lastly, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale discusses a myriad of different topics ranging from social skills to adaptation skills and even dealing with positive impacts on life (Connor and Davidson 2003). The scales that are highly accepted do use the same indicators to measure resilience, but all three touch on the importance of future orientation for individuals (Connor and Davidson 2003; Oshio et al. 2003; Wagnild 2009; Wagnild and Young 1993).

The resilience measures have been used extensively to study resilience among youth, who often face a variety of adverse circumstances. While some scales emphasize previous social factors, others concentrate on psychological importance individuals, and validated scales have not been used to study homeless youth specifically. However, research around youth resilience is

critical to developing programs for individuals who find themselves in adverse situations as a youth. Researchers use concepts such as future orientation as a partial defining factor in defining resilience for youth, but some of their measures vary from the measures for adults.

The literature argues for the importance of strength-based perspectives, like concentrating on future orientation, to be used with homeless service providers. Supportive services that encourage future orientation are more likely to engage youth in services. Future orientation is a malleable and imperative part of resilience, which has been shown to assist individuals in removing themselves from homelessness. Current literature has not studied future orientation with homeless youth, and cannot guide providers on the kinds of futures youth may want or the impact of their background on their wants and needs.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Data

This thesis uses the data from the Atlanta Youth Count and Needs Assessment 2015 (AYCNA 2015). AYCNA 2015 was a survey completed in the summer of 2015, with a primary goal of counting homeless youth in the Atlanta-metro area. Homeless youth were eligible for the survey if they had the following characteristics: 14-25 years of age, living independent from any consistent parental or familial support, and without a stable and permanent home. The survey covered topics including but not limited to demographics, sexual history, homeless history, history of traumatic life experience and information regarding individuals' contact with service providers in the metro-Atlanta area. The AYCNA 2015 was the first large-scale attempt to collect data about homeless youth in the metro-Atlanta area. In this regard, many of the topics covered in the survey deal with deficit-focused questions. Both homeless service providers and policymakers are interested in the needs of the homeless community, making deficit based questions an critical subject for the first study. Researchers were interested in the needs of homeless youth to highlight the extreme need for better and more comprehensive services.

The AYCNA 2015 had over 855 respondents. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, respondents often could take the survey more than once. Using a series of seven questions, researchers developed a code to get rid of anyone that may have been a duplicate. After applying the code, there were 693 individual surveys. Individuals ranged in age from 14-25 years of age, with a mean age of 21.5 years old. The sample was disproportionately cisgender African American men, with 71% of respondents being African American, 60.5% being cisgender male. Respondents reported high amounts of traumatic life experiences that happened to them before and while they were homeless. For example, over half the sample experienced

violence in their home and neighborhood and saw a parent go to jail. Respondents had substance abuse problems, serious mental illness, and engaged in risky sex behavior. The sample was indicative of literature surrounding homeless youth.

The AYCNA 2015 is an excellent data source to study future orientation among homeless youth. First, the AYCNA is a non-clinically focused survey which is different from other future orientation and psychological studies on future orientation and resilience. Second, when researchers conducted the survey, most of the questions concerned themselves with deficit-based models. During survey development and field worker training, researchers conducted a pre-test on several homeless youths in Atlanta. Researchers were interested in gaining perspectives on language in the survey, delivery of the survey, and overall feelings about the tone and tempo of the survey. When researchers asked pre-test respondents about their opinions of the survey, one brave female respondent asked researchers “Why aren’t you asking us anything about the positive parts of our lives? This survey is all negative.” Other homeless youth chimed in, and a conversation began about why the survey was focused on only negative and “depressing” parts of their lives when they were human beings with both negative and positive aspects. As a response to this feedback, researchers had conversations with service providers about this revelation, who reinforced the importance of taking a more holistic perspective of the youth. As a result, researchers added a final question to the survey, from here on referred to as the “aspirations question.” The aspirations question asked individuals “Each person is unique with different dreams and aspirations in life. What are your biggest dreams and aspirations for your life?”. Asking youth to reflect on their future helps to better understand the youth, and gives providers better ways to intervene and engage the youth.

Based on the relevant literature and the available dataset, there are two main research questions this thesis can examine. First, what is the range of homeless youths' future orientation? Second, what kind of variation (based on demographic characteristics) occurs in individual's future orientation? The first question will be answered qualitatively while the second quantitatively.

3.2 Methods

For this thesis, I use both qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine future orientation. I first use thematic coding, to look at the range of individual's future orientation, and then quantitatively use bivariate and multivariate analysis to examine the variation among future orientation.

3.2.1 Variations in Future Orientations: Thematic Coding

First, I performed thematic coding on the aspirations question which reads, "Each person is unique with different dreams and aspirations in life. What are your biggest dreams and aspirations for your life?" I created a code that separates individuals into groups based on their dreams and aspirations. I used their primary dream/aspiration for their future when coding this variable. Sometimes, individuals listed many dreams and aspirations, but I either chose the dream that they spent the most time talking about, or the one that was the furthest in the future. I read each response to the aspirations question and evaluated what dreams they had. Some individual's dreams were easy to code, for example, one respondent said, "*Music. I make beats and want to have my beats used on the big stages*", which was coded as a dream of being in the Music Field. Other responses were more difficult, such as another respondent who answered, "*underground rap, poetry, writing books, gardening, business owners,*" which was coded as Entrepreneur. The main goal in this section of coding was to get a general coding of individual's

dreams for the future. I made as many categories as possible and then collapsed them into more inclusive groups once coding was completed. In this analysis, I was interested in seeing what kinds of dreams and aspirations that individuals had, to give a descriptive analysis of what youth's future orientation. Because literature around these youth's positive experiences is limited, I was interested in showing the vast range of dreams and aspirations. Table 1 gives an example of all codes used and frequencies of each code and gives examples of responses that may fit into each category. The coding developed by this will be referred to as "kinds of dreams" set forward.

Next, I developed a second code based on the data that was provided. I was interested in seeing how individuals answered this question as it pertains to planning for their future. In my examination, I found three main themes/groups that ran through the responses to the aspirations question. I have categorized these as planners (individuals who have a specific plan for their future), dreamers (individuals who have a positive outlook on life, without any specific plans) and bystanders (individuals who are content with remaining homeless). Table 2 breaks down percentages and frequencies and details examples of how individuals were coded into the three categories. According to Nurmi (1991), individuals can have positive future orientation, but better future orientations would be those who have planning and motivation behind them (Nurmi 1991). The three codes I developed follow Nurmi's definitions of future orientation, as dreamers all have positive outlooks on their future, while planners have positive perspectives on their future with plans and motivations behind them, and bystanders are individuals who do not have plans for their future.

When coding in these three categories, the goal was to capture whether individuals had a plan for how they would achieve their future goals. An answer that said "*to be rich,*" although a

positive future orientation, was vastly different than “*going back to school to be a master welder.*” The former being coded as a Dreamer and the latter being coded as a Planner. When coding initially, I made distinctions between different types of bystanders. For instance, there were those who said they “*just wanted to be out here*” while others said they “*don’t know.*” While these are also vastly different, there was not enough variation and responses that could be considered negative or neutral future orientation were placed into the Bystander category.

To complete a statistical analysis of the aspirations question, it was important to tell individuals who had a strong future orientation and those who did not. The aspirations question was separated into three categories: dreamers, planners, and bystanders. According to the literature on future orientation, individuals who have a strong future orientation have not only positive perceptions of their future but also systematic plans and motivations for achieving that future. From coding, dreamers had positive views of their future, but no real plans on how to achieve them, and bystanders had negative or neutral views of their future. For this analysis, I made two categories, those with a strong future orientation (Planners), and those with a weak future orientation (Dreamers or Bystanders).

3.2.2 Social Location and Future Orientations: Bivariate and Multivariate

In this project, I was also interested in how demographic categories contributed to future orientation. With that purpose in mind, I conducted two sets of statistical analysis with the created variables. First, I was interested in seeing if there was a relationship between each demographic characteristic and the strength of their future orientation. To answer that question, I conducted a series of Chi-Squares to examine the relationship. Results from the Chi-Squared for each variable are found in Table 3.

Second, I was interested in seeing if there was a relationship between all the social location variables together and their future orientation. To answer this question, I performed a series of logistic regressions to see if there were systematic differences for people with various demographic characteristics. Results from the individual logistic regression are found in Table 4. Individual multinomial regressions were run with each of the social location variables: age, gender, race/ethnicity, time spent homeless and sexual orientation as independent variables and their strength of future orientation as the dependent variable¹. Finally, I ran one logistic regression² with age, gender, race/ethnicity, time spent homeless and sexual orientation as the independent variable, and their strength of future orientation as the dependent variable.

The purpose of this analysis is exploratory. I was interested to see if sociological principles around these demographic category variables made a difference to their future orientation. As an exploratory analysis, I also wanted to test my measure of future orientation, to see if there need to be changed to whom future orientation is measured moving forward.

¹ Although chi-squared indicated no real relationship for the majority of the variables, I found it statistically sound to try to see if there were individual relationships with each variable and how each changed with the addition of other variables.

² Multiple steps of logistic regression were run to see if there were a variety of relationships. Multinomial regressions first were run in different steps, starting with the sexual orientation variable and adding other variables to see if that changed the relationship. There continued to be no significance with a variety of different layering of variables. For the concise nature of this thesis, I will be reporting only on the larger multinomial logistic regression, as the general finding can be explained with this model.

3.3 Variables³

3.3.1 Age

Respondents were asked “How old are you?” and answered in an open-ended manner. To be a part of this survey and for their information to be valid, respondents needed to be between 14 and 25 years old. The age variable is numeric values from 14-25, based on their response to the question. The variable that I use for my analysis breaks the age category into three different categories: 14-17, 18-21 and 22-25. The categories are important because they correlate with how homeless providers conceptualize youth. For the chi-square analysis, I use collapsed categories to make it easier to see any correlations, but for the individual logistic regressions and the logistic regression that includes all the variables, I treat age as a continuous variable.

3.3.2 Gender

For this analysis, I use a created variable from the original survey that combines responses from both gender identification and sex assigned at birth. Individuals were first asked “What sex were you assigned at birth,” with options of male/man, female/woman, something else. Following that question, individuals were asked a series of eight yes/no questions to capture gender. Respondents were asked the following questions “Do you consider yourself to be man/male?”; “Do you consider yourself to be woman/female?; “Do you consider yourself to be part-time in both?”; “Do you consider yourself to be Gender queer?”; “Do you consider yourself to be transgender?”; “Do you consider yourself to be intersex?”; “ Do you consider yourself to be gender non-conforming?”; “Do you consider yourself to be something else?”.

³ Interactions were also tested between these variables in a variety of different models. Interactions showed no effects and again, for the concise nature of this thesis, are not reported or discussed.

Using responses from both responses for sex assigned at birth and respondent's gender orientation, a variable was created to collapse the sex and gender variables together. Individuals were coded into either Cisgender Male, Cisgender Female, or Other. Individuals who responded "Male/men" assigned at birth, and YES to "Do you consider yourself to be a man/male?" were assigned Cisgender Male. Individuals who responded to "female/woman" assigned at birth and YES to "Do you consider yourself to be a woman/female?" were assigned Cisgender Female. Any other combinations were coded as Other.

For the chi-squared, I used all three categories originally created in the original variable. For the logistic regression, I created a dummy variable with a cisgender male as the reference category. I use cisgender male as the reference category because the sample had a larger population of cisgender male individuals than of other genders.

3.3.3 Race/Ethnicity

Respondents were asked "What race do you consider yourself? (PLEASE CHECK AT LEAST ONE AND ALL THAT APPLY.). Respondents could choose from the following responses: "White"; "Black or African American"; "Asian"; "Native American/Alaska Native"; "Pacific Islander"; "Multiracial"; "Other, please specify." Responses of "Other, please specify" were coded back into the other categories. Respondents were also asked, "Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic or Latino?". Both of these questions were used to create the race/ethnicity variable. Anyone who identified as Latino and only one of the races was coded as Hispanic. All of the other individuals were coded into one category when appropriate, or deemed biracial if he or she identified with two races and multiracial if he or she identified with more than two races. For my analysis, I dummy coded everyone as "Black" and "Not Black" for

race/ethnicity, using Black as the reference category. I chose Black as the reference category because the sample disproportionality identified as Black/African American.

3.3.4 *Time Spent Homeless*

Respondents were asked “How long have you been homeless this time (that is continuously homeless since your last permanent housing)?” to measure time spent homeless. Respondents could answer “less than 1 month”, “1 to 2 months”, “more than 2 months to 3 months”, “more than 3 months to 6 months”, “more than 6 months to 1 year”, and “more than 1 year”. For my analysis, I maintained the categories developed in the survey.

3.3.5 *Sexual Orientation*

Respondents were asked “Which of the following labels best describes your sexual orientation?” to measure sexual orientation. Individuals could respond in the following ways: “straight or heterosexual,” “gay or lesbian,” “bisexual,” “undecided/questioning,” or “other, please specify.” “Other, please specify” were able to answer in an open-ended fashion. “Other, please specify” was categorized back to the original categories when appropriate. There were three dummy variables created from this question: Straight/Heterosexuals or All others, Lesbian and Gay or All others, and Bisexual and all others. In addition to those dummy variables, reviewers for the AYCNA also created dummy identifier variables for LGBTIQ identified individuals. For the crosstabs, I used all of the variables that dictate sexuality separately. Based on the results from those, I decided to use the dummy variable LG, which is coded as lesbian and gay ‘1’ and all others as ‘0’. Theoretically, I wanted to see if there was a significant difference between individuals who identified as Lesbian and Gay and those who did not identify that way.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Variations in Future Orientations

Once coded, individuals had many different types of aspirations that they were planning on achieving. The two largest categories Independence/Success (19.3%) and Big Career (20.6%) made sense as homeless youth are looking for financial stability in their lives. Some wanted to have independence and success, similar to a 19-year-old male who told interviewers his dreams and aspirations were *“just to be successful.”* Another respondent, a 20-year-old female said, *“I wanna go back to school and get a home for me and my family.”* Other respondents had more lofty dreams for their future. A 20-year-old female dreamed of being a “dentist” while a 20-year-old male dreamed of being an NFL football player. Another 22-year-old female had multiple dreams, responding with *“[I want to be] a youth counselor in a rehab facility, a pottery class teacher, a dolphin instructor in the Bahamas, [I want to own] an art business.”*

They also were interested in other dreams and aspirations that would give stability, such as parenthood/family (8.8%), school (8.3%), stable job (4.6%) money (3%) and stable housing (1.3%). The majority of responses dealt with stability either financially or socially. Individuals echoed responses that were simple and focused on getting out of their situation. Some respondents simply wanted education, citing their dreams and aspirations as to *“finish education.”* Others focused more on their family and their success, *“[I want to be] successful, a good father, a better person.”* A 24-year-old male, who had been homeless more than a year and said that he had issues finding a job as the reason for his homeless situation, cited his main dream and aspiration as to *“have a career, not just a job. Have a secure position”*. Others were not as specific in their ways of security and wanted to gain money; a 15-year-old male in the

sample wanted to get “*hoodrich*,” and another 18-year-old male wanted “*to be rich and own my own multi-billionaire*.” Regardless of the specificity, the vast majority of the sample was yearning for some stability in their lives.

Individuals wanted to become right people in the end as well. With individuals wanted to have happiness and peace (2.7%) and then to relay that they would like to change the world in some way (6.2%). A 23-year-old male said that he wanted “*to make some positive contribution to my community, [and] focus on consistent public service*.” Another respondent, a 25-year-old male who had been homeless since he was 16, responded that he “*wanna change the world somehow*.” Even in the adverse living situation that these respondents lived in, they still had the goal of wanting to help others in their future.

The most shocking statistic was the percentage of individuals who wanted to join the music industry (10.8%). The music industry seemed to be an achievable and reasonable way to gain stability. Individuals wanted to join all aspects of the industry, from rappers to producers. Individuals who wanted to join the music community came from different demographic backgrounds. An 18-year-old male who had been homeless more than one year wanted to be a “*music artist*,” while a 25-year-old male, homeless less than a month, wanted “*to become a rapper*.” One 22-year-old male staying in an extended stay hotel/motel for the past year said he wanted “*to be an R and B singer*” and claimed “*he was a singer before*” and had “*a history to tell*.”

When coding for the dreams question and assessing the themes of dreams, it became apparent even in the situations individuals had been placed in; they were still optimistic about the outcomes of their lives. Out of the three categories, individuals who wanted to stay where they were, or bystanders, were in the vast minority (3.4%). Few respondents were similar to a 22-

year-old male who had been homeless for less than a week due to a mistake in his traveling itinerary, who responded that he “*really don’t have one*” when talking about his dreams and aspirations.

Individuals who either had plans for their dreams or moderate dreams, which were categorized as Planners, accounted for the next largest group of responders (29.8%). Planners usually yearned for stability, as one respondent wanted to “*continue to be a chef*” and another wanted to “*have a regular [job]*” and “*get off the streets.*”

The largest category was individuals who were dreamers, who had dreams that were often large without any real plans of how to achieve them (66.8%). One respondent, a 19-year-old male who was staying in an emergency shelter, responded to the question about dreams and aspirations by saying he wanted his own “*Fortune 500 Company ‘First Class, Inc.’*”, citing that “*if dreams don’t seem too big to accomplish, then your [sic] not dreaming enough*”. While another 19-year-old male, who had dropped out of school and lost his job, and was staying with friends at the time of the interview, said he wanted to “*get rich and get signed to Young Money. After that fake my own death and disappear*”.

4.2 Individual Relationships: Social Location and Future Orientation

A series of Chi-Squared tests were performed to see if there were any significant interactions between aspects of individual’s social location and their hopes and dreams. In addition to the chi-squared, individual logistic regressions were also performed to see if there was any significance found. Finally, one logistic regression was performed to see if there was a relationship between all social location variables and their future orientation. Table 3 lists results from individual chi-squares, Table 4 lists individual logistic regressions, and Table 5 lists results

from the entire model. I was interested in seeing if each variable on its own had a relationship with the categorization of the aspiration question. As an exploratory study, and with little relevant literature, the purpose was to first test the importance of social location for this particular measure and also to hypothesize if there would be a way to improve the measurements.

4.2.1 Age

The three age categories had the same distribution of individuals' future orientations. Individuals were most likely to be dreamers and least likely to be bystanders. Age was used as a continuous variable for the logistic regression. There was not a significant relationship found between age, and the strength of future orientation fell into based on the Chi-Square Analysis (p 0.441). The logistic regression indicated the same void of the relationship between this age and aspirations question (p 0.307). Individuals' age was statistically not a contributing factor to their future orientation status.

4.2.2 Gender

Individuals who were men were more likely to be dreamers (65.2%) than planners (31.0%) or bystanders (3.8%). The same pattern held true for individuals who were coded as not men; they were majority dreamers (69.3%), then planners (28.0%) and finally bystanders (2.8%). These relationships were quite similar to the overall percentages of individuals within the general population, and the results of the chi-squared were non-significant (p 0.413), meaning that there was not a significant relationship between an individual's gender identification and the strength of their future orientation. The individual logistic regression showed the same lack of individual relationship (p 0.413). The Cox and Snell are extremely low, showing low model fit, which indicates that this variable may be important if you take into account other variables.

4.2.3 Race/Ethnicity

The race-ethnicity category was a dummy variable with two categories, black and not black. Individuals who were black were more likely to be dreamers (67.4%) than planners (30.0%) or bystanders (2.6%). The same pattern held true for individuals who were coded as not black; they were also majority dreamers (65.4%), then planners (29.3%) and finally bystanders (5.3%). It is important to note that there is a higher percentage of individuals who are bystanders in the not-black race category than any other comparison. The results of the chi-squared test did not show a significant relationship with their future orientation ($p = 0.855$), and the individual logistic regression did not indicate a relationship either ($p = 0.855$). With the individual logistic regression, the Cox and Snell were extremely low, which indicates that there may be other variables that would be necessary within the model.

4.2.4 Time Spent Homeless

The time spent homeless variable had categories ranging from “less than one month” to “more than one year” spent homeless. Individuals who were coded as bystanders were most likely to be individuals who had been homeless for more than one year, 45.6% of bystanders were individuals who had been homeless more than one year. Both the planner and dreamer category had equal distributions of individuals at different levels of time homeless with their perceptions of their future orientation. The individual chi-square test resulted in a non-significant relationship between individuals’ time homeless and their categorization of future orientation ($p = 0.124$), and the individual logistic regression echoed that finding ($p = 0.307$).

4.2.5 Sexual Orientation

The sexual orientation variable had two categories, individuals who identified as lesbian and gay and those who did not. Individuals who identified as lesbian and gay followed the same

theme that other variables followed; individuals were most likely to be dreamers (78.9%), then planners (16.7%) and finally bystanders (4.4%). The same pattern held true for individuals who were not lesbian and gay; they were majority dreamers (65.0%), then planners (31.8%) and finally bystanders (3.2%). The relationship between sexual orientation and the strength of future orientation did have a significant relationship when testing for a significance level of $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.004$). With the individual logistic regression, the relationship continued to be significant at the level of $p > 0.05$ ($p = 0.002$). Although there is this relationship, the model has a low model-fit score with a Cox and Snell 0.014, leaving there to be some other variables that could help to strengthen the model fit.

4.3 Multi-Layers Relationships: Social Location and Future Orientation

After testing individual relationships of demographic variables and the strength of future orientation, I performed a binary logistic regression, with all the demographic variables as the independent variables, and the binary coded future orientation variable as the dependent variable. The model was significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.026$), with a log likelihood of 767.839, chi-square of 12.756 and a model fit R^2 of 0.20. Throughout the model only one variable, sexual orientation was significant ($p = 0.008$). That, combined with the model fit statistic, indicates that there must be other variables that lead to an individual's strength of future orientation. For individuals who were lesbian or gay, we would expect a 0.798 decrease in the log odds of individuals have a strong future orientation when holding age, gender, race and time homeless constant. Other variables in the model were not significant, and for the brevity of this thesis, will not be reported.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Variations in Future Orientations

Homeless youth yearned for stability in their ways with the kinds of dreams that they aspired towards. Although stereotypically homeless youth are only painted in a negative light, the kinds of dreams and aspirations that they reported give a greater insight into the kinds of future that they will have. Homelessness is a temporary part of their life, not a life-long decision that they have made for themselves. Along with stability, homeless youth's kinds of dreams represent their positive outlook on life and their own lives. Youth want to be able to help other individuals like themselves once they are beyond this part of their life.

Interestingly, the kinds of dreams that homeless youth have can be indicative of their geographical location. For example, Atlanta is known as the rap capital of the south and believed by some music critics to be the birthplace of current rap music. It is not surprising then that many youths have goals of becoming rappers. Music and rap work the same way that sports play in other areas of the world, a way to get out of poverty and provide for the family. Future research around the rap music and the draw for youth within this geographic region are needed.

Focusing on these more positive aspects of homeless youth can give a more holistic view, and provide better services for the youth. As the literature suggests, homeless youth want providers who see them holistically and not just as homeless. It has also been found that concentrating on the positive is more likely to get them out of their situation. When providers and researchers understand more about motivations of homeless youth, they will be able to have better relationships with the youth and services for them. It is important that more research is done around the future orientation of homeless youth to better understand the connections between future orientation and other aspects of their lives.

5.2 Social Location and Future Orientation

While age, gender, time spent homeless, and race did not contribute directly to youth's future orientation, their sexual orientation did make a significant difference. When looking at the overwhelming impact that homelessness has on individuals, it seems as though homelessness can become an overwhelmingly equalizing factor. Individuals who are homeless experience many different things, independent of their other demographic characteristics, than those who are regularly housed. What is more important to note is the overwhelming significance that being lesbian or gay plays into an individual's future orientation. From the analysis, lesbian and gay individuals were significantly more likely to have weak future orientation. For this analysis, a weak future orientation could be a positive attitude about the future, that may not have planning or motivation behind it. It raises the question, what in lesbian and gay homeless youths' lives leads to this? Being geographically located in the south, Atlanta is a region of both wide acceptance of LGBT individuals, while also deep rejection of LGBT individuals. The same kind of acceptance and rejection is mirrored in the system of service providers in Atlanta. With a high percentage of homeless youth identifying as LGBT, there are few service providers who provide truly comprehensive and welcoming services for LGBT youth specifically. Funding for providers is low, and oftentimes youth that will get more funding are in different groups. Without these supportive services, LGBT youth may not have the direct access to service providers that can hone their future dreams and aspirations.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

The AYCNA 2015 was a survey designed to get broad information about homeless youth in Atlanta, with the goals of not only counting the youth but acquiring a general knowledge of individuals' demographic information. There are some broad limitations to the research that has

been done. First, the sample was highly disproportionately African-American and male. While this makes it hard to expand to the broader population, it is unique in its extensive sample.

Another limitation of our study is the created future orientation variable. The variable was created from coded qualitative data. While the qualitative data gives more variation and depth to the data, the variable has not been validated. However, due to the lack of research on future orientation with homeless youth, there is not another scale specific to the population.

There is a vast amount of future research that needs to be done about homeless youth. The lack of research about youth causes the underfunding and underrepresentation of groups who deal with homeless youth. More research can help lead to better information to give to granting agencies. Also, homeless providers will benefit from continued studies that combine both the needs and the strength-based perspective. Youth providers echo the strength of youth but are unable to produce any outside research to support their claims.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study of homeless youth's future orientation leads to the beginning insight into future orientation for homeless youth in Atlanta. The youth that was talked to during the AYCNA 2015 had exceptional variations in their future orientations. These variations, although not explained by most demographic variables, still prove to be interesting and important for service providers, and as an effect should be interesting for sociologists. Using the strength-based perspective for research leads to a better and more productive view of homeless youth, and can lead to the better service provider and homeless youth relations.

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APPENDICES: Tables

Appendix A: Table 1

Table 1
 AYCNA 2015: Thematic Coding of the Kinds of Dream Categories from the Aspirations Question

Kinds of Dream	N	%	Primary Theme	Example
Housing	8	1.3	Owning their own house, have apartment condo, etc	“I have a regular (house). Being off the street.”
Money	19	3	Making money, be a millionaire, be rich	“To be rich and famous.”
Entrepreneur	75	12	Owning their own business	“Own her own hair salon.”
School	52	8.3	Go to school or finishing school	“Get my GD, go to college and shine.”
Parenthood/Family	55	8.8	Maintaining their current family or starting a family	“I wanted to be a very good mother.”
Independence/Success	121	19.3	Want to live on their own	“To be successful in having my own place, job, etc”
Music	68	10.8	Join the music industry	“To have a lot of money and be a rapper”
Big Career	129	20.6	Lucrative Careers such as lawyers, engineers, doctors etc	“Professional boxer, rapper, and artist and do better for self”
Happiness/Peace	17	2.7	Wanted to be happy	“To be happy and not have stress”
Change the World	39	6.2	Wanted to change the world, get rid of rate, help individuals like themselves	“To find a way to universally teach love to everyone. To homeschool her son.”
Travel	9	1.4	Travel	“To travel the world, African and Europe in particular”
Stable Job	29	4.6	Get a job to maintain	“Have a career, not a job. Have a secure position”
Other	3	1	Improve Health, porn, stripper, sex work, drug sales, illegal work	“Wants to film a porn”

Appendix B: Table 2

Table 2
 AYCNA 2015: Thematic Coding of Future Orientation Type from the Aspirations Question

Dreams	N	%	Primary Theme	Examples
Bystanders	22	3.4	Individuals who either didn't have dreams or wanted to stay where they were	"I don't believe in dreams" "I just like smoking weed" "Can't say"
Planners	193	29.8	Individuals who had planned dreams or modest dreams (i.e. affording food, becoming a good parent)	"Get a job and get an apartment" "To get on her feet so she can do something for herself and not depend on others. She would like to be a cosmetologist some day" "Go to school"
Dreamer	433	66.8	Individuals who had lofty dreams without any real plans of how to achieve those goals	"To become rich and own my own multi-billionaire" "Get rich and get signed to Young Money. After that, fake my own death and disappear"

Appendix C: Table 3 & 4

Table 3

AYCNA 2015: Individual Chi-Square Results from Demographic Variables and the Aspirations Question

	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	P
Age	1.480	2	0.477
Gender	0.670	2	0.413
Race	0.033	1	0.855
Time Spent Homeless	8.639	5	0.124
Sexual Orientation	8.477	1	0.004*

* Significance $p > 0.05$

Table 4

AYCNA 2015: Individual Logistic Regression Results of Future Orientation

	-2 LL	Chi Square	Degrees of Freedom	P	Pseudo R²*
Age	788.038	1.255	1	0.267	0.002
Gender	788.620	0.673	1	0.412	0.001
Race	785.423	0.033	2	0.855	0.000
Time Spent Homeless	780.950	1.043	10	0.307	0.002
Sexual Orientation	777.552	9.316	1	0.002**	0.014

*Cox and Snell Pseudo R² has been reported

**significance $p > 0.05$

Appendix D: Table 5

Table 5: AYCNA 2015: Logistic Regression of Demographic Predictors of Strength of Future

Orientation

Effect	Frequencies		B	S.E.	Wald	Exp(B)	Sig.
Age	Minors	29	0.053	0.035	2.363	1.055	0.124
	18-29	157					
	20-25	457					
Gender	Not Men	251	0.069	0.182	0.144	0.450	0.704
	Men	392					
Race	Not Black	186	0.074	0.048	.476	1.076	0.705
	Black	457					
Time Homeless	Less than 1 month	115	0.033	0.048	0.476	1.034	0.409
	1-2 months	108					
	2-3 months	68					
	3-6 months	99					
	6 months-1 year	99					
	More than 1 year	154					
Sexual Orientation	Not Lesbian & gay	554	-0.798	0.300	7.065	0.450	0.008*
	Lesbian and gay	90					

Model Statistics- -2LL 767.839, R² 0.20, sign 0.026*, Chi-square- 12.756

*significance at p>0.05