HARVEY’S HOMELESS: DISASTER THROUGH THE EYES OF THE STREET

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ABSTRACT

Shawn Richard Griffith: Harvey’s Homeless: Disaster Through the Eyes of the Street
(Under the direction of Caela O’Connell)

This thesis examines the impacts of Hurricane Harvey on the street homeless population of Houston, Texas and the subsequent disaster response coordinated by the City of Houston and Houston's Continuum of Care (CoC)—The Way Home. This photo-ethnographic study was conducted 18 months post-Harvey and followed a socio-ecological mixed methods approach. Using a political ecology theoretical orientation, the preliminary results are broken into three areas—“Disturbance Regimes”, “Disaster for whom?”, and “CoC Intervention”—to describe street homeless experiences of disaster and the coordinated disaster response. Based off these preliminary results, I argue that homeless individuals are conditioned to a disaster context making Harvey “like any other day.” Moreover, I assert that disaster can be viewed as an opportunity for homeless peoples as new pathways out of homelessness are created that did not exist pre-disaster. This orientation justifies increasing CoC funding and integration as a disaster preparedness measure.
This work is dedicated to all those living on the street doing what they must to survive.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my entire family for your love and support during the tumultuous journey that Graduate School became. The completion of this work would not have been possible without the unconditional support from every one of you.
PREFACE

Man walks along the railroad track
He’s goin’ some place, there’s no turnin’ back
The Highway Patrol chopper comin’ up, over the ridge
Man sleeps by a campfire under the bridge
The shelter line stretchin’ around the corner
Welcome to the New World Order

The Ghost of Tom Joad
Rage Against the Machine¹

Loaves and Fishes soup kitchen in downtown Houston, Texas (photo by Shawn Griffith)

¹ “The Ghost of Tom Joad” was originally recorded by Bruce Springsteen as a folk rock song in 1995 with Columbia Records. Rage Against the Machine would cover and record the song as a single in 1997. The song pays homage to John Steinbeck’s (1939) novel The Grapes of Wrath from which Tom Joad is a character.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES........................................................................................................ ix
LIST OF FIGURES........................................................................................................... x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.............................................................................................. xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................... 1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK............................ 17
  Homelessness Discourse................................................................................................. 17
  What is Disaster?.............................................................................................................. 22
  Vulnerability.................................................................................................................. 25
  Resilience....................................................................................................................... 26
  Ecology.......................................................................................................................... 27
  The Political Ecology of Homelessness........................................................................... 29
CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND............................................................................................. 32
  Brief History of Homelessness in Western Society......................................................... 32
  United States Welfare & Homelessness Policy.............................................................. 34
  History of Houston & Homelessness............................................................................. 43
  Hurricane Harvey.......................................................................................................... 49
CHAPTER 4: METHODS, MATERIALS, & ANALYSIS................................................ 53
  Working with Homeless Populations............................................................................. 53
  Study Design................................................................................................................ 56
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Breakdown of research informants and data collected........................................57
Table 2 – Homeless and HSP interview informants...............................................................62
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – "Hilltop" encampment.............................................................................................................. 2
Figure 2 – Knowles—Temenos Place Apartments Plaque........................................................................ 3
Figure 3 – Medical refuse left after overdose revival............................................................................. 6
Figure 4 – Estimates of people experiencing homelessness in the United States, 2007-2009............... 8
Figure 5 – Demolition of I-40 viaduct encampment in Knoxville, TN....................................................... 11
Figure 6 – 2018 estimates of race in Houston, Texas................................................................................. 45
Figure 7 – Houston Continuum of Care estimates for people experiencing homelessness, 2005-2019.............................................................................................................. 47
Figure 8 – Hurricane Harvey in the Gulf of Mexico................................................................................ 49
Figure 9 – Hurricane Harvey estimated total rainfall............................................................................. 50
Figure 10 – Hurricane Harvey track........................................................................................................ 51
Figure 11 – Harris, Fort Bend, & Montgomery County Point-in-Time count comparison................. 52
Figure 12 – Ecclesia & Harmony House monthly barbeque................................................................. 60
Figure 13 – Homeless encampment example......................................................................................... 65
Figure 14 – Sleeping rough example.................................................................................................... 66
Figure 15 – Environmental Protection Agency Method 6200 soil sample........................................... 69
Figure 16 – Wheeler fencing.................................................................................................................. 69
Figure 17 – Homeless man panhandling.............................................................................................. 70
Figure 18 – Overpass cover example: Chartres.................................................................................... 73
Figure 19 – Tree canopy cover example................................................................................................. 74
Figure 20 – Tree patch encampment & continued use post leaf shedding............................................. 75
Figure 21 – Alpha's pallet shelter........................................................................................................... 76
Figure 22 – Bravo's Harvey refuge location............................................................................................ 78
Figure 23 – Wheeler patch dynamics................................................................. 90
Figure 24 – Houston homeless sleeping arrangements heat map.......................... 92
Figure 25 – Houston homeless sleeping arrangements heat map with ordinance enforcement zone overlay................................................................. 93
Figure 26 – Homeless individual sleeping rough & escaping the cold...................... 96
Figure 27 – Sleeping Structure in Whiskey's encampment..................................... 97
Figure 28 – Venn diagram of homeless informants within Baker’s taxonomic spectrum........ 100
Figure 29 – Homeless informants plotted within Baker’s taxonomic spectrum.............. 104
Figure 30 – SEARCH Homeless Services............................................................. 108
Figure 31 – McDonald's hostile architecture during "blue sky" conditions..................... 110
Figure 32 – Ecclesia & Paper Company Cafe....................................................... 115
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACLU</td>
<td>American Civil Liberties Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990</td>
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<td>AFDC</td>
<td>Aid to Families with Dependent Children</td>
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<td>ARRA</td>
<td>American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>BLS</td>
<td>United States Bureau of Labor Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>CARES</td>
<td>Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act of 2020</td>
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<td>CE</td>
<td>Coordinated Entry</td>
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<td>CHH</td>
<td>Coalition for the Homeless Houston</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoC</td>
<td>Continuum of Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>Domestic Policy Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Encampment</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMS</td>
<td>Emergency Medical Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESS</td>
<td>Encampment with Soil Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDR</td>
<td>Franklin Delano Roosevelt</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMA</td>
<td>Federal Emergency Management Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>FHA</td>
<td>Federal Housing Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GHWB</td>
<td>George Herbert Walker Bush</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>Global Positioning System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Housing Harvey's Homeless</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCDA</td>
<td>Housing and Community Development Act of 1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEARTH</td>
<td>Homeless Emergency and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009</td>
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<tr>
<td>HERA</td>
<td>Housing and Recovery Act of 2008</td>
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<td>HHS</td>
<td>United States Department of Health and Human Services</td>
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<td>HOT Team</td>
<td>Houston Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team</td>
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<td>HSP</td>
<td>Homeless Service Provider</td>
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<td>HUD</td>
<td>United States Department of Housing and Urban Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>IPCC</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBJ</td>
<td>Lyndon Baines Johnson</td>
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<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Millennium Ecosystem Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Metropolitan Statistical Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLCHP</td>
<td>National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty</td>
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<td>NOAA</td>
<td>National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration</td>
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<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIT</td>
<td>Point-in-Time</td>
</tr>
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<td>PRWORA</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSH</td>
<td>Permanent Supportive Housing</td>
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<td>PXRF</td>
<td>Portable X-Ray Fluorescence</td>
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<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Homeless Resource</td>
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<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-ecological Systems</td>
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<td>SNAP</td>
<td>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program</td>
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<td>SR</td>
<td>Sleeping Rough</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRO</td>
<td>Single Room Occupancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDOT</td>
<td>Texas Department of Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USGCRP</td>
<td>United States Global Change Research Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>USHA</td>
<td>United States Housing Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>USICH</td>
<td>United States Interagency Council on Homelessness</td>
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<td>WMO</td>
<td>World Meteorological Organization</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Humanity has reached yet another pivotal moment in history eerily like only a century ago. Populism and nationalism are on the rise across the world. Charismatic leaders like Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Rodrigo Duterte, and Boris Johnson have reached powerful positions with nationalist and isolationist political platforms that magnify perceived human differences and the rightful place of certain human groups over others. Moreover, these leaders have reignited fascism (European Economic & Social Committee, 2018) and employ fascist-like tactics to destabilize the media, jeopardizing global press throughout the world (Washington Post Editorial Board, 2019). Similarly, humanity is in the throes of another pandemic—Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (COVID-19). COVID-19 has swept across the world and illuminated vulnerabilities embedded within globally intertwined socio-ecological systems (SES). The United States (US) has been hit particularly hard and leads all confirmed cases with 6,531,437 and 194,238 deaths as of September 14, 2020 (John Hopkins University & Medicine, 2020). The pandemic has devastated the US economy and pushed 23,078,000 individuals onto unemployment rolls (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2020).

Simultaneously, a racial reckoning has been revived with the killings of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, and Breonna Taylor by Louisville Metropolitan police officers Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove. As a result, the Black Lives Matter movement gained significant traction and protests against police brutality toward people of color spread across the US and eventually the globe. At the heart of movements like Black Lives Matter is the inequality, trauma, and violence that accompanies human differences
and perceived “otherness” (Hallam & Street, 2013). Courtney Cogburn (2019) has demonstrated how racism engenders inequality and produces negative health outcomes for people of color. “Otherness” affects care, societal acceptance, and upward mobility in the US, and homelessness epitomizes a state of “otherness” — a state that brings negative outcomes within nearly all aspects of life:

Vignettes from the Field: “dope alley”

It is my first morning on the ground in Houston, and I have an informal meeting to discuss Hurricane Harvey with the Coalition for the Homeless Houston. As I park, I see an encampment in the distance that tracks along multiple diverging overpasses. I am early to the meeting and decide to walk by the camp to get an initial feel for the patch. I count roughly 37 tents spread throughout the area with a large concentration along the left side of this picture (see Figure 1). The residents are primarily black, from what I can tell from the street. I snap the photo and round the corner to head back. I see an apartment building, but there is something
strange about the setting. The building mixed with the people coming, going, and lingering has
an institutional feel. I see a plaque on the building and investigate it.

![Plaque](image)

**Figure 2: Knowles-Temenos Place Apartments Permanent Supportive Housing Program (photo by Shawn Griffith)**

*I realize that the building is permanent supportive housing for chronically homeless individuals and was philanthropically funded by Beyoncé Knowles—“The Knowles Family.” As I read the plaque, a man lingering near the building engages me in conversation. It is around 8:30 in the morning and the man, who goes by Charlie, is clutching a 24 oz Steel Reserve in a brown paper bag. It is clear that Charlie has addiction and mental health issues, but he is curious about what I am doing. I explain my fieldwork project and that I am trying to talk with folks living on the street who were affected by Harvey. Charlie expresses interest in helping me*

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2 Pseudonyms have been applied to all informants. See "Chapter 4: Working with Homeless Individuals" for description of pseudonym usage.
out and we begin talking about “Hilltop.” Charlie used to frequent the encampment, but no longer goes. He is hesitant about entering the camp now. He calls it “dope alley”….

Charlie left an impression of danger and exclusivity that influenced my approach for engaging Hilltop, and I held off on entering the camp until a ride-along with Tare. An adept outreach worker, Tare is well-known and respected throughout Houston’s homeless population. As we pull up to Hilltop, Tare parks the van on the street and we head into the encampment. It becomes obvious that Tare is a welcomed face as many residents are eager to speak with him. Just as Charlie had expressed, the camp was full of residents in the throes of addiction. As we move deeper into the camp, there are roughly nine people lounging and shooting the shit in front of a line of tents that block the road.

Tare asks if they want water and hygiene supplies, and many of them say “yes.” While Tare is gone, I strike up a conversation with a few members of the group. I tell them I am from Knoxville and here researching Harvey. As we talk, a shift in the group dynamics occurs and something feels off. Oscar starts pouring water on a rag and puts it on November’s head while she sits limply in a camping chair. Considering that it is nearly 100°F, this should not seem strange, but something is wrong. The group’s anxiety begins to spike. Sierra starts getting distressed. She starts slapping November’s cheeks saying, "Come on November, come on November!" At this point, I realize that November is overdosing. Sierra starts frantically yelling, "She is turning purple!"

I immediately get out my phone and call 911. I give the dispatcher the street corner and encampment location as November falls out of her chair onto the ground. The encampment residents flip November on her back and Victor starts performing CPR. After two rounds, the compressions cause November to seize. With each compression, November’s arms extend, and
her hands and legs twitch rapidly. Determined, Victor keeps doing compressions and giving
breaths. The camp is in a tizzy. People keep screaming, "Come on November!" as they continue
to slap her face to keep her awake. November falls completely unconscious and is turning more
purple, seizing after every compression. It appears November is going to die. I cannot see any
movement or breathing. She is totally limp and turning purple in the face.

I finally hear sirens and run to the street. One of the residents is already in the middle of
the road waving his hands in the air. A team of six EMS personnel walk nonchalantly into the
encampment. As the situation unfolds, the EMS team acts with little expediency. There is an air
of resentment for having to be here. It feels as if they begrudge treating her and have little
concern if she lives or dies. They ask everyone to step away. Two personnel members kneel, but
neither continue chest compressions. EMS-A\(^3\) feels for a pulse. He then ties off her arm and
inserts an IV. EMS-B removes an external breathing device from its packaging. However, he
does not use the device or start chest compressions. The four other EMS personnel members
stand together away from the encampment residents and simply watch. After inserting the IV,
EMS-A takes what appears to be a blood sample. He then intravenously administers Naloxone.

November begins to revive. The encampment residents are elated. EMS-A and EMS-B try
to speak with her, but she is too disoriented. She continues to nod in and out of consciousness
with her hands quivering. They forcefully sit her up but do not support her neck. Her head falls
backwards, limp. Two of the other team members wheel a gurney into the encampment. EMS-A
and EMS-B grab November under each of her armpits while the four other team members
continue to watch. November is still very disoriented and not completely conscious. EMS-A and
EMS-B sling her onto the gurney, but her legs are still dangling off. They toss her legs on with

\(^3\) "EMS-A, EMS-B, and EMS-C" denote individual EMS personnel members.
equal force and lack of care. They strap her lap down and wheel her off. EMS-C walks to the front of the open tent directly behind where November was sitting. On the ground is a pair of sandals she had been wearing. EMS-C asks if they are November’s and upon affirmation forcefully throws them through the open tent door hitting the back wall of the tent. I look down and the external breather, flushes, and packaging are strewn across the ground (see Figure 3).

The other EMS personnel who have stood back and watched this situation unfold show no intention of picking up the medical refuse. The acts symbolize their outward disdain for treating homeless addicts. This space is not viewed as peoples’ homes. The residents notice and lament their frustrations. I ask if I can take a picture. Agreeing, Victor says, “post that shit.”
To be homeless in the US means belonging to a society that dismisses your humanity. Homelessness is a distinctive, liminal space (Hopper, 2003) of ‘otherness’ (Amster, 2008; Hallam & Street, 2013) where physical existence is seen as a nuisance, dangerous, and unwanted (Erikson 1995; Ring 2019). As a result, local governments construct policies to regulate public space to eliminate, reduce, and prevent the presence of homeless peoples (Mitchell, 2003; Ruppert, 2006). While some cities, like Seattle, Washington (Greenstone, 2020), have addressed homelessness more humanely by allowing public space occupation in certain areas of the city, adoption of this approach is infrequent and consistently faces backlash from community residents, business leaders, and politicians alike. Fervent societal exclusion and constant exposure to the natural elements require unabating adaptation and perseverance by homeless individuals to cope with physical and social environmental extremes. Whether they are utilizing the greater society’s material refuse to build shelters or establishing networks of reciprocity and support to pool resources, their economic and social resourcefulness, adaptability, and mettle determine their daily survival.

As of 2019, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ([HUD], 2020a) estimated the total US homeless population to be 567,715, with 356,422 considered sheltered—“living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement” (HUD, 2014, p. 7)—and 211,293 considered unsheltered—“primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings” (HUD, 2014, p.8). While these estimates are widely criticized as under representative (Agans et al., 2014; Smith & Castañeda-Tinoco, 2018), the 2019 estimate marked a 2.7% increase in the total US homeless population,
with both the total and unsheltered homeless populations exhibiting increasing trends since 2016 as illustrated in Figure 4.

For 567,715 homeless individuals, contemporary circumstances are becoming increasingly challenging as compounding pressures from their physical and social environments show little sign of future abatement. On one front, climate change is altering and magnifying the daily struggle of life in an exposed physical environment, especially for street (unsheltered) homeless individuals. Research indicates that the last three decades have seen successively warmer temperatures and that the northern hemisphere over that time has experienced its warmest temperatures in the last 1400 years (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2013; IPCC, 2018). A warming climate is lowering sea-ice extent in Antarctica and the Arctic and melting glacial reserves resulting in rising sea levels and warming sea-surface temperatures (World Meteorological Organization [WMO], 2020). As a result, the frequency and intensity of weather extremes is increasing, jeopardizing human well-being across the globe with

\[\text{Figure 4: Estimates of people experiencing homelessness in the US, 2007-2019 (HUD, 2020b)}\]
vulnerable populations, like homeless individuals, at particular risk (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MA], 2005; U.S. Global Change Research Program [USGCRP], 2018).

On the other front, homeless individuals’ social environments are becoming progressively more exclusionary, oppressive, and volatile. The ‘criminalization of homelessness’ is flourishing across the US (Amster, 2008; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2014; Aykanian & Lee 2016). The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty ([NLCHP], 2019) findings suggest that policies criminalizing basic aspects of homelessness— (1) camping in public; (2) sleeping in public; (3) sitting and lying down in public; (4) loitering, loafing, and vagrancy; (5) begging; (6) living in vehicles; (7) food sharing; (8) property storage; (9) public urination and defecation; and (10) scavenging—are prevalent throughout the US and that all measured categories have increased since 2006. As the ‘criminalization of homelessness’ rises across the US (Kieschnick, 2018), homeless individuals are caught in a predicament—wherever they are is a place they cannot be.

The gap between effective policy and practical outcomes has widened, with policies criminalizing basic needs of human survival and increasing risk and vulnerability to the elements and extreme weather events. These city ordinances deconstruct encampments and remove belongings homeless peoples use to endure harsh weather conditions. Policies are “rooted in prejudice, fear, and misunderstanding and serve businesses and housed neighbors over the needs of unhoused neighbors” (NLCHP, 2019, p. 15). Local governments justify policies as necessary because of environmental degradation (Ho, 2019), public health (Trovall, 2018), safety (Ward, 2018), and flawed homeless enablement concerns (see ‘Food Sharing’ NLCHP, 2014). Often, however, they are increasing vulnerability of homeless individuals by causing social instability, uncertainty for resource pooling, disrupted networks of communication, and trauma.
Cumulatively, these policies diminish homeless peoples’ adaptive capacity and push them to the fringe of society with greater exposure to environmental conditions.

Prior to entering graduate school, I witnessed these mounting pressures firsthand. I was a street outreach worker in Knoxville, Tennessee working specifically with runaway and homeless youth. My position necessitated interaction with the city’s entire homeless population to identify youth living on the street. I visited encampments and areas where homeless peoples frequently congregated to connect individuals with resources and housing. As a highly marginalized population, building rapport was crucial as trust can be hard to come by with many of them. I learned quickly that an effective way to build trust with homeless peoples was to simply be present and listen as they are too often simply ignored.

I heard the struggles they were having with accessing resources and getting off the street. I learned of their traumatic pasts, and I listened as they complained about the cops hassling them the day before and taking all their “stuff.” Moreover, I observed how they protected themselves from the elements with scavenged materials. I saw the “hustle” and the demands survival necessitated from both their physical and social environments. I became intimately aware of the systemic barriers that prevented individuals from obtaining housing as I struggled to move my own clients through the system. And I stood, supporting my "unhoused" emotionally distraught neighbors as bulldozers demolished their homes in Knoxville’s largest encampment to make a “homeless day space” seen in Figure 5 (Halm, 2018).

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4 "Hustle" or "Hustling" is a colloquial term that encompasses differing activities and persuasive tactics homeless individuals use to gather money and material resources. In many ways, "hustling" is viewed as "working" or "being on the clock" as they need to obtain money and resources to meet their needs. Many homeless individuals will refuse to continue interacting while "hustling" if you do not provide compensation.
I carried these experiences into this research project, and they guided my research focus. As I considered the mounting pressure on homeless individuals, I asked: what happens when homeless individuals’ physical and social environments are pushed to the extreme of disaster? Presently, a research gap exists on the impacts of disaster on homeless peoples, particularly with street homeless individuals. The junction of disaster and homelessness is a contradictory space where individuals who are living in a constant state of flux now navigate the greater society’s newfound instability and comprehensive research on the subject is needed to better support and understand issues homeless peoples face during these times.

A spate of research on the subject exists, but the field is still nascent. Research on the subject has focused on the everyday disaster that is homelessness (Vickery, 2015; Vickery, 2017;
Gaillard, Walters, Rickerby, & Shi, 2019); the lack of homeless perspectives in disaster risk reduction policy and education (Walters & Gaillard, 2014; Every & Thompson, 2014; Every, 2015; Every & Richardson, 2017); the increased vulnerability of homeless individuals to disaster (Wisner, 1998; Cusack, Loon, Kralik, Arbon, & Gilbert, 2013; Every & Richardson, 2017); housing barriers post-disaster (Gin, Der-Martirosian, Stanik, & Dobalian, 2019); and disrupted resource access during a disaster context (Settembrino, 2015; Settembrino 2016). However, more ethnographic research focused on street homeless individuals’ personal perspectives of disaster is needed.

My prior experiences and review of disaster literature led to my working thesis that the daily struggles homeless peoples face predispose them to manage a disaster context. This predisposition grants them a unique capacity to “ride out the storm”, but I pursued research to seek evidence for what was happening on the ground and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what “riding out the storm” truly meant. As a result, this research informs how marginalized populations simultaneously adapt to disturbances from their social and physical environments and shows how marginalized states influence perspectives of disaster. It underscores homeless agency during disaster contexts and shows how and why homeless individuals make decisions based off their immediate physical and social environmental pressures. In doing so, the nuances of street homeless perspectives of disaster are brought to light and better interventions can be created to support this population during a disaster context. For half a million homeless individuals in the US, the advent of a disaster raises the acute question: “Where do I go if there is nowhere that I can be?” In order to answer this question, I designed a study that would investigate social and environmental processes in relation to the effects of disasters on homeless peoples’ experiences.
In August of 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall along the middle coast of Texas, devastating coastal communities and the greater Houston, Texas area. The resulting disaster offered a unique opportunity to not only study the junction of disaster and homelessness, but also how one of the nation’s most regarded homeless service systems adapted to provide supportive resources for its increasing homeless population (Coalition for the Homeless Houston [CHH], 2014). As such, this thesis addresses the following questions:

1) How do daily hardships and disturbances affect homeless peoples, and is it possible that such experiences condition them to a disaster context, effectively altering their experience of disaster?

2) How does a disaster context create advantageous opportunities for homeless individuals and the overarching homeless service provider system that otherwise would not have been present if the disaster had not occurred?

To answer these questions, I conducted socio-ecological mixed-methods ethnographic fieldwork in 2019 with Houston’s street homeless population and homeless service providers. The following thesis addresses these two questions while simultaneously bringing readers closer to street homeless individuals’ lived realities by way of photo-ethnography. Consequently, some photos are visually jarring and may elicit negative perceptions of homeless individuals’ way of life. An open mind is needed when assessing this research to not further entrench homeless marginalization.

This thesis engages my fieldwork findings framed around the earlier questions as follows. Chapter two is a literature review synthesizing existing literature in the fields of public health, 

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5 Homeless service provider is an all-encompassing category that includes any individual working within or near Houston’s CoC. This was done to increase confidentiality of informants. See “Chapter 4: Methods, Materials, and Analysis” for HSP position breakdown.
psychology, social work, ecology, and anthropology on homelessness, disaster studies, and ecology to construct a theoretical framework for the political ecology of homelessness. Chapter Three provides background on homelessness in western history; US welfare and homelessness policy; the history of Houston and homelessness; and Hurricane Harvey. Chapter Four details the socio-ecological mixed-methods used during fieldwork and covers analytical methods. Chapter Five presents my research findings, results, and recommendations.

To enable a more in-depth discussion of my findings, Chapter Five contains three subsections. The first subsection—“Disturbance Regimes”—considers my findings in relation to research question one. Here, I apply two formative ecological theories—disturbance ecology (Huston, 1979; Shugart, 1984; White, 2006) and patch dynamics (Thompson, 1978; Pickett & White, 1985)—to the context of homelessness. I argue that homeless disturbance regimes are social and environmental in origin and result in “homeless patch dynamics.” I support this argument with analyzed Global Position System (GPS) data collected during fieldwork to demonstrate how social and environmental factors affect homeless spatial dynamics in central downtown Houston.

The second subsection—“Disaster for Whom?”—documents how homeless individuals managed Harvey and the resulting disaster. Here, I address both research questions and emphasize the paradoxical nature of disaster for homeless individuals. I argue that as a population constantly subjected to loss of personal belongings, altered livelihoods, and daily hardship, homeless individuals during Harvey’s disaster just experienced another reshuffling of an already poor hand of cards. Thus, homeless individuals felt like Harvey was just “like any other day.” Nevertheless, my findings suggest that many homeless individuals are conditioned to disaster’s hardships, and their previous adaptations to social and environmental systems allow
some to orchestrate a disaster context to their advantage. In this way, Harvey’s disaster created opportunities for homeless individuals to improve their immediate circumstances and provided pathways to exit homelessness that otherwise would not have been present.

The final subsection—“CoC Intervention”—examines the disaster reconstruction efforts made jointly by the City of Houston and Houston’s Continuum of Care (CoC)—“The Way Home.” I engage research question two through qualitative analysis of interviews and participant observation. By addressing historical issues involving the delivery of homeless services, I underscore why Houston’s CoC was restructured to create an “integrated system” as homeless service providers, since the establishment of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (1987), have struggled to provide coordinated responses to homelessness throughout the US. Moreover, the discussion exemplifies why Houston’s CoC was called upon to perform disaster relief after Harvey. The result is a non-governmental system built with the primary function of re-housing individuals judiciously applied during a disaster context to provide streamlined and tailored housing access. I argue that the success of the CoC’s “disaster rapid re-housing” program creates opportunity and justification for CoCs around the country to further integrate and bolster their homeless service system as a disaster preparedness measure.

The conclusion provides policy recommendations for decision-makers and those serving homeless populations. Echoing calls from Phillipe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg (2009) for the necessity of “critically applied public anthropology” and many in the discipline enacting and supporting more applied work especially at the intersection of disasters and environmental anthropology (Oliver-Smith, 2016), this research is not simply “intellectual voyeurism” (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). Homeless individuals are exceptionally vulnerable, and research with this population requires putting theory into practice. Moreover, researchers cannot be
paralyzed by the confines of the researcher role as homeless individuals continue to suffer.

While true solutions to contemporary homelessness likely require radical reorientations of economic and social structures and practices, it is safe to say that such radical change will not happen expeditiously. Consequently, realistic change to ease suffering of homeless individuals must be situated under current economic, social, and political frameworks. As such, the conclusion addresses how fortifying and increasing integration, functionality, and funding of local CoCs serves not only to benefit homeless populations during non-disaster settings, but also serves as a community disaster mitigation and preparedness effort. Additionally, I provide pragmatic feedback on policy choices made by the City of Houston, such as city ordinance implementation, camp sweeps, and the restriction of public restroom access, to improve the local everyday circumstances of Houston’s homeless population.

Beyond policy and disaster response suggestions, the conclusion explores how studying the nexus of homelessness and disaster contributes to disaster studies and environmental anthropology. The paradoxical nature of a state of homelessness expands our understanding of disaster and reinforces how historically produced vulnerability is the cause of such contexts. Additionally, applying socio-ecological theories to homelessness underscores the deep interconnection of social and physical environments and how similar processes—disturbance regimes and patch dynamics—exhibit similar outcomes in different arenas. The discussion further destabilizes the human/nature divide to show that social and environmental systems are intertwined with human ideologies and practices. As a result, I argue that humans have the capacity to simultaneously ease the plight of homeless individuals and slow the progression of a shifting climate by altering human actions and ideological constructions.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this literature review, I engage three large fields of study relevant to this research—homelessness, disasters, and ecology. It is organized into three segments. In segment one—“Homelessness Discourse”—I engage literature from multiple disciplines to situate contemporary homelessness discourse. The literature spans public health, psychology, social work, and anthropology. For segment two, I address literature on “disasters” and focus on three major concepts within the field—disaster, vulnerability, and resilience—that are intrinsic to this thesis. The final segment covers literature from ecology to foreground my application of disturbance ecology and patch dynamics to the context of homelessness.

**Homelessness Discourse**

Homelessness research is extensive and global in nature. Fields such as public health, psychology, social work, and anthropology all play crucial roles in understanding and critically analyzing homelessness. Contemporary public health research regarding homelessness focuses on three areas: (1) the relationship between housing and health (Fransham & Dorling, 2018; Elder & King, 2019; Aldridge et al., 2019); (2) epidemiology of homeless populations and vulnerability to infectious diseases (D’Amore et al., 2001; Fazel et al., 2014; Fahimeh et al., 2014); and (3) homeless pathways (Laere, Wit, & Klazing, 2009; Fowler, Toro, & Miles, 2009; Brown et al., 2016).

Psychology’s focus within the discourse is at the nexus of mental illness and homelessness (Brandt, 2001). Martell, Rosner, and Harmon (1995) found that mentally ill defendants in New York City’s criminal justice system were 40 times more likely to experience
homelessness than the general population. Moreover, researchers demonstrated the common occurrence of comorbidity and co-occurring disorders among individuals experiencing homelessness (Torchalla et al., 2014; Polcin, 2016). Gelberg, Linn, and Leake (1988) found that homeless individuals with co-occurring disorders have the highest rates of arrests and felony convictions, and contemporary research demonstrates that housing homeless individuals with co-occurring disorders reduces involvement, or further involvement, with the criminal justice system (Mitchell, Clark, & Guenther, 2017). These acknowledgments fostered the housing first approach during the 2000s and a swath of studies examine the efficacy of this approach in alleviating homelessness with mentally ill homeless populations (Macnaughton et al., 2015; Kerman, Gran-Ruaz, Lawrence, & Sylvestre, 2019; O’Donovan, Russel, Kuipers, Siskind, & Elphinston, 2019).

Contemporary literature in social work has taken a strong stance toward addressing youth homelessness (Morewitz, 2016; Aptekar & Schoecklin, 2014). A recent study by J. J. Cutuli (2018) found that 16.3% of the Philadelphia public school system’s high school students had experienced homelessness and 11.7% were currently homeless. Additionally, social work research on homeless sexual minorities is burgeoning (Keuroghlian, Shtasel, & Bassuk, 2014). Kattari and Begun (2016) found that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals experience higher rates of homelessness than the general population and rely on survival sex to access basic needs. Moreover, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth have a disproportionate tendency to be homeless, experience victimization, and use addictive substances than heterosexual youth (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002). Compounding these issues, young adults (18-24) have the lowest shelter access rates, leaving them more vulnerable to victimization while increasing length of homelessness periods (Yoonsook,
For anthropology, one of the first ethnographic studies with homeless populations was conducted by James Spradley (1970) who examined why alcoholics who were consistently jailed for public intoxication immediately returned to drinking and street life upon release in Seattle’s “Skid Row”. The 1980s brought the first wave of American anthropological literature on US homelessness, led by Ann Marie Rousseau’s *Shopping Bag Ladies* (1981) and Ellen Baxter and Kim Hopper’s *Private Lives/Public Spaces* (1981). Rousseau explored individual life histories of homeless women in New York City and documented individual pathways to homelessness for women—abandonment, poverty, trauma, and lack of mental healthcare access (Rousseau, 1981).

Baxter and Hopper’s (1981) study with New York City’s homeless shed light on contemporary structural causes of homelessness—deinstitutionalization, unaffordable housing, and the overall state of the economy. After, Kim Hopper continued ethnographic work with New York City’s homeless, focusing on livelihood strategies (Hopper, Susser, & Conover, 1985); the construction of homelessness in the US (Hopper, Hamberg, & Community Service Society of New York, 1984); homeless advocacy through litigation (Hopper & Cox, 1982); the relationship between mental illness, institutionalization, and homelessness (Hopper, Jost, Hay, Welber, & Haughland, 1997); and the liminal state of homelessness (Hopper, 2003).

During the 1980s, the increasing presence of homeless black men on the streets of major metropolitan areas did not go unnoticed by anthropologists. Research began highlighting the disproportionate tendency for people of color to be homeless (Hopper, 2003; Passaro, 1996). Hopper (2003) suggested that for young black males, “when market losses in affordable housing and decent work are coupled with the mounting strains on extended families, feminization of
familial discipline, the growth in the drug trade, and continued failures of community-based mental health services, homelessness seems an all but foregone conclusion” (p. 167).

Anthropologists played a crucial role in destabilizing the homeless “personal pathology” narrative that ascribed homelessness as an individualistic issue relating to addiction, mental illness, or poor choices (Glasser & Bridgman, 1999). Additionally, scholarly work within medical anthropology began to scrutinize individual pathologies by viewing individual suffering as a societal problem rather than an individual’s problem (Kleinman, Das, & Lock, 1997). However, the “personal pathology” narrative pushed researchers to further address the relationship between addiction, mental illness, and homelessness.

Phillipe Bourgois engaged this nexus focusing his early work on addiction (Bourgois, 1998; Bourgois, 2000) and subaltern livelihood strategies such as drug-dealing (Bourgois, 1995; Bourgois, 1997). Bourgois became a seminal figure within homelessness discourse after publishing Righteous Dopefiend—a collaborative, longitudinal photo-ethnographic study with San Francisco Bay’s homeless intravenous heroin addicts (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009). The work covers a wide range of elements—ethnic polarization, gender relations, morally bound social networks, childhood experiences, income strategies, traumatic transgenerational relationships, running partners, bodily effects of enforcement, and substance abuse treatment—to holistically encompass life as a homeless heroin addict.

Given anthropology’s focus on structural and ideological forces perpetuating inequality and poverty throughout the world, anthropologists have been critical of neoliberalism’s effect on social welfare policy established to support homeless populations in the US. Activist anthropologist Vincent Lyon-Callo (2004) has been critical of HUD’s establishment of CoCs arguing that “in practice, the continuum of care system became a neoliberal continuum only as a
focus on individualized, market-based views of the social replaced the notion of a governmentally supported social safety net” (p. 12). Lyon-Callo's explication suggests that the governmental responsibility for providing the social safety net was further destabilized by the CoC system as non-governmental organizations are leaned upon to provide the US's social safety net.

After a surge of research within anthropology on homelessness between 1980 and 2010, scholarship on the subject is decreasing. Since 2015, the bulk of ethnographic literature on homelessness are dissertations and theses. A cluster of these works focus on homeless women and their experiences of heightened social seclusion (Morrison, 2017); management of health through sociality in shelters (Elliot, 2020); and the need for collaborative policy construction incorporating homeless women’s perspectives (Nelson, 2018). Other research scrutinizes views of homelessness as a social problem (Edwards, 2018) and how tactics like denial of place equate to forms of violence resulting in “parallel worlds” between housed and homeless individuals (Peck, 2016). A push to study homelessness outside of the developed world is strengthening. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork with street homeless individuals in Manila, Philippines, Boonlert Visetpricha’s (2015) dissertation draws critical attention to the need for increasing research on homelessness in the developing world while analyzing “the complexity of happiness in the context of hardship on the street” (p. 2), highlighting how happiness still exists within the context of homelessness.

Ethnographic journal articles and books on homelessness are relatively sparse over the past five years. Bruce O’Neill (2014, 2017) has put out a collection of research on Romania’s homeless population focusing on their affective state of boredom and cross-cultural differences in homelessness. Tasha Rennels and David Purnell (2017) employ auto-ethnographic methods to
reveal ways that homeless individuals make public spaces “homelike.” Tony Sparks (2017) conducted six months of fieldwork in Seattle’s tent city 3 and argues that residents live there “to feel human.” Lastly, Chris Herring (2019) examines “complaint oriented policing” of homeless populations and contends that such practices have unforeseen consequences such as employment barriers and increased vulnerability to crime and violence.

Given the surge of ethnographic work from the 1980s up through the 2000s, it is surprising to see such a precipitous drop-off in scholarship on contemporary homelessness within anthropology. It is tough to interpret why this has occurred, but it is apparent that interest exists among nascent scholars. Even with a drop in contemporary scholarship, past ethnographic work by Ellen Baxter, Kim Hopper, Phillipe Bourgois, and Vincent Lyon-Callo still shape anthropological understandings of homelessness and the discourse as a whole.

**What is Disaster?**

Anthropology, sociology, and geography have taken defining roles within disaster discourse. By engaging vulnerability and resilience, these disciplines engender critical examination of disasters and post-disaster reconstruction. But what is a disaster? What makes certain instances disasters while others fail to be? As Anthony Oliver-Smith (2020) suggests “the conjunction of a human population and a potentially destructive agent does not, however, inevitably produce a disaster” (p. 37).

If disaster is not a foregone conclusion of a potentially catastrophic event, then what factors contribute to disaster formation, severity, and length? Anthropology presses us to understand that humans, specifically human societies, are a key function of disasters (Hoffman, 2020). Natural events and hazards are solely natural (Cannon, 1994) while disasters are brought about by the unequal distribution of vulnerability and risk generated by socially constructed
systems (Hilhorst & Bankoff, 2004; Oliver-Smith, 2004). Thus, “natural disasters” are unequivocally “unnatural” (Alexander, 1997; Steinberg, 2000), and anthropologists have played a formative role in deconstructing disasters as “natural” by recognizing vulnerability’s role (Oliver-Smith, 1999; Bankoff, Frerks, & Hilhorst, 2004; Oliver-Smith, 2012). Moreover, Vincanne Adams (2013) suggests that “natural disaster” rhetoric hides the unequal distribution of vulnerability produced by socially constructed systems while simultaneously reinforcing and expanding such systems.

Anthropologists have begun to understand disasters as a two-step process (Schuller, 2016). First comes the triggering event, which can occur from environmental processes or be directly induced by human action (i.e. war, terrorism, or economic fluctuations). The second step is the human response to the triggering event. Both steps have tangible effects upon impacted societies, but the latter is where disaster risks and social vulnerabilities are exacerbated (Schuller & Maldonado, 2016).

This second stage became home to author Naomi Klein’s (2007) “disaster capitalism”. She argues that in recovery, disasters can induce rapid societal change (Hoffman, 2016) through neoliberal economic restructuring and can ultimately benefit private industry (Klein, 2007; Gunewardena & Schuller, 2008). Since neoliberalism strives for market liberalization, some have critiqued recovery efforts saying that many contemporary disasters result in financial prosperity for private corporations contracted for disaster relief rather than for the affected community (Johnson, 2011).

Given the complexity of disasters, anthropologists assert that disasters result from the interconnection between society, nature, and culture (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith, 1999). Due to this interconnectivity, hazardous events transform into disasters as a result of social
vulnerabilities (Gaillard, 2007). Moreover, disasters bring social vulnerabilities to light (Oliver-Smith, 2004). Disaster can then be perceived as a human populations’ overall adaptive capacity to the natural, built, and socially constructed environments (Oliver-Smith, 2020). In many ways, cultural adaptations have evolved over time to reduce disaster risk and present instances of disasters can be viewed as humanity’s adaptive failures to a myriad of human and environmental systems (Oliver-Smith, 2016).

However, if a group’s social vulnerability is tied to historically produced systemic processes, then how can a disaster be viewed as an adaptive failure? Rather, the adaptive failure is the result of circumscribed social vulnerability produced by human and environmental systems (Oliver-Smith, 2013). The triggering event brings the social vulnerability of certain groups to light leading to the disaster. Consequently, disasters can be viewed as historically produced since the conditions that led to the disaster were present long before the event occurred (Faas, 2016b).

Acknowledging disasters’ historical production allowed anthropologists to further question understandings of temporality and disaster. Disasters are not discrete events. Disasters are the coalescence of numerous variables inextricably tied to vulnerabilities produced by social, political, economic, and environmental systems over time (Schuller & Morales, 2012). Haiti’s disaster proneness is not merely the result of the nation-state’s geographic location situated close to a major fault line or in the path of tropical cyclones. Much to the opposite, Haiti’s disaster proneness is the culmination of hundreds of years of exploitation that have produced high levels of vulnerability for Haitians (Oliver-Smith 2012). In this way, precarity engenders disaster and precarity is produced over time.
Given vulnerability’s connection to disaster, social scientists have critically analyzed how vulnerability impacts disaster in theory and practice. But what is vulnerability and what are the pragmatic consequences of vulnerability’s use in disaster discourse? Early discussions in disaster circles viewed vulnerability as the “susceptibility to damage or injury” (Alexander, 1997). Conceptual understandings of vulnerability have grown to include “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover” (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis, 2004, p. 11) from disaster. However, this definition failed to incorporate how vulnerability is unequally distributed among certain human groups resulting in an increased proximity to hazards. As such, contemporary understandings view vulnerability as a measure of the inequitable spread of certain human groups' "proximity to hazards" (Faas, 2016a) combined with their ability “to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover” (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 2004).

Contemporary anthropologists have begun critically analyzing vulnerability on two fronts. First, scholars have consistently struggled to operationalize vulnerability, leading to shortcomings in policy and practice (Faas, 2016a). Second, vulnerability has been ascribed to populations who do not see themselves as vulnerable, resulting in deleterious effects. Gregory Bankoff (2001) contends that vulnerability can be used to justify Western intervention. Marino and Faas (2020) argue that “identifying a community as vulnerable has tacit implications that can function to perpetuate marginalization and violence in subaltern communities and spaces” (p. 2). Marino and Faas (2020) suggest that vulnerability should be ascribed to “relationships and assemblages” rather than individuals and communities (Marino & Faas 2020). From this vantage...
point, anthropologists can critically examine how these assemblages produce vulnerability rather than ascribing vulnerability as a label that can further marginalize populations.

**Resilience**

Working in tandem with vulnerability, the resilience paradigm acts as the pragmatic response for disaster mitigation and prevention (Gaillard, 2007). With a myriad of definitions, resiliency’s “flexibility and elasticity” grant dynamic usage in academia, science, policy, and practice (Weichselgartner & Kelman, 2015). Generally, disaster discourse understands resilience as “the ability to survive and cope with a disaster with minimum impact and damage” (Cutter et al., 2008, p. 600). However, disaster scholars argue that contemporary definitions of resilience are rooted in the physical sciences (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008) and ecology (Holling, 1973) where resilience is understood as the ability to absorb stress and return to a stable state. Robertos Barrios (2016) persuasively argues that such states of stability do not truly exist for human populations and that employing resilience from a ‘stability’ perspective is inadequate for understanding human responses to disaster.

Since resilience has been operationalized to encourage adaptive responses to mitigate disaster risk, conceptual understandings impact policy and practice related to disaster. As resilience gained strength in disaster discourse, decision makers began to assert the need to “Build Back Better” (Fernandez & Ahmed, 2019) or rebuild resilient communities (Barrios, 2014; Barrios, 2016). Yet, Mark Schuller has argued that resiliency paradigms can have an inverse effect where “it (resilience) can depoliticize inequality and demobilize efforts to reduce vulnerability” (Shuller, 2016). If rebuilding does not address the historical production of vulnerabilities that primed the disaster, then its primary function is little more than narrative
control. Moreover, Schuller (2016) argues that viewing vulnerable populations as simultaneously highly resilient has justified “doing less” for needy populations.

Disasters are complex situations involving social, technological, and environmental systems, and social scientists have made valiant efforts to holistically unravel disaster nuances. Critical discussions surrounding what a disaster is and how vulnerability and resilience factor into the disaster equation have allowed social scientists to demonstrate that systemic change is the true means for disaster mitigation. Moreover, disaster concepts are highly applicable to the context of homelessness, and this study shows how these concepts have pragmatic consequences for homelessness policy.

**Ecology**

Ecology has rapidly evolved over the last few decades. One of the defining disciplinary shifts is the destabilization of human/nature divide notions (Cronon, 1995; Kareiva, Watts, McDonald, & Boucher, 2007). Oswald Schmitz (2017) argues that “these seemingly divided realms are in fact intertwined socio-ecological systems—systems in which human political, cultural, religious, and economic institutions influence how nature works and how feedbacks from nature can instigate institutional change in a co-dependent way” (p. 6). Schmitz’s argument counters formerly held notions of nature in a state of balance where human interaction is the origin of ecological imbalance (Kramer, 1983; Simberloff, 2005). As Peter White (2006) suggests, “The balance of nature paradigm holds that ecosystems progress toward equilibrium states when free of human influence, that disturbances are external and rare, that communities composed of the most adapted species occur in undisturbed conditions, and that such communities are self-perpetuating” (p. 178). Humans are then the catalyst for ecosystem degradation and unable to positively influence ecological systems.
Disturbance ecology has played a formative role in countering equilibrium conceptualizations (Huston, 1979; Shugart, 1984; Pickett & White, 1985). Disturbance ecology views nature as a system in flux where perturbations, social and ecological, grant opportunities for organismal advance (Pickett & Thompson, 1978). White (2006) contends that “ecosystems are frequently disturbed in relation to the lifespans of the organisms present and thus are always in a state of response to previous disturbances, that disturbances are caused by factors both external and internal….and that some communities are regenerated only through disturbance” (p. 178). Thus, ecosystems have a constant ebb and flow from a multitude of variables, most notably human interaction with the system.

Early conceptualizations of disturbance ecology were wed with “patch dynamics” theory (Thompson, 1978). This theory suggests that “internal dynamics are generated by patterns of disturbance and subsequent patterns of succession” (Pickett & Thompson, 1978, p. 29). Internal and external disturbance regimes produce heterogeneous effects that influence patch formation, size, and frequency (Pickett & White, 1985).

New research in disturbance ecology and patch dynamics is pushing for further acknowledgment of scale. Contemporary research on pulse events—“any abrupt change, positive or negative, in system parameters” (Jentsch & White, 2019, p. 1)—suggests that three scales are influential to encompass pulse dynamics: (1) individual event scale; (2) landscape or multipatch (White & Jentsch, 2001) and pulse incident scale; and (3) global/continental environmental variation scale (Jentsch & White, 2019). By incorporating scale, Jentsch and White (2019) argue that pulse dynamics can account for multiple events through time and space that are influencing multipatch dynamics. In other words, disturbances are not solely discrete events and
patch/multipatch dynamics are influenced by the confluence of numerous pulse events at multiple scales.

I argue that concepts within ecology hold potential value for homelessness discourse. Disturbance ecology encapsulates homeless street dynamics as homeless individuals face constant perturbations (Kieschnick, 2018). Their shelters/habitats are frequently destroyed (McCormick-Cavanagh, 2020; Trovall, 2018; Davila, 2019), and they are herded throughout cities (The City of Houston, 2019; see Ord. No. 02-504, § 4, 6-12-02, Sit/Lie on Public Sidewalk). These perturbations generate “heterogenous and patchy” (Pickett & White, 1985) homeless encampments across cities that are constantly shifting in relation to internal and external disturbance regimes—a cycle that results in “homeless patch dynamics”.

The Political Ecology of Homelessness

During the 1970s the synthesis of ecological approaches with political economy occurred forming a new theoretical paradigm—political ecology. Eric Wolf (1972) made first mention of the concept to acknowledge how power relations influence human-environment interaction. Geographers Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield (1987) formally merged political economy and ecology theories creating the initial paradigmatic framework. Alleta Biersack (2006) argues that political ecology opens space for culture, power, history, and nature to be examined as intertwined, albeit dependent, arenas instead of isolated ones. As such, the paradigm focuses “on the respective roles and interactions of the state and the market and the influences on environmental outcomes” (Neumann, 2005, p. 6).

An important emphasis of political ecology is the epistemological and ontological conceptions of nature. Arturo Escobar (1999) contends that “the ‘crisis of nature’ is also a crisis of nature’s identity” (p. 1). Escobar (1999) recognizes the construction of nature’s identity by
humans where “the meaning of nature, to be sure, has shifted throughout history according to cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors” (p. 1). This understanding has led to the differentiation of nature, within political ecology, between “first nature” and “second nature”. First nature is a pristine and unaffected functioning entity whereas second nature is the acknowledgment of human discursive and pragmatic activity having a transformative role (Escobar, 1999).

Aletta Biersack (2006) maintains that contemporary political ecology has transformed into a post-Marxist framework. This form of political ecology emphasizes the discursive construction of reality and nature (Escobar, 1999) and prioritizes local-global interconnectivity influencing human-environment interaction. However, some scholars have critiqued political ecology as having little to do with ecology (Walker, 2005). Disputing this claim, Matthew Turner (2016) demonstrates how contemporary political ecologists incorporate ecological principles, specifically within environmental politics and the political economy of environmental change.

The political ecology of homelessness acknowledges the historical production of vulnerability generating homelessness as a result of power imbalances, systemic inequalities, and political marginalization. It recognizes how homelessness leads to increased exposure to hazardous conditions from both social and environmental systems. It understands homeless survival practices as adaptations to their social and environmental systems. Lastly, it allows researchers to play pivotal roles for applied outcomes with homeless peoples.

Speaking to the utilization of ethnography under a political ecology framework, Paul Little (2007) claims that, “the ethnographer possesses information that no other social actor has access to, which endows him with a specific quota of power within the (socioenvironmental)
conflict’s political arena” (p. 12). While ecological models of homelessness map how relationships and system interactions exist (Nooe & Patterson, 2010), little literature exists applying political ecology perspectives to the context of homelessness. The political ecology of homelessness is fertile area for intellectual inquiry. I apply this framework to engage critical discussions surrounding homeless realities and power to produce pragmatic feedback to policy makers, front-line workers, and homelessness discourse as a whole.
CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND

The following section provides background on the major elements of this thesis. First, to provide a historical understanding of homelessness in western society, I trace the evolution of homeless forms from the Tudor and Stuart periods to the industrial revolution of Europe and the US. In the process, I underscore how governments throughout this time attempted to control and regulate historical forms of homelessness. Second, I provide a thorough synopsis of US welfare and homeless policy, outlining major changes from the Great Depression to contemporary times. I pay particular attention to policy developments from 1980 to 2020 as homelessness surged and sustained over this time in the US. Third, I provide a focused historical background of Houston, Texas and urban homelessness. Lastly, I provide a brief synoptic history of Hurricane Harvey and how the storm impacted the City of Houston and the local homeless population.

**Brief History of Homelessness in Western Society**

Self-awareness, reason and imagination have disrupted the “harmony” which characterizes animal existence. Their emergence has made man into an anomaly, into the freak of the universe. He is part of nature, subject to her physical laws and unable to change them, yet he transcends the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is *homeless*, yet chained to the home he shares with all creatures. Cast into this world at an accidental place and time, he is forced out of it, again accidentally. Being aware of himself, he realizes his powerlessness and the limitation of his existence. He visualizes his own end: death. Never is he free from the dichotomy of his existence: he cannot rid himself of his mind, even if he should want to; he cannot rid himself of his body as long as he is alive—and his body makes him want to be alive.

Erich Fromm (1947, p. 40 emphasis added)

Erich Fromm’s passage is a poignant vignette to engage the convoluted subject of homelessness. At the time of Fromm’s writing, the contemporary form, function, and production
of homelessness had yet to come about in the US. In the passage he is not talking about a physical state of being “homeless”, but the conundrum that reason has placed upon human existence. Yet unknowingly, Fromm outlines the existence of what we now understand to be homelessness: a state subject to Mother Nature’s physical laws and forced into a state of constant adaptation; a state of separation while chained to the same home all creatures must share; and a state where individuals intimately understand their powerlessness and limitations, but their body and mind still yearn to be alive.

Society’s contemporary understanding and state of “homelessness” is nascent at the time of Fromm’s writing, but it is not as if homelessness has solely been an issue for contemporary societies. Historical forms of what we would consider homeless—vagrants, vagabonds, and tramps—are pervasive in Western history. Shakespeare consistently engaged vagrancy in theatrical works, particularly in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, and heavy handedly allied theatrical players with the lifestyle of vagabonds (Nesvet, 2004). Vagrancy laws were established as early as England’s Tudor and Stuart periods as a means to control the ‘Elizabethan underworld’ (Beier 1985). Lionel Rose (1988) examined British government regulation of vagabonds and tramps in the early 1800s underscoring vagrant resistance to regulation and assistance measures. Reviewing Rose’s (1988) work, Donald Ulin (1990) suggests that “throughout vagrancy legislation from the eighteenth century to present, we find no fixed definition of vagrancy, but a continual attempt to produce vagrancy as a discursive subject in order to control it” (p. 106).

Karl Marx, frustrated with vagrant disengagement with the working class, termed the lowest class of society the ‘lumpenproletariat’ (Bussard, 1987; Thoburn, 2002). In *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels (1848) envision the lumpenproletariat as “the ‘dangerous class’, the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of
the old society, may, here and there, be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue” (p. 20). Marx would go as far as describing the lumpenproletariat as the “scum, offal, and refuse of all classes” (Marx, 1852) after Louis Bonaparte garnered the support and bidding of vagrants, tramps, and beggars.

Vagrancy became a normality with the rise of “hoboes” in post-Civil War America as “a veritable army of homeless men, predominantly white and native-born, had occupied the nation, growing virtually unabated year by year until it had become such a permanent fixture on the American landscape that few thought it could ever be resettled” (Depastino, 2005, p. XVIII). American “hoboes” forged a new counter-culture of the time and redefined the meaning of home on the American frontier. During the Industrial Revolution, the establishment of poorhouses, or almshouses, brought about the first effort to institutionalize vagrants, the mentally ill, and homeless families/children in the US (Crannell, 2004).

But what should be taken from all of these historical examples? Should we view homelessness as a constant with nomenclature to fit the time? Rather, historical examples underscore the need to place homelessness within its historical context. While homelessness is not a unique problem of contemporary society, its present form, function, and production do not translate back through time. Thus, contemporary homelessness is bound to this point in time with vestiges of past forms embodied in present circumstance.

**United States Welfare & Homelessness Policy**

Homelessness would continue to evolve in post-industrial revolution America. The Great Depression left the US economy in shambles and more than 20% of Americans became unemployed (Duignan, 2013). Shanty towns, colloquially known as “Hoovervilles”, and “hobo
jungles” began to propagate throughout the country becoming some of the first instances of informal homeless settlements in the US (Dearborn & Harmon, 2012). The economic crisis would prompt federal legislative action by Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). The New Deal established the social safety net and created key programs within the US welfare system (Conkin, 1992).

The New Deal involved a slew of social welfare acts to stem the negative effects of the Great Depression. Two New Deal acts are important to this discussion: (1) the Social Security Act of 1935 establishing Aid to Families with Dependent Child (AFDC), old-age insurance, and unemployment programs (Martin & Weaver, 2005) and (2) the United States Housing Act of 1937 that formed the United States Housing Authority (USHA) and provided funding for public housing (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, 2020). Lyndon B. Johnson’s (LBJ) “The Great Society” expanded FDR’s vision of a progressive welfare state (Andrew, 1998) and brought the second wave of social welfare resources in the 1960s—Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Food Stamp Act of 1964, and Social Security Amendments (Medicare and Medicaid) of 1965. Taken together, FDR’s and LBJ’s welfare legislation laid the foundation of the US welfare system with key functions still operating today.

Even with the social safety net in place, multiple factors would contribute to the swell of homeless populations during the 1970s and 1980s. Ideological economic restructuring promoting free markets, privatization, and labor outsourcing led to wage deterioration and loss of manufacturing jobs in the US (Gilpin & Gilpin, 2001; Lyon-Callo, 2004). Housing costs began to rapidly increase just as major cutbacks decreased public housing construction and assistance (Kurtz, 1985; Rubin, Wright, & Devine, 1992). “Geographic asymmetry” then began to occur as available jobs did not match neighborhood characteristics resulting in economic vulnerability
(Wolch & Dear, 1993). The number of individuals receiving welfare began to surge and privatization proponents began breaking down the US welfare system. Major changes involved deinstitutionalization of the mentally disabled, state’s assuming control of social programs, healthcare privatization, and drastic reduction in public housing construction and funding (Rubin, Wright, & Devine, 1992; Wolch & Dear 1993).

The increasing presence of homelessness in the US during the 1970s and the “homeless crisis” of the 1980s increased public concern for the issue (Marcus, 2006). Public displeasure prompted federal legislative action and Ronald Reagan reluctantly signed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (1987) contained three general provisions to support homeless individuals: “(1) establish the Interagency Council on the Homeless (USICH); (2) use public resources in a more coordinated manner to meet the needs of the homeless; and (3) provide program funds for the homeless, with special emphasis on elderly persons, handicapped persons, families with children, Native Americans, and veterans”.

George H. W. Bush (GHWB) continued to support free market and privatization approaches during his term, which was subtly woven into his inaugural address with the phrase “a thousand points of light” (Bush, 1989). The statement supported privatization ideologies that push non-governmental organizations to fill necessary social services roles in communities. GHWB viewed supporting and increasing these “points of light” as the path to providing supportive resources to those in need, a strategy that abstracts governmental responsibility to provide such services. GHWB’s welfare approach matched this strategy by increasing state control over welfare programs, specifically AFDC, through the waiver process, granting states considerable flexibility for administering welfare aid (Wiseman, 1993).
GHWB signed two influential acts impacting welfare and public housing—The Housing & Community Development Act (HCDA) of 1992 and The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. HCDA (1992) amended the United States Housing Act (1937). Notable changes included: (1) extension of rent ceilings in public housing; (2) tenant preference rules for public and Section 8 housing; (3) public housing termination from tenant criminal activity; and (4) extension of waiting list requirement exemptions. ADA (1990) is a civil rights law that protects people with disabilities from workplace and housing discrimination. It requires that public and private entities make “reasonable accommodations” for disabled persons. Additionally, ADA increased access to transportation by requiring publicly funded transportation for disabled persons (ADA National Network, 2017).

The Clinton Administration initiated sweeping federal welfare reform with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996. Crucial aspects of this reform included shifting federal monetary assistance to a 5-year within a lifetime maximum assistance format; abolishing AFDC to enact Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) as a means to devolve federal control and allow state-run programs through block grants; stringent food stamp restrictions with time-limited assistance for individuals without dependent children; and the restriction of welfare benefits if individuals are unable to find work within two years (Patriquin, 2001).

While Clinton’s tenure is generally viewed as a time of American prosperity and decreasing unemployment, homelessness remained pervasive. The Urban Institute estimated that the US homeless population was 640,000 to 842,000 over a seven-day period in February of 1996 (Burt, 2001). In spite of such prevalence, Congress refused to reauthorize funding for USICH in 1993 (USICH, 2010). To allow the council to remain functional, the Clinton
administration shifted USICH to a working group known as the White House Domestic Policy Council (DPC). Additionally, Clinton signed Executive Order 12848—Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness (1993) resulting in DPC and HUD’s Priority Home! (USICH, 1994). This strategic federal plan called for a coordinated and streamlined approach among federal, state, and local governments and non-profit homeless services through the formation of a “Continuum-of-Care”—"a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals” (National Alliance to End Homeless, 2010).

The George W. Bush administration is generally viewed as prioritizing other policy goals over welfare. Rather than overhauling PRWORA (1996), the Bush Administration strengthened certain provisions already in place. PRWORA (1996) was reauthorized by the Bush administration in 2006 with amendments that enforced tougher restrictions to access aid by strengthening the Work First Approach (Daguerre, 2008). Additionally, two other major shifts in welfare policy occurred during the Bush Administration: (1) direct assistance through welfare checks was dramatically reduced and replaced by a social-service based approach to support employment; and (2) the expansion of PRWORA’s (1996) charitable choice clause, incentivizing faith-based organizations to operate social service programs (Allard, 2007).

After 9 years of dormancy, Congress and the Bush administration would reauthorize USICH in 2002. Around this time, a radical new approach to homelessness surfaced. Known as the “Housing First Model”, the approach prioritized housing individuals before addressing other issues such as mental illness or substance abuse (HUD, 2007). The Bush administration adopted the approach and prioritized the initiative. By 2008, the Bush administration reported that the US experienced a 30% decrease—175,914 to 123,833—in its chronically homeless population from 2005-2007 (Swarns, 2008), and the adoption of the Housing First model is viewed as heavily
influencing this decline (Leopold & Cunningham, 2017). However, the US was in significant turmoil by the end of Bush’s second term in 2008.

Barrack Obama came into office at a pivotal point in US history. The US was still at war with Iraq and Afghanistan, which was triggered by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Moreover, the US housing market crash of 2007 prompted a global economic downturn leading to the Great Recession. With the US economy in shambles, households across the US struggled and unemployment rates surged, peaking at 10% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2012). As a result, Obama brought the re-emergence of the welfare state to stymie the recession’s negative effects (Daguerre, 2008). During Obama’s first term in office, the administration bolstered the social safety net with three major acts—the Housing and Recovery Act (HERA) of 2008, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) of 2009, and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010.

HERA (2008) targeted the subprime mortgage crisis and housing market decline by strengthening regulatory lending measures; authorizing the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) to guarantee up to $300 billion for subprime mortgages; and implementing a first-time home buyers tax credit. ARRA (2009) was an extensive stimulus package aimed at decreasing unemployment rates and stimulating the economy by way of federal aid and tax incentives. Of significance to this discussion, ARRA (2009): (1) increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility and benefits providing $53.6 billion in aid (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2013) ; (2) provided TANF $5 billion in supplemental funding to offset increased state expenditures as caseloads grew (HHS, 2013); (3) allocated the Social Security Administration $1.2 billion to distribute Economic Recovery Payments and account for increasing disability and retirement recipients (Social Security Administration, 2009) and (4)
provided HUD $13.61 billion to fund multiple projects and programs (HUD, 2020c). Lastly, ACA (2010) overhauled the US healthcare system with three major goals: (1) improve quality and delivery of medical care while lowering cost; (2) increase access and affordability of health insurance by subsidizing healthcare costs and removing barriers such as “pre-existing conditions”; and (3) expand access to Medicaid.

On the whole, these acts served not only to stabilize the economy and bolster the social safety net, but also to act as a homeless prevention strategy. The recession had raised unemployment rates to their highest level since the 1980s (BLS, 2012) and the threat of homelessness increasing across the US was palpable. The Obama administration used the opportunity to amend the McKinney-Vento Act (1987) with the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) of 2009. Building on strategy laid out by DCP and HUD’s Priority Home (1993), HEARTH (2009) streamlined grant funding for three homeless service programs—the Supportive Housing Program, the Shelter Plus Care Program, and the Moderate Rehabilitation/Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Program—by merging the entities into the CoC Program (HUD, 2009).

HEARTH (2009) mandated the formation of CoCs for grant funding eligibility. More importantly, HEARTH “directs HUD to promulgate regulations for these new programs and processes” (HUD, 2009). In other words, HEARTH granted HUD consolidated power to require programmatic implementation within CoCs. Lastly, the Obama administration prioritized homeless solutions in 2010 with a new federal strategic plan known as Opening Doors (USICH, 2015). The strategic plan outlined four ambitious goals: (1) prevent and end veteran homelessness by 2015; (2) end chronic homelessness by 2017; (3) prevent and end family and

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6 The strategic plan was amended in 2015 to reaffirm effective strategies and add newly developed approaches after not meeting set goals.
youth homelessness by 2020; and (4) “set (a) path to end all types of homelessness” (p. 6). Overall, the intent of this strategic plan was to “transform homeless services to crisis response systems” (USICH, 2015, p. 9).

The political pendulum swung yet again with the election of Donald Trump in 2016. After nearly four years in office, the Trump administration has worked diligently to dismantle swaths of Obama-era policy. However, Trump failed to garner enough support to repeal ACA (2010) in 2017 while Republicans held a supermajority (Jacobs & Smith, 2017). That being said, Trump has significantly weakened ACA (2010) by removing the “individual mandate”, adding Medicaid “work requirements”, and cutting publicity budgets to HealthCare.gov (Simmons-Duffin, 2019). Additionally, Trump signed Executive Order 13828 Reducing Poverty in America by Promoting Opportunity and Economic Mobility (Trump, 2018) mandating increased eligibility requirements for welfare programs. Estimates suggest that nearly 700,000 individuals could lose SNAP benefits due to strengthened able-body requirements (Fessler & Treisman, 2019) and 3 million individuals could lose some type of welfare benefit if all restrictions are implemented (Wheaton, 2019).

In contrast to Obama’s strategy, Trump has taken an authoritative and punitive approach to homelessness. In 2019, Trump established the White House Council on Eliminating Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing. Ironically, Executive Order 13878 (Trump, 2019) establishing the council identifies inflating housing costs as a causal factor for homelessness growth while listing rent control as a barrier to affordable housing. Trump then appointed Robert Marbut to head USICH with fervent opposition from numerous congressional members (Congress of the United States, 2019). Marbut, a homeless enablement proponent and critic of
the Housing First model, represents an ideological rival to many evidence-based homeless programs (Capps, 2019a).

Trump’s animosity toward homelessness has been blatant. Openly expressing his dismay over the homeless crisis in many major US cities, particularly in California (Beckett, 2019), Trump has pressured state and local governments to take swift action or face backlash (Chiu, 2019). Trump has yet to unveil a direct plan to alleviate homelessness, but administration officials have suggested federal intervention involving increased enforcement, camp sweeps, and the use of federal facilities as shelters (Jan, Stein, and Dawsey, 2019; Capps, 2019b). However, Trump was dealt a blow after the Supreme Court declined to review an appeal of Martin vs. City of Boise, a 9th District Court ruling making it unconstitutional to ban sleeping in public when shelters are full (Harvard Law Review, 2019).

Trump’s approach to welfare and homeless policy made an about face with the global outbreak of COVID-19. The pandemic stalled Trump’s Executive Order 13828 (Trump, 2018) increasing work requirements for SNAP as a federal judge issued a temporary injunction (Khalil, 2020). The Trump administration initially pursued an appeal, but backtracked after economic fallout from COVID-19 (Fadulu, 2020). The pandemic pressured Congress and the Trump administration to enact The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) of 2020. The unprecedented $2 trillion stimulus package provided direct cash assistance, roughly $194 billion to homeless prevention programs, and a 120-day moratorium on public housing or project-based assistance program evictions (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2020).

Lastly, the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin reignited antipathy for police brutality against people of color. Protests across the US were met with contentious riot suppression tactics, with some instances possibly violating the Geneva
Convention (Horton, 2020). After weeks of supporting suppression tactics and the unsettling forced dispersal of protestors by police and military personnel for Trump’s Lafayette Square photo op (Rucker & Parker, 2020), Trump signed *Executive Order 13929 on Safe Policing and Safe Communities* (Trump, 2020). Relevant to this discussion, the order marks a reversal in homelessness strategy by developing “opportunities to train law enforcement officers with respect to encounters with individuals suffering from impaired mental health, homelessness, and addiction; to increase the capacity of social workers working directly with law enforcement agencies; and to provide guidance regarding the development and implementation of co-responder programs, which involve social workers or other mental health professionals working alongside law enforcement” (Trump, 2020). While the order may only serve as an appeasement to the ongoing unrest, the language and tone signify a shift in approach that may bring positive effects for homeless peoples. It is too soon for the reach and implementation of this executive order to be evaluated.

Taken together, these acts, executive orders, and federal strategic plans are the foundational framework of the US approach to poverty and the alleviation and prevention of homelessness. While the political pendulum consistently swings, homeless individuals continue to rely on the resources and programs established, shifted, and eliminated by these acts for survival and pathways out of homelessness. As the instability of 2020 grows, the US is poised to see spikes in homelessness if the social safety net is not maintained or improved (Burt 1992; Rubin, Wright, & Devine, 1992; Wolch 1993).

**History of Houston & Homelessness**

After General Sam Houston defeated Mexican forces in the Battle of Jacinto of 1836, a trade post known as the “Town of Houston” was formed near the headwaters of the Buffalo
Bayou by brothers Augustus C. and John K. Allen. In 1845, the annexation of the Republic of Texas to the US occurred resulting in Texas becoming the 28th state in the Union. Texas seceded from the Union in 1861 to fight for the Confederacy during the American Civil War and was readmitted to the Union in 1870. During the 1870s, Congress officially designated Houston a port and began development projects to improve the shipping channel. The port designation and development laid the groundwork for Houston’s economic prosperity and growth moving forward (see 'historical timeline' Greater Houston Partnership, 2020a).

Since Houston’s origination, it has become the 4th largest city in the United States with a population of 2,295,982 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Additionally, Houston is one of the most economically prosperous cities in the US. In 2017, the 9-county Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) had an estimated Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of $490.1 billion (Greater Houston Partnership, 2019). To put that in perspective, Houston’s economy was larger than the State of Maryland ($394.3 billion GDP) whose economy ranked 16th in the US. Currently, Houston has a total area of 637.4 square miles with a poverty rate of 20.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Figure 6 shows the racial makeup of the city.

Houston’s economy has been propelled by trade and the energy sector since the early 1900s (Melosi & Pratt, 2007). By the 1920s, oil refineries increased along the shipping channel due to ease of product export. The growth of the energy sector prompted Houston to develop a petrochemical complex in the 1940s, and Shell moved their headquarters to Houston by 1971. The 1973 Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) embargo spiked oil prices (United States Department of State, 2020) and resulted in a surge of economic growth for Houston lasting until the early 1980s. As a result, Houston is now known as “The Energy Capital of the World” and 4,600 energy-related firms are now located in the city.
Additionally, energy sector losses since the 2013 downturn have been offset by $60 billion for the development of chemical plants along the coast.

Economic prosperity combined with population growth in Houston has driven development at a high rate. However, development in Houston is unique compared to other US cities. Since the 1920s, Houstonians have voted against the establishment of zoning ordinances five times with the last citywide referendum failing in 1993 (The City of Houston, 2020). While the city may lack zoning, many tactics are still used to control land-use such as city ordinances, deed covenants, historic districts, and neighborhood restriction petitions (Buitelaar, 2009).

However, the lack of zoning has resulted in market-driven development. Bill Fulton, director of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research, explains that market-driven development, “means affordable-housing developers have a tough time competing for land because they are competing against high-rise residential developers and high-end retail and restaurant developers, and whoever else can bring the most money to bear on a parcel” (Fulton, 2020). The results are high
rates of gentrification and less affordable housing development (Olin, 2020; Fulton, 2020). To combat the negative effects of market-driven development, the City of Houston created a Community Land Trust as an attempt to preserve neighborhoods and provide affordable housing in 2017 (Binkovitz, 2018).

Another common feature of Houston is a proneness to tropical cyclones. Hurricanes are a yearly threat and the city and surrounding coastal communities have been subjected to some of the worst hurricanes in US history. In 1900, the Great Galveston Hurricane devastated Galveston island causing at least 8,000 deaths—the deadliest tropical cyclone in US history (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], 2000). Since 2000, Houston and the surrounding coastal communities have been hit by three major hurricanes—Allison 2001, Ike 2008, and Harvey 2017—with each bringing costly damages and loss of life. Additionally, Houston felt indirect impacts from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as more than 100,000 evacuees fled Louisiana for the Houston area (Greater Houston Partnership, 2020a).

Like most major urban areas in the US, Houston maintains a sizable homeless population. As of 2019, Houston’s total homeless population was estimated to be 3,938 with 2,324 sheltered and 1614 unsheltered homeless individuals (HUD, 2020a). Figure 7 shows Houston homeless population dynamics since 2005.

The line graph depicts the steady decline of Houston’s homeless population from its 2005 high—12,005. Population spikes occurred in 2011 and 2018 while all other years saw drops. Houston experienced a 67% decline in its total homeless population from 2005 to 2019 and a 53% percent decline since its 2011 spike. For comparison with the three larger US cities,
New York City and Los Angeles saw increases of 54% and 62%, respectively, while Chicago saw a 20% decrease since 2011. In 2015, Houston “Mayor Annise Parker announced that Houston has effectively ended veteran homelessness” after housing 3,650 veterans in three years (CHH 2015; Gale 2019). Additionally, data collected by Houston’s CoC suggests that from 2011 to 2019 more than 17,000 homeless individuals have accessed permanent housing, with 84% of those individuals remaining stably housed (CHH, 2019). Consequently, Houston is viewed as a national model for homeless solutions (CHH, 2014).

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7 Statistics analyzed from HUD Exchange “CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports” for years 2011 and 2019 with each major cities’ CoC—New York City CoC; Los Angeles City and County CoC; and Chicago CoC (HUD, 2020a).
While Houston has produced unprecedented results over the past 15 years, the issue of homelessness is still pervasive in the community. As discussed in “CoC Intervention”, CoCs function to mitigate the constant influx of individuals falling into homelessness. They are not a solution to homelessness as many factors producing and perpetuating homelessness require reorienting our economic and social systems. Houston’s “system transformation” in 2013 drastically reshaped their CoC from being a crisis-response system to a re-housing system engendering the precipitous decline in Houston’s homeless population. Despite such success, homelessness persistence continues to draw community ire. In the background of what should rightly be viewed as a successful homeless service system, the City of Houston has implemented numerous anti-homeless city ordinances to regulate and control their homeless population. As of 2019, at least 4 major anti-homeless city ordinances exist: (1) Sec. 21-62. – Encampment in Public Place; (2) Sec. 28-46. – Aggressive Panhandling Ban; (3) Sec. 40-352 – Sitting/Lying Down on Sidewalks and (4) Article V. Charitable Food Services (The City of Houston, 2019). These ordinances serve the interests of local neighborhoods and businesses rather than homeless individuals and, as discussed in “Disturbance Regimes”, my findings demonstrate how these ordinances negatively impact case management and achieving housing goals.

After passing the encampment ban in 2017, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a civil action lawsuit against the City of Houston stating that “Houston’s camping ban effectively criminalizes homelessness in violation of the Constitution” (Tammy Kohr et. al v. City of Houston, 2017). US District Judge Kenneth Hoyt sided with the ACLU and filed a temporary injunction ceasing enforcement of the camping ban (Langford, 2017). However, the injunction was lifted in December of 2017 and allowed enforcement of the ordinance to resume (Carpenter & Blakinger, 2017). By November 2018, the City of Houston deconstructed its
largest encampment, colloquially known as Wheeler, citing safety and public health concerns (Ward, 2018; Trovall, 2018). Currently, large encampments similar to Wheeler continue to propagate in Houston and enforcement of the camping ban remains a contentious issue after ACLU pressure.

**Hurricane Harvey**

![Figure 8: Hurricane Harvey regaining strength in the Gulf of Mexico (NOAA, 2017a)](image)

The tropical wave that eventually became Hurricane Harvey originated off the western coast of Africa on August 12, 2017. The wave transitioned to a tropical depression on August 17, 2017 440 nautical miles east of Barbados and increased to a tropical storm later that day. After reaching an initial peak in intensity, Harvey weakened in the Caribbean Sea and transitioned back to a tropical wave. However, Harvey regained strength in the Bay of Campeche accelerating back to a tropical depression. On August 23, 2017, Harvey rapidly intensified in the Gulf of Mexico reaching hurricane status by the following day, as seen in Figure 8. Harvey strengthened to a category 4 hurricane on August 26, 2017 as it approached the Texas coastline.
Harvey then made landfall as a category 4 hurricane 5 miles east of Rockport, Texas with a minimum pressure of 937 mb (Blake & Zelinsky, 2018).

Hurricane Harvey began to devastate the middle coast of Texas and left large swaths of Houston/Harris County literally under water. The storm was uniquely slow moving and stalled after making landfall. It would rest along the Texas coast for four days and inundate the greater Houston area with roughly 40-44.99” of rainfall as illustrated in Figure 9. Stalling allowed the warm waters from the Gulf of Mexico to continue fueling the storm over those four days. Storm surge reached 6 to 10 ft above ground level along the Texas coast and maximum wind levels reached 115 kt after initial landfall (Blake & Zelinsky, 2018). Harvey also produced 52 tornadoes, half of which were in close proximity to Houston. After stalling, Harvey then retreated back to the Gulf of Mexico, its center remaining within 60 miles off the Texas coast until making its last landfall in southwestern Louisiana as illustrated in Figure 10.
Harvey became the largest tropical cyclone rainfall event in US history (NOAA, 2020). Historic levels of flooding occurred as some areas of southeastern Texas received over 60 inches of rainfall (Kennedy, 2018). To put the flooding in perspective, the National Hurricane Center classifies that level of rainfall as a “1000-year or greater flood” event (Blake & Zelinsky, 2018). The storm resulted in 68 direct deaths and an estimated $125 billion in damages. The greater Houston area came to a halt as 30,000 individuals and families were displaced and 200,000 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed from flooding (NOAA, 2018). After Harvey,
Houston saw a 14.9% increase in its homeless population, the first in seven years as seen in Figure 11.

Harvey became an ominous warning of the challenges a shifting climate brings to human populations around the globe. Current research suggests that this rainfall event had a 1% chance from 1981 to 2000, but that the probability of such an event increases to 18% between 2081-2100 when considering recent trends in climatic changes (Emanuel, 2017). As a result, coastal community resiliency will be a pressing issue for the foreseeable future.

Figure 11: PIT Count data from 2011 to 2018 highlighting the first increase in Houston’s homeless populations in six years after Hurricane Harvey. The dashed lines include homeless population totals from Harris and Fort Bend counties whereas the solid line includes homeless population totals from Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery counties (CHH, 2018).
CHAPTER 4: METHODS, MATERIALS, & ANALYSIS

Working with Homeless Populations

I’d like to begin by addressing some of the exigent spaces of ethnographic methodologies involving homeless populations. Homeless individuals are one of, if not the, most vulnerable populations in a given society and serious challenges accompany ethnographic research with this population. Researcher subject position is problematic as homeless individuals are constantly trying to survive. I was frequently “hustled” by my informants presenting ethical dilemmas regarding privilege, help, and unintentional harm. Next, homeless populations are very fluid and transient in nature, and constraining my sample population to homeless Harvey survivors made it more challenging to find informants as time passed. With individuals entering housing, leaving town, or entering supportive programs, the homeless Harvey survivors left were often chronically homeless, many of whom suffered from serious mental illness, which hindered my ability to obtain informed consent.

An additional challenge is that many homeless individuals suffer not only from serious mental health conditions, but also from substance abuse and physical health issues that are frequently comorbid making them highly vulnerable. Homeless vulnerability is, then, further exacerbated by: (1) lack of or restricted access to resources for meeting basic needs; (2) poor access to material goods including food, hygiene, and shelter supplies; (3) political and social marginalization; (4) the constant threat and occurrence of traumatic incidents; (5) exposure to natural elements; and (6) daily instability and uncertainty.
As a result, homeless peoples have accumulated countless adaptive measures that counter cultural norms for a given society making the anthropological tenet of cultural relativism essential while simultaneously problematic. Homeless individuals’ way of life and mechanisms used for survival can be viscerally jarring and boundary pressing, making fieldwork more intense and demanding, especially with street homeless individuals. Their lives necessitate an open mind and the suspension of moral judgement to understand and appreciate the nuances of these practices. However, cultural relativism becomes problematic when it shields how power produces precarity, marginalization, and restricted upward mobility, which engenders these adaptations in the first place. Consequently, a delicate line must be walked by individuals conducting research.

Lastly, research must be conducted with diligence to avoid unintentional harm, which can further entrench homeless individuals’ already precarious state. I took care to safeguard individual informant identity. Pseudonyms have been applied for all informants—homeless and homeless service providers (HSPs)—to protect confidentiality. Pseudonyms are derived from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and 1943 Combat Command B (CCB) phonetic alphabets given Houston’s claim to have “effectively ended veteran homeless” (CHH, 2015), a claim later described as a “functional statement” by an HSP informant. Pseudonyms and pronouns were applied randomly, and pseudonyms do not imply gender classifications.

I protected homeless informants’ precise encampment locations as identification of these spaces poses potential harm to informants. I chose not to provide informants with financial compensation for participation in the study, viewing financial compensation as possibly coercing participation and, more importantly, increasing chances for unintentional harm. As a former street outreach worker sensitive to the perils faced by homeless individuals, I attempted to mold
an experimental methodology that protected homeless individuals from further marginalization while also keeping me safe.

I collected data with street homeless individuals in encampments alone. Few researchers conduct ethnographic fieldwork with homeless peoples alone for a multitude of reasons, but safety is a common theme. To be forthright, at many points I would have preferred a collaborative ethnographic approach (Bourgois & Schonberg 2009). My safety was frequently in jeopardy, but not from stereotypical sources such as crime, violence, or mental instability. A major safety concern was the use of dogs by homeless individuals as a security measure to ward off unwanted guests. Regrettably, I was also nearly assaulted by an informant with a hockey stick in an attempt to protect their camp from intruders as they did not initially recognize me. That being said, my fieldwork suggests that homeless individuals primarily carry weapons to protect themselves or to regulate their immediate social environment, not wreak havoc on the greater society. This conclusion is supported by the fact that 1,758 anti-homeless acts of violence resulting in 476 deaths have occurred since 1999 (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2018).

The vast majority of scholarship at the nexus of homelessness and disaster employ methodologies that abstract researchers from street homeless peoples’ lived environments by conducting all interviews, direct observation, and focus groups in resource settings or by telephone (Cusack et al., 2013; Vickery, 2015; Settembrino, 2016; Every & Richardson, 2017; Gin, Der-Martirosian, Stanik, & Dobalian, 2019). A notable exception comes from a recent study by Gaillard, Walters, Rickerby, and Shi (2019) on homelessness precarity and the “disaster of everyday life” where a portion of interviews were conducted on the street where homeless informants were “hustling.” Due to this gap in street-based homeless research on disaster, I

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8 “They” is specifically used due to gender fluidity.
found it important and feasible to couple my prior skills, knowledge, and experience as a street outreach worker with anthropological methods to engage street homeless individuals in their lived environment to further understand what exactly disaster means for them.

**Study Design**

To complete this study, I used a rapid ethnographic framework (Chambers, 1981) involving two trips totaling 21 days of mixed-method socio-ecological fieldwork in Houston, Texas after Hurricane Harvey, in 2019. The first trip occurred in February lasting 7 days, and the second trip occurred in June lasting 14 days. This research was approved by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was intended to be pilot work for dissertation research. As such, I collected a broad range of data to establish a baseline of life in Houston after Harvey for homeless peoples. The methods for data collection involved: (1) participant and direct observation; (2) informal meetings and conversations; (3) semi-structured interviews; (4) photo-ethnography; (5) global positioning system (GPS) mapping; (6) surveys; and (7) soil samples. I entered the field roughly a year and a half after Harvey, which allowed me to follow similar disaster research approaches aimed at reducing the potential harm for research participants affected by disaster (Phillips 2014; Stallings 2002). Table 1 illustrates a consolidated breakdown of research informants and data collected during Trips 1 and 2. Overall, there were 45 total research participants, 18 interviews and 19 surveys conducted, 16 soil samples collected, 86 waypoints and 19 tracks recorded, and 506 photographs documented.
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<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encampment with Soil Sample Waypoints</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Rough Waypoints</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping Rough with Soil Sample Waypoints</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
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<td>506</td>
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</table>

Table 1: Breakdown of research informants and data collected.

**Study Participants & Recruitment**

I focused my research on two groups—street homeless individuals and homeless service providers (HSPs). I chose to specifically research street homeless individuals to fill the research gap that exists with this population at the junction of disaster. Two approaches were used to
recruit street homeless research participants. The first approach involved participant observation with Houston’s homeless outreach teams. As I conducted participant observation with outreach teams, street homeless individuals were curious about my presence and frequently engaged me in conversation as I was a new face on the scene. I used these opportunities to inform homeless individuals of the research I was conducting involving the impact of Hurricane Harvey on Houston’s homeless population. During these informal conversations, I was able to identify homeless Harvey survivors. Once participant observation with outreach teams concluded, I returned alone to encampments where homeless individuals expressed interest and willingness to participate in research. After initial contact, I employed a snowball sampling approach to build my informant base. However, as discussed earlier, there were challenges to this approach as many homeless individuals were not able to identify other homeless Harvey survivors.

The second approach I used to recruit informants was through participant and direct observation at areas heavily congregated by homeless individuals. These areas included: (1) the three major encampment hotspots known as Chartres, Pierce, and Wheeler; (2) outside homeless service agencies; and (3) homeless soup kitchens or feeding events such as ‘Loaves and Fishes’ and Ecclesia. Similar instances of curiosity among Houston’s homeless occurred, allowing for opportunities to engage in dialogue about the research, particularly within encampment spaces. In total, n=25 core and peripheral homeless participants were documented in field notes while independent interactions with Houston’s street homeless easily surpassed 100 individuals. However, many of these individuals were filtered out of research participation because they were not affected by Harvey or due to mental illness and/or severe inebriation that presented issues with obtaining informed consent.

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9 For a description of participant observation performed with outreach teams see subsection “Participant & Direct Observation” on p. 62.
I chose to include HSP individuals to understand the CoC response to Harvey and how direct care workers supported homeless peoples during and after the disaster context. To accumulate HSP informants, I compiled a list of homeless services agencies in the Houston area and began making initial contacts via email. I took a hierarchical approach for contacting agencies. The first agency I approached was CHH. This organization houses Houston’s CoC and plays a formative role in organizing all homeless service provisions, policies, and targeted efforts. I held an informal meeting with CHH to discuss their coordinated response to Harvey and the agency’s overall role in Houston. CHH then recommended specific agencies that played influential roles during Harvey and identified three agencies running street outreach programs—Search, Star of Hope, and the Houston Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Team (HOT Team). Using a snowball sampling approach, key informants identified influential HSP individuals to contact as informants. These individuals were then contacted via email or phone to address their willingness to participate in research and maintain confidentiality. In total, n=20 HSP individuals were encountered during participant observation.

**Participant & Direct Observation**

For participant observation, my time was split between two distinct groups—homeless individuals and HSPs. Participant observation with homeless informants was an amalgamation of participating in cultural practices while relying on direct observation. I entered and remained in multiple homeless encampments alone. I participated in shelter reinforcement, cleaning of encampment spaces, and viewed how informants went about their daily lives in the camps. I shared meals and drank coffee with homeless informants at their camps. However, it was not feasible or ethical to stay overnight given the length of my fieldwork. More time was needed to build trust and rapport with homeless informants and to identify potential safety concerns.
Additionally, I joined many informants as they traversed the city and accessed resources. I enjoyed multiple meals at homeless feeding events with homeless informants, particularly the Ecclesia and Harmony House monthly barbeque seen in Figure 12.

![Figure 12: The Ecclesia and Harmony House monthly barbeque for homeless individuals (photo by Shawn Griffith).](image)

In contrast to the isolated encampments, I stood under bridges watching the structured chaos of large-scale, un-sanctioned homeless encampments where residents suffering from severe mental illness and addiction are stuck in a cycle of abject poverty and viewed the vigilance that life under such circumstances requires. I sat under bridges next to Houston’s Buffalo Bayou interviewing homeless informants while their partners lay next to them shaking from withdrawals who miraculously gave their two cents on the topic at hand. I walked the streets with informants as they ‘hustled’ for bus fare, at times for me, which tested the limits of
my cultural relativity. At the end of the day, I attempted to see the streets through the eyes of homeless individuals while acknowledging that there is no true way to understand homelessness without being homeless. In total, I conducted 84 hours of participant observation with homeless informants.

Participant and direct observation with HSPs involved multiple ride-alongs with different outreach teams and individual outreach workers in Houston. I obtained two key informants who greatly aided this study during outreach team interactions. During ride-alongs, I joined outreach teams and helped perform street-based outreach, including encampment engagement and distribution of hygiene kits, food, and water. I also observed street-based case management styles and strategies, and toured the Star of Hope’s male emergency shelter. In total, I completed six full-day (8-hour) ride-alongs totaling 48 hours. After ride-alongs with key informants, I had four informal debriefs and conversations about specific interactions and overarching dynamics of Houston’s homeless population. I also conducted direct observation at multiple homeless resources including Search, Star of Hope, The Beacon, Harmony House, Salvation Army, Loaves and Fishes, Lord of the Streets, and Ecclesia.

**Semi-Structured Interviews & Surveys**

I conducted semi-structured interviews and surveys with homeless and HSP informants following recent qualitative method guidelines (Bernard, 2018). Each group had different questionnaires pertaining to Harvey, homelessness, and demographic information. Semi-structured interview and survey questions for homeless and HSP informants are shown in APPENDIX 1. During semi-structured interviews, I allowed drift from the question scaffolding to occur for informants to express topics important to them. However, I returned to the question schedule for consistency between interviews. I asked informants survey questions related only to
Interviewed Homeless Informants | Interviewed HSP Informants
--- | ---
Alpha | Able
Bravo | Baker
Delta | Fox
Echo | How
Foxtrot | Jig
Kilo | Nan
Lima | Oboe
Tango | Tare
Yankee | Yoke
Zulu | 

Table 2: Homeless and HSP interview informants

Harvey and demographics. I collected surveys anonymously on an electronically based platform via iPhone. In total, I conducted n=11 semi-structured interviews, and I surveyed n=10 street homeless Harvey survivors\(^\text{10}\). Additionally, I completed n=10 semi-structured interviews and surveys with 7 HSPs, 1 public official, and 1 academic professional\(^\text{11}\). It should be noted that some HSP individuals I performed participant observation with chose to not conduct interviews, many times due to chain of command authorization. This situation occurred with the Houston Police Department HOT Team wherein I was granted permission to do a ride-along, but interviews with individual HPD team members required further authorization from the Chief of

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\(^{10}\) A total of three interview sessions had two homeless participants. The total n=11 interviews includes each participant involved in the interview. This total is not the total number of interview sessions, which was n=8. Additionally, one homeless informant participated in two group interviews.

\(^{11}\) One HSP informant was interviewed on both trips. Additionally, another HSP participant took a survey, but was not interviewed.
Police. Additionally, I chose to lump all professional informants into a single category—HSP—for increased confidentiality. Table 2 shows the pseudonyms for interviewed informants.

**Photo-Ethnography**

To add further nuance to the daily lives, adaptive strategies, and disruptions of homeless individuals, I utilized photo-ethnography (Bourgois & Schonberg 2009) to broaden understandings of homelessness and support findings from interview and GPS data. I collected visual data at most research sites and paired visual data with fieldnotes. Due to IRB protocol restricting any identifying pictures of research participants, my visual data collection focused on encampment structures and adaptations; livelihood methods; hostile architecture; environmental conditions; and Harvey damage. While scholars have acknowledged issues surrounding photography’s codeless message (Barthes, 1961) and the photographic gaze (Sontag, 1977), I chose this methodology to document the reality of everyday life on the street. More importantly, I specifically chose not only to document challenges homeless peoples face, but also to highlight the immense ingenuity and knowledge they possess to survive their physical and social environments. By pairing photography with ethnographic vignettes, I am able to provide deeper discussion and analysis of how homeless individuals navigate these environments. Lastly, photographic documentation illuminates how disturbance regimes further marginalize homeless populations, leading to a negative feedback cycle that traps homeless individuals in this liminal state (Hopper 2003). In total, I took 506 photographs and selected only a portion for this thesis.

**GPS Mapping**

Over the course of fieldwork, I visited 73 sites—37 encampments, 26 instances of sleeping rough, and 10 homeless resources/agencies—and collected GPS data at each site using a Garmin GPSMAP 64st. I utilized previous approaches toward incorporating GPS data collection
with qualitative methodologies (Mennis, Mason, & Cao, 2013). Homeless sleeping arrangements were broken into two categories: ‘encampment’ and ‘sleeping rough’. I define ‘encampment’ as any substantial structure, or set of structures, that provides reasonable protection from the elements as illustrated in Figure 13. I adapt a British colloquialism—‘sleeping rough’—to define instances of homeless individuals using makeshift, extemporary shelters out of basic materials—cardboard, carpet remnants, tarpaulin, etc.—or no material at all as seen in Figure 14. To remain explicit, I define homeless resources/agencies as any entity, formal and informal, providing aid or supportive supplies for homeless individuals. I took waypoints at each research site to map Houston’s homeless spatial dynamics in relation to resource providers, environmental pressures, and anti-homeless city ordinances. I took tracks (polylines) during all ride-alongs with outreach teams to demonstrate the extent of homelessness in the Houston area. Additionally, I took tracks of encampment pathways and migration routes of Houston’s homeless.

Figure 13: Homeless encampment—see APPENDIX 2 for a select portion of encampment photography (photo by Shawn Griffith)
Soil Samples

While conducting participant observation in encampments, I collected 16 soil samples following Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Method 6200 for determination of elemental concentrations in soil and sediments as illustrated in Figure 15. To perform this method, I removed any debris or organic material from the site, and collected a 4- by 4-inch square at 1-inch depth in a plastic bag. I accompanied soil samples with fieldnotes describing the local environment and any proximal mitigating landscapes contributing to environmental pollution. Encampments where residents identified flooding had occurred or where they thought pollution existed in or near the encampment were chosen as sample sites. In this way, sample sites were selected to represent a variety of the situations based off resident recommendations, and I collected waypoints at each soil sample site.
Analysis

Given the broad range of data collected during fieldwork, I utilized multiple forms of analytical methods. Survey data was visualized with Google Forms as seen in APPENDIXES 4 and 5. For qualitative data, I conducted analysis with MaxQDA software following current anthropological research approaches (Bernard, 2018). I transcribed roughly 15 hours of recorded interviews and participant observations. I began with a deductive approach for analytically coding transcriptions, fieldnotes, and photographs, beginning with seven main codes: adaptive strategies, perseverance, opportunity, interventions, disturbance, camp dynamics and disaster impacts. While coding data for these topical areas, I inductively sub-coded each parent code category. Additionally, I inductively coded visual data that did not apply to the seven main
parent codes. This approach produced three additional parent codes—encampments, sleeping rough, and resources. I used MaxQDA’s code coverage function to understand differences in code frequency within and between the two study groups. I then analytically assessed codes for recurring themes across both groups. To construct my photo-ethnographic vignettes, I combined fieldnotes and portions of transcribed interviews with visual data. These vignettes describe specific events encountered in the field. Certain vignettes, such as “dope alley”, jump through time, but they remain in chronological order of events.

To analyze GIS data, I used ArcGIS Pro. I classified all research waypoints into encampment (E), sleeping rough (SR), encampments with soil sample (ESS), and resource (R) categories. Multiple approaches were then used to analyze waypoint data. To create Figure 23 (see Chapter 5 p. 93), I created a boundary around Wheeler’s original encampment location and then used the “Generate Tessellation” function to produce a 1-acre hexagonal tessellation within the boundary. I then spatially joined the waypoints with the tessellated area and designated the hexagon to take the maximum number of waypoints as its classification. Afterwards, I changed the symbology to display unique values to color-code the separate classifications: E, SR, and original encampment location.

To create Figure 24 (see Chapter 5 p. 95), I created a new feature class combining E, SR, and ESS. Next, I changed the symbology to visualize the waypoints as a heat map showing aggregated homeless sleeping arrangement density. I chose to visualize the data as a heat map to protect precise encampment location. I then layered the R waypoints onto the map to show the relationship between resources and homeless sleeping arrangement density. Figure 25 (see Chapter 5 p. 97) is the same map used in Figure 24. However, I added a new feature class and drew a polygon of the central business district enforcement zone for the “Sitting/Lying Down on
Sidewalks” ordinance. I chose not to add track data to Figure 23–Figure 25 as track data provided little additional insight regarding homeless spatial dynamics. However, APPENDIX 6 Figure 6.1 shows Figure 24 zoomed out with the HOT Team ride-along track data to underscore the extent of homelessness throughout Houston.

I intended to process encampment soil samples with a Portable X-ray Fluorescence (PXRF) spectrometer following EPA Method 6200. However, campus closures due to COVID-19 prevented these soil samples from being processed and analyzed. At a later date, I plan to process the 16 soil samples collected within encampments to identify elemental concentrations.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS & DISCUSSION

**Disturbance Regimes**

![Figure 16: Fencing used to push homeless individuals to the sidewalk under an overpass near the old Wheeler encampment (photo by Shawn Griffith)](image)

**Vignettes from the Field: “Wheeler”**

The Wheeler area is dicey. The heaviest drug use in the city occurs here. A few months before I got here, the city busted up the encampment and the residents are scattered throughout the area. Encampments now pepper the adjacent interstate onramps and individuals are sleeping rough under every bridge. People are pan-handling every intersection, assertively. I see an Asian man wearing ripped nursing scrubs with only one shoe walk into traffic asking for money. The occupants of a lavish, blue Audi A6 refuse to acknowledge his presence. The light turns and the Audi drives away. Unfazed, the man remains in the middle of the street moving to the now...
stopped side of the intersection. He continues to aggressively pan-handle with exaggerated body language and raised voice as his presence continues to be ignored. His presence would never be acknowledged. Defeated, he slowly doddered back to his camp underneath the overpass muttering obscenities—a single example that represents the dismal resentment, and overt “otherness” of Houston’s homeless.

Wheeler is abject poverty or a state beyond poverty. Homeless individuals in this area are highly vulnerable with extreme mental health, substance abuse, and physical health issues and they are sleeping rough with little materials. The surrounding community has also exacerbated the milieu’s madness. An apartment building adjacent to the Asian man’s camp has installed a high-frequency beeping sound that constantly plays to discourage homeless individuals’ presence, but it is simply an act of torture engendering further chaos.

The fencing is oppressive. It feels like a jail yard. It appears fencing has been used to separate what would be a concentrated encampment, leaving only so much space on sidewalks, under bridges. It is a tactic employed all over the city. Many of the homeless individuals cluster
on the sidewalk surrounding Jack in the Box, getting high on what I presume to be “kush12.” Everyone is either strung out and on edge or fading in and out of consciousness. The area is overwhelmingly black males with a minimum 5:1 ratio to any other presentation of race.

Wheeler’s atmosphere is turmoil. It seems as if the disruption of the main encampment has not only impacted the physical and geographical composition of the now sporadic encampments, but has sown disconcertion, raising tension, anxiety, and frustration among the homeless.

Midway through my fieldwork, I sat down with HSP Baker to discuss the shutdown of Wheeler. Baker is a young Senegalese man and has been doing homeless outreach in Houston for many years. He spoke to the multi-faceted pressures exacerbating tension among Wheeler’s homeless and reaffirmed much of my initial experience:

**Baker:** One of the things that we see now that the camp is closed is that the energy is still there in the surrounding streets. And so you see people….arguing—Quote, unquote “barking” at each other. And you’ll see even the surrounding parking lots have been fenced off. Areas where people used to sleep under abandoned buildings and what not all fenced off. And so it feels like this is an area that has been pushing people out more and more….That pushing out has been happening for a long time in different ways. And so you can imagine a whole neighborhood that’s started to boom (and) now has kind of just left these people in a really small section that keeps shrinking. So I could see that as a source of agitation.

As Baker suggests, the pressures influencing Wheeler’s homeless go far beyond the destruction of the encampment. Wheeler’s homeless have been subjected to a plethora of pressures influencing their present circumstances. Wheeler typifies a central feature of homelessness that is foundational to its consistency—disturbance. Street stability only exists for an undetermined amount of time and uncertainty is constant. The complexity of this instability is vast, but to parse out this albatross, I apply two formative ecological theories—disturbance

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12 Kush is the colloquial name for synthetic cannabinoids. Kush has hyper-localized use within the Houston homeless community. Homeless informants suggested that many individuals mix Kush with other chemicals, such as "roach spray", to increase the effects of the substance. HSP informants also noted the widespread use of the substance and overdoses related to its use.
ecology and patch dynamics—as a way of viewing homelessness and homeless circumstances from a new vantage point.

Disturbance ecology views ecosystem equilibrium as suppositional. Disturbance regimes generate patterns of ecosystem destruction and subsequent succession. Disturbances then have both positive and negative effects on the ecosystem. In addition, some organisms and ecosystems are dependent upon disturbance for propagation and maintenance (White 2006). Disturbances can destroy habitats and available resources (Pickett & White 1985) while altering nutrient cycling, species diversity, and landscapes (Sousa 1984). Early understandings in ecology saw disturbances as both physical—wildfires, floods, cyclones, drought, floods, etc.—and biological—predation or grazing (Sousa 1984). Applied to the context of homelessness from a political ecology orientation, disturbance regimes expand to encompass a wide range of interactions, both physical and social, that influence homeless patch establishment and the interconnected “homeless patch dynamic” process.

Through analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the following section engages homeless disturbance regimes that result in “homeless patch dynamics.” First, I discuss how environmental disturbances influence homeless patches and preferential habitation spaces, with a particular focus on Harvey. Second, I address social disturbances and the cyclical construction of pressures that reinforce social disturbances upon homeless peoples in Houston. I then combine qualitative findings with GPS mapping of homeless patches to show how environmental and social disturbance regimes affect homeless patch dynamics in Houston. I use the deconstruction of the Wheeler encampment to show how the disturbance reorganized homeless patches in the immediate area. Additionally, I identify how a particular anti-homeless ordinance—Sec. 40-352. - Sitting/Lying Down on Sidewalks—directly impacts homeless patch dynamics and migration.
Lastly, I discuss how two events temporarily slowed enforcement of Houston’s anti-camping ordinance—Sec. 21-62. – Encampment in Public Place—releasing social disturbance pressure. However, my findings reveal how the City of Houston implemented loopholes to still enforce the ordinance on a reduced scale.

**Homeless Environmental Disturbance**

Environmental disturbances regulate preferential areas within urban environments for homeless individuals’ survival. Exposure to the natural elements drives homeless peoples to seek areas that lessen exposure. During fieldwork, both instances of homeless arrangements—encampment and sleeping rough (SR)—exhibited inclinations for either natural or urban environment cover. Cover features reduce exposure to natural elements by shielding rainfall, reducing wind, and creating shade. Delta, a rugged old man with sun-damaged skin and a silver beard, blatantly affirmed cover’s importance stating, “first thing we do is if the weather gets too hot, I crawl my ass in the tent. Underneath this bridge blocks a lot of the heat.”

![Figure 18: Chartres encampment using overpass for cover (photo by Shawn Griffith)](image)
For encampments, overpasses and tree canopy are the most utilized forms of cover. Every large encampment, greater than 15 tents or structures, I encountered in Houston utilized overpasses for cover. Generally, overpasses offer consistent cover and larger amounts of protected space allowing encampments to grow. Figure 18 shows Houston’s largest encampment—Chartres—utilizing overpass cover.

Smaller, sporadic encampments tended to utilize tree canopy cover as seen in Figure 19. Tree canopy is often “patchy” in an urban environment and protects less space than a freeway overpass. Tree patches constrain the size of encampments as cover is limited, preventing large-scale encampments like Wheeler, Chartres, and Pierce from occurring.

Figure 19: Encampment using tree canopy for cover (photo by Shawn Griffith)
Surprisingly, many encampments continue to utilize tree canopy spaces during fall and winter months when cover lessens from leaf shedding as illustrated in Figure 20. One could argue that these areas would become less desirable as exposure, specifically to rainfall, increases during colder months, but it is possible that less leaf cover provides more sunshine and warmth during the day. However, many of my homeless informants possessed unrivaled determination, perseverance, and mettle. As such, their preferences override environmental pressures. These findings support my theory that factors beyond environmental exposure influence homeless patch dynamics.

Figure 20: Tree patch constrains camp size; continued use of camp post leaf shedding (photo by Shawn Griffith)
Factors that counter dependence on natural and urban cover preferences are skill, ingenuity, material access, and scavenging abilities. If individuals can source necessary materials to build cover, then other factors drive where and why they choose patch locations. Alpha’s shelter serves as a prime example of constructing cover in an exposed space as seen in Figure 21. Alpha scavenged pallets from a local furniture store and drug each pallet multiple city blocks to his chosen patch. Alpha deconstructed the pallets and utilized his carpentry skills to build a pallet roof. He then covered the pallets with tarpaulin and used bricks found in the patch to secure the tarpaulin from blowing away. Alpha’s shelter withstood Harvey.

SR instances involve greater variation in cover usage. SR instances in exposed areas are demonstrated in APPENDIX 3: Figures 3.3, 3.5, and 3.6. SR instances using urban cover as shown in APPENDIX 3: Figures 3.1 and 3.2. Individuals sleeping rough can be highly transient

Figure 21: Alpha’s pallet shelter (photo by Shawn Griffith)
and tend to have severe mental health and substance abuse issues. Due to increased transiency, observation bias likely influenced the greater degree of variation in cover usage I experienced during fieldwork. Here, observation bias occurs in two ways: (1) the individual was only in an exposed area while I was present; and (2) the majority of fieldwork was conducted during daylight hours with dry weather conditions. It is probable that SR instances fluctuate between day and night hours. Additionally, my ethnographic findings suggest that environmental perturbations influence preferential areas and relocation. As a result, I argue that SR instances fluctuate based on present environmental conditions and that environmental disturbances put SR individuals in greater states of flux and instability than encampment occupants.

My interactions with Bravo support this argument. As I interviewed Bravo on sloped concrete adjacent to a freeway onramp underneath I-69, Bravo spoke about choices made for survival during Harvey:

**Bravo:** Yeah, I stayed outside....It was raining hard. I had no place. I had to go find a place where there was no water and the places were flooded and muddy. So I had to go find higher ground.

Bravo sought refuge from the storm underneath the overpass where we conducted the interview. The overpass offered cover from the rain while the onramp provided elevation. However, he still had to adapt to his surroundings:

**Bravo:** Yeah, I was like sleeping in the sleeping bag on the side right there you know. And umm blankets, a pile of blankets and I’d sleep in my sleeping bag on top of it. And when it rains then I put it in the middle of the pillar right there....So the water goes around.

Bravo had pointed to the large middle pillar supporting the above overpass as seen in Figure 22. Since the sloped concrete embankment acts as a freeway water runoff, water continuously flowed down the concrete throughout Harvey. With only a sleeping bag and a pile
of blankets, Bravo rode out the storm using a pillar to divert water to stay dry. Harvey, acting as environmental disturbance, forced Bravo to adapt to his rapidly changing physical environment.

![Figure 22: Bravo’s Harvey refuge location (photo by Shawn Griffith)](image)

Other homeless informants were forced to leave their “spots” for survival. Sleeping rough under a bridge 20 yards from the Buffalo Bayou, Kilo and Lima had fallen asleep as the bayou water rose during Harvey:

**Kilo:** I had me and my friend, I had to get out of this little hole here because the water had.

**Shawn:** It had come up that fast?

**Kilo:** Because, I was asleep. That’s what it was….I thought it won’t gonna be that much. So I was asleep, but it was bad….But thank god we were able to get out.

Lima described waking Kilo and getting the two of them out of a small hole between the sloped concrete embankment and the bridge’s metal support beam as the water rushed into their
sleeping space. Lima expressed that they had been in that spot for three floods and not once had the water reached the top of the bridge.

My ethnographic findings suggest that both encampment and SR populations were impacted by Harvey and were required to make similar adaptations for survival. In this way, Harvey acted as a perturbation to the entire homeless ecosystem. It cleared encampment spaces and preferential “spots” of SR individuals as many accessed shelter at the George R. Brown Convention Center and the Star of Hope Men’s Shelter. Harvey altered the landscape’s homeless presence and the urban physical environment. The resulting effect was a pattern of disruption and succession. Harvey reshaped Houston’s homeless patches by allowing certain homeless individuals to advance and occupy previously held spaces, a process similar to organismal advance post-disturbance within ecosystems (Pickett & Thompson, 1978).

Individuals like Bravo were able to establish in the area where they sought refuge from Harvey. By the time I met Bravo, roughly 18 months had passed since Harvey. Bravo no longer had just a sleeping bag and a pile of blankets. Bravo had constructed a functional encampment in the grassy area at the bottom of the sloped concrete embankment, not more than 100 feet from the pillar used to ride out the storm. Bravo’s encampment had a firepit used for cooking, making coffee, and nightly enjoyment. The camp had a dish pit and Bravo had even constructed a makeshift bathroom for privacy (see APPENDIX 8).

In total, Harvey forced 36% of my homeless informants to leave their patch, but only 27% entered disaster shelters. The discrepancy between those forced to leave and those accessing shelter resulted from decision-making differentiation between street partners. While Kilo chose to enter the disaster shelter, Lima opted to stay on the street. Alternatively, 54% of homeless
informants stayed in their patch and rode out the storm\textsuperscript{13}. Once the floodwaters receded, 27\% of homeless informants returned to their old patches.

**Social Disturbances and Homeless Preferences**

Kilo and Lima’s desire to return to their patch serves as a useful turning point to examine how other types of disturbances influence homeless preferences, spatial dynamics, and habitation patterns. At Kilo and Lima’s spot, Harvey had severely damaged the above street’s drainage system resulting in water and sewage pooling next to where they slept. In fact, the two spent the majority of the interview complaining about how the city, specifically the public works employees, handled the damage after Harvey. Lima eloquently encapsulated his frustrations saying bluntly, "I had to tell a motherfucker what a manhole was."

The couples’ focus on the subject came as no surprise after spending multiple days at their patch performing participant observation and interviews. The smell of raw sewage was overwhelming and damage from Hurricane Harvey had made the space much more challenging to traverse. Kilo fell and injured her hip resulting in a trip to the hospital the night before I met her. The damaged terrain made it difficult for her to exit the spot as she was older, frail, and malnourished. Yet, the fetidness of sewage and new damage did not deter Kilo and Lima. After Harvey, they returned and remained in their spot for 22 months until my arrival, dealing with their new normal, as many other factors influence homeless patch dynamics.

Social disturbances help explain why Kilo and Lima remained, even though Harvey had made their spot less than ideal. Social disturbances greatly influence homeless individuals’ patch preferences, spatial dynamics, and migration. After meeting with Kilo and Lima initially, they

\textsuperscript{13} One informant—Foxtrot—was in a care facility during Harvey. He became homeless after Harvey, but the cause of homelessness was unrelated to the storm.
told me to come back the next morning to meet Tango, who had also remained outside during Harvey. The subsequent interview informed how social disturbances affect patch preferences.

Tango was a street-hardened, yet exuberant addict who preferred freebasing or smoking cocaine. Tango had been homeless in 8 different cities, incarcerated multiple times, and consistently struggled to stay clean, but carried himself with great confidence. During our interview, Tango spoke frequently of his bouts of sobriety and desires to remain clean, but felt that no matter what: “I’m always gonna fall back to these streets.” Tango identified how social disturbances impact patch desirability and becoming accustomed to the street:

**Tango:** At that time, I wasn’t doing that (attempting to get housing). You know what I’m saying. Before that (Harvey) came I wasn’t trying to get no housing nothing like that.

**Shawn:** Do you just want to talk a little bit about why?

**Tango:** Imma tell you reason why because I was comfortable being in the streets like that. I was being comfortable.…cause I don’t have to pay no bills, I don’t have to do none of that. I was just comfortable. Sleeping outside, ya know….I had got used to that….Give me a nice little spot and boom….Keep all my stuff there and, you know, I come back its still there. I come back, you know. I ain’t gotta worry about nothing. Ain’t nobody taken nothing, none of that….I just had me a nice little spot to where I could, you know, come and lay down whatever time I want to. Ain’t nobody bothering me or nothing….It’s just that I had gotten comfortable with being outside and with being by myself.

For Tango, a desirable spot made street life manageable, but his comfortability involved multiple factors: (1) security of personal belongings; (2) accessibility at any time; (3) peace of mind while sleeping; and (4) seclusion from interpersonal interaction. Additionally, Tango’s spot during Harvey provided necessary protections from extreme environmental conditions:

**Tango:** Where I was, I was under a bridge….I was wrapped up real tight….And wind went right by me….That was by the grace of god….See the grace of god, he the one who really saved me cause I’m outside. And I’m wrapped up in about 4, 5 blankets around me right, real tight. I mean I’m cold, sprawled up….So I’m….I was really scared and praying to the lord “lord please don’t let nothing happen to me man. Please don’t let this wind just whip me up and take me up”….And it didn’t. You know, I got a little wet though….I stayed in my little cubbie hole, you know.

While the differing disturbance regimes—environmental and social—act in tandem upon homeless patch dynamics, social disturbances act as a constant regulatory and authoritative
feature upon homeless decision-making and preferences. My ethnographic and GPS findings underscore how homeless individuals adapt to social disturbances that include but are not limited to: intra-homeless dynamics; overt instances of discrimination, prejudice, and violence against homeless peoples; societal perceptions and complaints influencing reactionary local government policy; and increased ordinance enforcement.

Regarding intra-homeless social dynamics, Echo expressed how variation in homeless culture affects individual interactions and restricts desirability for entering certain locations:

**Echo:** I’m a huge book reader and I have tons of books, but I will not go to the library because then I will have to deal with those, those people. And those people, they just sit there, and they lay there. And they don’t do nothing all day. And I don’t understand it. And then they steal from each other. And none of that makes sense to me so I just want to be away from all them.

Tango also identified instances of intra-homeless conflict and the resulting trauma and violence that can accompany street life:

**Tango:** See cause you got real life killers out here. And people don’t understand that…. You stay there, messing with old people and taking their money and run off and think that’s cool. That’s not cool man. Because eventually one of these times you ain’t gonna make it…You know, I done seen the funny stuff. Like the people doing that kush and shit and all them are all laid out. I don’t touch it. I walk by it…But some people don’t do that. You high on that kush and all stuff hanging and laying all out. You higher than a motherfucker. (unintelligible) I done seen it happen. Turn around, somebody tell that person who done it. I done see them kill that person.

Similarly, HSP Baker noted how Chartres encampment residents restrict access to regulate the immediate social environment:

**Baker:** And that part is interesting because the front of it is more intense, but it is even more intense now. Like the crew, the crew that was up there before. They were actively using and everything, but they all wanted help. They were all kind of old heads. Umm, what I hear these days there’s kind of more organized dealing. Umm, and actually like I guess more…maybe struct…., I don’t know if structure is the right word, but more exclusiveness around who can stay there and who can’t….and then we even have heard reports from people who stay downtown passing through there late at night and getting jumped because they are not supposed to be there.
Of my homeless informants, 45% made comments related to intra-homeless dynamics that influenced behavior and decision-making. These findings suggest that intra-homeless dynamics influence patch size, formation, and location. Large-scale, hierarchical encampments such as Chartres have internal mechanisms to control occupancy. Street-based behavior can influence individuals’ safety and the overall security of a patch. Tango spoke to how he felt good laying down at night because he knew he “didn’t mess with nobody that day.” Alternatively, Echo felt different from the rest of “those people” (other homeless individuals) and chose to disassociate. These feelings led to Echo’s encampment occupying a smaller patch on the edge of the central business district that encountered significantly less foot traffic.

Social disturbances also come in the form of abuse and trauma from the surrounding community with acts of verbal, physical, and sexual assault perpetrated against homeless individuals. Before interviewing Bravo, his partner spoke about the dangers of being a woman on the street:

*Fieldnotes*

Bravo’s partner ignores my question about Harvey. She starts talking about the dangers of being a woman living here. She shows me two places where she has been stabbed. She says that people on the freeway stopped last week and came down to her tent. They said, “They were gonna get with her (rape).” They tried to pull her out of the tent when her Pitbull attacked them.

The couple stated that this was not an isolated occurrence and that they felt it was a constant threat. Bravo and his partner had three dogs that they used to protect the camp (see APPENDIX 8: Figure 8.9). Using dogs to protect camps was a common occurrence encountered during fieldwork.

Similarly, Delta documented multiple occurrences of hate-induced violence that he had experienced over his 17 years of living on Houston’s streets:
**Delta:** It’s a day to day struggle. You got to put up with a lot of people’s bullshit. Even people from this church coming out, (unintelligible) and you would think people coming out of church would have a little bit of a calmer spirit. But 90% of these fuckers (unintelligible) laugh. I have had some of them cuss me out. Flip me off. Coming out of church! Since I’ve been out here, I’ve been shot with a paintball gun, pellet gun. One time it was with a .22 (pistol).…. I’ve been sliced. I had 16 stitches here. I got sliced here. I got three slices on my back. (unintelligible) 16 stiches in my head. You got to put up with a lot of bullshit.

Societal discrimination, abuse, and violence require homeless individuals to adapt. Bravo and Delta both increased the footprints of their respective patches by bringing in additional occupants for safety in numbers. Bravo also strategically built their camp with only two entrances and used dogs to ward off intruders at each entrance (see APPENDIX 8). Alternatively, Tango and Alpha sought isolated locations to decrease chances of social interaction in their patches. Additionally, accessing Alpha’s camp required slipping under fencing and traversing a steep bayou embankment, which acted as a protective measure against social interactions.

Intra-homeless dynamics and acts of community violence against homeless peoples are compounded by social perceptions that influence the political structure. Large-scale encampments, such as Chartres, Pierce, and Wheeler, present considerable challenges to local governments as substantial pushback from local neighborhoods and businesses mount political pressure for action. The highly visible nature of large encampments using tents and structures built from repurposed materials makes them beacons of societal chagrin as HSP Baker noted:

**Baker:** It’s (homelessness) more visible, more visible. That’s what we hear when we have guests come to (the homeless service) that want to learn about homelessness. Why is it so visible?

Encampment visibility engenders visceral community responses and pushback. Of my HSP informants, 27% spoke of increasing community concerns related to visibility. Encampment visibility bolsters community perceptions that homelessness is getting worse or growing in
Houston. This phenomenon leads to what I call “invisible results”—the positive effects of a homeless service system gone unseen by the greater public as encampment homelessness makes the issue more visible and implies permanency. Houston typifies this phenomenon as the CoC has consistently lowered their total homeless population over the last decade, but city residents see homelessness as more visible and view the homeless situation as being worse than prior years. I argue this phenomenon occurs because the general public fails to understand that a large portion of individuals and families live in a state of precarity. A loss of a job, a car breaking down, or loss of a loved one, just to name a few, can have cascading effects that carve a path to homelessness. Additionally, the US criminal justice system serves as a direct pipeline to the streets, particularly for people of color (Alexander 2012). As a result, individuals are constantly thrown into a state of homelessness and CoCs function to mitigate homelessness rather than end homelessness.

At the time of my fieldwork, Houston’s homeless population had steadily declined since 2008 and dropped 61% over the time period (HUD, 2020a). The only increase seen in Houston’s homeless population over the previous decade occurred in 2018, the year after Harvey. While 36% of my HSP informants dispute the validity of their Point-in-Time numbers, there was a consensus that Houston’s CoC could house individuals expeditiously with an average time from engagement to housing hovering near 30 days. Moreover, CHH claims to have housed over 17,000 individuals in permanent housing programs since 2008, with 84% of those individuals remaining stably housed (CHH, 2019), and 66% of HSP informants acknowledged the effectiveness of Houston’s CoC. But whether homelessness has increased or decreased is largely inconsequential due to “invisible results.” If public perception views homelessness as worsening
then pressure mounts, forming new or increased instances of social disturbances for homeless populations.

Homeless individuals are viewed as bringing deleterious impacts to surrounding neighborhoods (Erikson 1995; Ring 2019). Safety and public health concerns become justifications for the political structure to respond and manage homelessness issues. Businesses view homeless individuals as harming their profits by harassing customers or damaging the neighborhood’s perception as HSP Able explained, “Houston is a business-oriented downtown and….they felt like a lot of people were getting harassed by the homeless population or felt uncomfortable.”

Community members file complaints with the local government if they perceive, or experience, increasing crime. HSP Fox reaffirmed community sentiment expressing that “any encampment is dangerous. When you have that many people in a small area and it’s hot as fuck here and then you know you have drugs or people who use drugs and then some who don’t. You know it can terrorize any community.” The buildup of trash and fecal matter then draw further community ire as HSP Oboe suggests:

**Oboe:** I do think that this city does have a legitimate public health and safety concern when it comes to encampments. When you have large congregations of people and you don’t have the proper facilities in place to cater to that population. You don’t have running water. You don’t have electricity. You don’t have plumbing. Umm, so I think on part it’s legitimate and on the other and I can’t say it’s illegitimate, ya know, the concerns of businesses….I mean you don’t want to have fecal matter building up on the doorstep….of a business….And I think people don’t want to be perceived as being an impoverished area….because they have homeless people hanging out.

The irony in Oboe’s quote is that the City of Houston is complicit in the creation of a vicious cycle for homeless individuals. Public pressure mounts as homeless individuals cannot meet their basic needs in a manner deemed appropriate by our current social body (Lock & Schepen-Hughes, 1990). However, public pressure on these issues results from the lack of or
restriction to accessible spaces for homeless individuals to meet their basic needs. Public restrooms and showers are not openly available throughout the city, and the local government has made little attempt to address this issue. HSP Nan was highly critical of this issue and the city’s open stance for restricting access to these resources stating, “And I know the city hates me to say this, but….I always believe in public restrooms and public potties and public showers and all of those things that are needed. Right? We shouldn’t say "oh we don’t want to do that."

Without access to proper facilities, homeless individuals are forced to relieve themselves in whatever space is available, whether privacy is available or not (see APPENDIX 9). I documented multiple instances of homeless individuals openly relieving themselves as they had nowhere else to go. Echo also voiced her frustration and humiliation over restricted access to basic hygienic facilities:

Echo: You feel dirty and you want to go clean up somewhere, it doesn’t matter if you are at a fountain or at a sink. And you’re washing your face just….trying to clean up or something, whenever you can. And you got somebody in there looking like you are just fucking bat-shit crazy. Another problem with downtown is the restrooms. If you have to use the restroom, there is few places that you can actually go into and they will accept you to use the restroom without you paying for anything. Very few places. So then what, you have to pee and you got to find a place to pee. So what, you gotta find woods or a secret spot. So you can let it loose real quick…

Shawn: So the city doesn’t have any public restrooms anywhere?
Echo: No. You go to that park across the street and the public restrooms are locked.

Justifications for political action, then, take an environmental degradation tone. Donald Trump attempted to weaponize this argument to force homeless camp sweeps by the local San Francisco government. Trump asserted that homeless individuals were polluting the ocean with hypodermic needles (Hernandez & Alexander 2019). The president further escalated the situation by threatening the state of California with environmental violations, to induce fiscal harm to California’s budget, if action was not taken to “clean up” California’s homelessness issues (Chiu 2019). To be clear, what Trump means by action is actively sweeping and deconstructing
homeless camps. While Trump’s assertion is discounted by experts as being “purely political” (Fessler 2019), the buildup of large amounts of refuse and fecal matter compel local governments to react. However, the City of Houston has designed camp cleanings to function as a disturbance:

**Oboe:** So ya know close to a hundred (occupants) and it (Wheeler) was so big too. I mean it spread out across multiple blocks under 59 and I mean they were there for a while. It was the first major encampment that popped up and they were there long enough to where the city had to conduct a certain number of deep cleans. The deep cleans were both well intentioned and also designed to disrupt people being there.

In this way, the City of Houston created its own tool of social disturbance used to discourage homeless patches from establishing in public spaces. However, the fiscal expense of camp cleanups is vast, and HSP Oboe estimated that a single cleanup involving hazmat services costs roughly $50,000. While heavily intrusive deep cleans had begun to decline by my arrival, HSP Oboe said these cleanings were happening on a quarterly basis. If deep cleans were performed at all three major encampments in Houston on a quarterly basis, the fiscal expense for the City of Houston is $600,000 a year. This expense does not account for additional costs of routine cleanings.

The confluence of these pressures—public pressure; safety, public health, and environmental concerns; and fiscal expenditures—against homeless individuals led to political action after “tipping point” events occurred. The Wheeler encampment would succumb to such a fate:

**Oboe:** So they (City of Houston) had enough of those cleanups and there were also several incidents of people getting shot and stabbed. I think there were a couple fatalities at the encampment and the community right there was incredibly vocal….and it was just a natural hotspot for the press….if there was ever an incident. If there was ever a cleanup. So it was just a confluence of factors….there were enough instances of public health and safety issues within a certain timeframe to where it, the encampment, was a serious liability….It’s officially going to be repurposed as a parking lot.
The mixture of social pressure and tipping point events induced political action leading to the deconstruction of the Wheeler encampment. Just like environmental disturbances, social disturbance can generate destructive events that coerce homeless individuals into leaving their preferred areas. Additionally, Wheeler is a poignant example of a social disturbance altering the physical urban environment. After the camp was cleared, the city used development as a tool to fence the former homeless patch to prevent a homeless succession pattern (see APPENDIX 7). Given the large-scale use of fencing documented in fieldnotes and visual data, the use of fencing to physically alter preferred homeless patches appears to be a tactic used throughout the city.

I argue that homeless management efforts only serve the immediate neighborhood and businesses interests and further perpetuate homelessness. Additionally, these efforts do not fully resolve issues in the area as homeless individuals moved to new locations in close proximity to the original encampment. After deconstructing Wheeler, homeless patches began to propagate in surrounding areas. Figure 23 is a one-acre hexagonal tessellation over the former Wheeler encampment area.

The map highlights how a camp sweep resulted in the emergence of new homeless patches in the surrounding area. The map suggests that the locale remains desirable and preferential as homeless patches remain in close proximity to the former encampment. This finding further supports earlier discussions involving the complexity of patch location preferences for homeless individuals and the confluence of factors that influence their decision-making. I should note that it is possible that satellite homeless patches existed in the Wheeler area while the encampment was still in place. However, I am unable to verify if such a pattern existed prior to deconstruction.
The end result of camp sweeps is a highly variable “homeless patch dynamic” landscape that presents challenges to both homeless individuals and HSPs attempting to move their clients off the street. HSP Baker spoke to the overall effects camp sweeps have on homeless peoples and the ability to continue providing them supportive services:

**Baker:** Bashstrip and Pierce was kind of this weird phenomenon... just a slew of medically vulnerable old folks that were just out there. And this past Wednesday the city did a cleaning, wiped everything out. Everything is gone and now these cases....there was probably about ten guys out there, uh about half of them were about to get housed and we don’t know where they are now. And so we have like my main guy whose an 86 year old sex-offender....supposed to be on dialysis, has a catheter into his chest; doesn’t get medical treatment. Really, really bad case....we were finally making some headway and now I have no idea where he is. Another guy is kind of like a chronic alcoholic was supposed to move in this week or last week. Didn’t move in because everyone was moved out of there.
In total, 50% of HSP informants documented cases of camp sweeps disrupting case management or achieving housing goal\textsuperscript{14}.

Beyond politically decisive encampment deconstructions that bring negative press and, as Oboe expressed, “are very traumatic for people living in the encampment”, public pressure results in city ordinance enactments to regulate homeless peoples. Presently, Houston has, at minimum, four ordinances used to regulate homeless individuals and patch formation. These include: Sec. 21-62. - Encampment in Public Place; Sec. 28-46. - Aggressive Panhandling Ban; Sec. 40-352. - Sitting/Lying Down on Sidewalks; and Article V. - Charitable Food Services. These ordinances are disruptive forces that alter homeless daily lives and heavily influence homeless patch dynamics. They become a tool for controlling homeless peoples and are enacted to herd, push, and prevent homeless patches from establishing. Both quantitative and qualitative data analyzed documented this effect.

Figure 24 shows a heat map of homeless sleeping arrangements encountered in Houston’s central downtown area. Initial interpretation of the data was that environmental disturbances were heavily influencing homeless patch dynamics. Hot spots track along major freeways that act as urban environmental cover. As expected, the largest hot spot is close to many essential homeless service resources. However, homeless individuals also heavily depend upon other homeless service resources that exist in central downtown Houston, specifically the Beacon. It was perplexing that no heat signatures of homeless encampments or SR instances were documented in the central business district of Houston. The lack of signatures was initially interpreted as observation bias.

\textsuperscript{14} It should be noted that not all HSP informants were direct care workers. For HSP informants providing direct care, 80% documented disruption in case management due to camp sweeps.
After consulting fieldnotes and transcriptions, it seemed plausible that certain city ordinances may be regulating homeless patch dynamics, specifically ordinance “Sec. 40-352. - Sitting/Lying Down on Sidewalks.” HSP Baker expressed how he would coach clients to avoid harassment and citations related to this ordinance from the Houston Police Department:

**Baker:** You get ticketed and so actually, I….know people who aren’t homeless who have been ticketed for this….but it happens to our clients all the time. And so the people downtown, we have actually had to coach people to just practice walking. You just got to keep moving around. And so of course then the encampments end up having everybody who wants to go lay down.

These ordinances exhibit similar characteristics to color-blind mass incarceration laws (Alexander 2012), as they are enforced in a supposedly “indiscriminate” manner. The non-homeless individuals Baker referred to were friends who sat down on sidewalks while
intoxicated during a night out on the town. However, the true intent of the sit and lie ordinance has little to do with drunken individuals enjoying a night out. The ordinance is specifically operationalized to target homeless individuals and “herd” them out of economically prosperous areas\textsuperscript{15}. This can even be recognized in the ordinance language where “It shall be unlawful for any person to place or deposit any item of bedding materials or personal possessions, including but not limited to any blanket, bag, package, or container of personal possessions on a sidewalk between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m.” (The City of Houston, 2019; emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{15} The term “herd” was used by HSP informants Fox and Nan to describe how ordinances force homeless migration in Houston.
Figure 25 shows the same heat map with the “Sec. 40-352. - Sitting/Lying Down on Sidewalks” enforcement zone for the central downtown business district. The map displays how heat signatures primarily exist on the boundary of the enforcement zone. Additionally, sectors in the northeastern quadrant of the enforcement zone rest upon the Buffalo Bayou trail, an outdoor recreation area where local businesses are less impacted and social isolation is obtainable. This map accentuates the competing disturbance regimes that regulate homeless patch dynamics as homeless individuals seek refuge from environmental pressures, punitive consequences of ordinance violation, and involvement with HPD. Intra-homeless dynamics and livelihood strategies then influence where and why individuals pursue certain locations along the ordinance boundary.

During fieldwork, it appeared that many patches had stabilized, and 27% of homeless informants expressed that “harassment” from police officers had decreased. I contend that two major occurrences aided patch stabilization. First, any land adjacent to or underneath interstates and freeways is owned by the State of Texas and the Texas Department of Transportation (TDOT). HSP Oboe explained that a few years prior the “attorney general for the State of Texas advised the state to stop pursuing trespassing charges” on TDOT land. As a result, punitive ticketing and consistent HPD interaction decreased. Second, after the City of Houston enacted the “Sec. 21-62. – Encampment in Public Place” ordinance making “encampment in a public place in the city unlawful”, the ACLU filed a civil action lawsuit against the City of Houston and forced the immediate suspension of enforcing the ordinance (ACLU, 2017).

These two events slowed social disturbances during my fieldwork, but Houston installed loopholes—"resource connection” and “homeless storage program”—in policy to still enforce ordinances on a smaller scale. Speaking to the homeless storage program that allowed HPD
officers to remove any unoccupied tents and place them into “storage”, Oboe simply put, “it’s kind of the intention of the storage space that most people will not pick up their items.” As such, marginalized homeless peoples still face social disturbance pressures even while enforcement in general has eased. Just as Yankee suggested during our first conversation:

**Yankee:** They are gonna boot us all out.
**Shawn:** Yeah, how long do you think it will take?
**Yankee:** I have no idea.
**Shawn:** But it always happens at some point right?
**Yankee:** Yes sir.

As many of the ethnographic accounts in this section have demonstrated, disturbance regimes create highly variable landscapes resulting in homeless patch dynamics. Environmental and social disturbance regimes influence where and why homeless individuals choose certain locations. More importantly, disturbance regimes regulate the tenure of occupancy. My main argument is that the ebb and flow of street life draws striking similarities to disturbance ecology and patch dynamics. Patterns of disruption and succession consistently occur, and disturbances act to perpetuate states of homelessness by increasing instability, uncertainty, and traumatic instances. Environmental disturbances remain a constant threat, especially in a hurricane-prone city such as Houston. Even while entities with good intentions attempt to slow social disturbances, Houston continues to find ways to enforce ordinances with loophole programs that have no intent to help homeless individuals. Additionally, an HSP informant suggested that once legal issues were resolved, increased ordinance enforcement would occur, and the next encampment slated for deconstruction is Chartres. As such, homeless individuals must continue to survive, adapt, and persist under the constant threat of disturbance regimes that are functional aspects of their daily lives.
Disaster for Whom?

“Just another day when their shit gets fucked up…”

HSP Baker

Figure 26: Homeless individual sleeping rough and escaping the cold off the Buffalo Bayou trail (photo by Shawn Griffith)

Vignettes from the Field: “like any other day”

As I walk along an isolated path of the Buffalo Bayou trail, I come across a homeless individual draped from head to toe in blankets. It is late winter, and the temperature is hovering around 46°F. Any exposed skin hurts, and the bitter wind quickly strips away body heat. The individual lies motionless wrapped in a blanket. After years of working with homeless individuals, cold days give me worry. Low temperatures are painful and dangerous. Mixed with wet conditions, hypothermia is a threat, and survival depends on materials, resourcefulness, and mettle.
I continue on to Whiskey’s spot just off the Buffalo Bayou trail. The encampment is situated between an interstate junction. A handful of other structures are sporadically interspersed throughout the bounded area. Each structure is attached to a tree patch giving the encampment a disjointed feel. The cacophonous sound of vehicles passing on the interstate is deafening, and the odor of vehicle exhaust is strong. As each vehicle passes, the air current shifts. Trucks thunderously drive by and I can feel the vibrations. Between the raucous noise, turbulent drafts of air, and erratic vibrations, the space is sensorially stimulating. As I reach Whiskey’s spot, he is cooking on a small charcoal grill. The camp is on a hill and in a denser tree patch than the rest of the encampment’s structures. It back up all the way to the concrete interstate barrier, making him no more than a few feet away from vehicles swiftly passing on the interstate. Extrapolating from prior experiences, it’s likely that he has done this as a protective measure to make sure people can’t access his spot from all sides. He has a small tent and tarps

Figure 27: Neighboring sleeping structure within Whiskey’s encampment showing the proximity to the interstate junction. Whiskey asked for no pictures of his structure to be taken. (photo by Shawn Griffith)
tied to trees to make a single entrance way and most likely to provide privacy. There is trash accumulating in and around his camp as the nearest trash can is easily half a mile walk away.

Whiskey is an older Latino man with long gray hair, a matching beard, and he speaks in a hoarse tone. He has been on the street for many years, and he seems unperturbed by the discordant milieu. Whiskey had remained outside during Harvey and, similar to his indifference to his immediate surroundings, he expressed little concern over the experience. Even though his spot was in close proximity to the bayou, its slight elevation kept the floodwaters from reaching the camp. Whiskey’s apathetic tone while talking about Harvey initially catches me off guard. His frustrations were focused on his present circumstances and Harvey was a fleeting matter. Encapsulating the encounter, he simply stated, “Harvey wasn’t as bad as this cold! Everything got a little wet, so we just dried it off. It was like any other day.”

Whiskey viewed Harvey as a minor inconvenience whereas the unusually cold weather that day was troublesome. This mindset is common among different types of vulnerable populations where disaster is not really the problem (O’Connell, 2014), but the interaction unveiled a paradox. While the greater society fell into turmoil, Whiskey continued about his life relying upon the same skills and perseverance that everyday requires for homeless individuals to survive. The experience initially felt idiosyncratic, but the pattern became inescapable as fieldwork continued calling into question whether a state of homelessness conditions individuals to a disaster context, effectively altering their experience of disaster compared to the greater population.

Unlike other vulnerable populations scholars have argued that “every day is a disaster” (Vickery, 2015, p. 12) for homeless individuals and small-scale hazards constantly influence homeless vulnerability (Walters & Gaillard, 2014), which my findings on homeless disturbance
regimes support. While not an all-inclusive argument as certain homeless individuals suffer from severe mental and physical health issues making them exceptionally vulnerable to disaster, in this section I engage a gray area wherein homeless individuals are conditioned to a disaster context by the daily crisis and instability they experience. This conditioning normalizes a disaster context making it "like any other day." Moreover, I contend that homeless individuals can leverage their prior adaptations to social and environmental systems to make a disaster context advantageous and improve their immediate circumstances—a situation presenting the abstract notion of “disaster for whom.” From this vantage point, I argue that street homeless informants were conditioned to a context of instability, uncertainty, and loss of material items making Hurricane Harvey and resulting the disaster context "like any other day.” Moreover, Harvey's disaster allowed street homeless informants to advantageously leverage their prior adaptions to the "everyday disaster” that is homelessness and improve their immediate circumstances. Harvey, then, became an opportunity, and opportunists were able to access resources and housing that otherwise would not have been available if the disaster had not occurred.

Although Whiskey’s experience initially seemed idiosyncratic, a pattern emerged throughout fieldwork. Homeless informants stated how challenging Harvey was for them while also making comments that countered their first claims. Echo, Whiskey’s camp partner, started our discussion about Harvey by saying, “oh man it was horrible!.....there was no way out of here without getting wet…Yeah, yeah it was bad, bad, bad. And it (water) was all over all the streets.” Echo stayed outside during the storm and used multiple different resources like she would any other day. When asked if Harvey or the disaster presented any unique challenges making street life harder than usual, Echo expressed, “Oh my gosh no, you had to wade through water. Uh, it was fine. It was fine.”
As an HSP working in the wake of Harvey, Baker described a homeless taxonomy that identified differing homeless experiences of the disaster. The taxonomic structure was broken into three major categories—survivalists, non-survivalists, and opportunists. Figure 28 depicts my homeless informants within Baker’s taxonomy. I positioned homeless informants based on their survival mindset, disaster experience, and opportunistic tendencies gathered during participant observation and interviews.

Baker first described survivalists, “So I know of cases that people, kind of the survivalist mindset, had kind of hunkered down and had figured out their own provisions or figured out how to get to high water [though he says “water” in listening to the interview, it is clear his meaning is high ground]….they weren’t really affected that much by Harvey.” Many of my informants hunkered down during the storm or adapted to changing environmental pressures and remained relatively unaffected by the physical hazard and subsequent disaster context. Lima typified the survivalist connotation and seemed unfazed by the experience: “I mean, it wasn’t that hard….I
have been on these streets for a long time....I know how to survive man.” In addition, Lima expressed the regularity of disturbances that normalized the experience:

**Lima:** I mean we didn’t really have too much stuff. Our personal stuff. Our IDs and you know a couple pairs of clothes. Stuff that we already done had, it packed up where we gone snatch up and go. The rest of the stuff we leave down for the bayou.

**Shawn:** Was it easy to get everything else you needed again afterwards?

**Lima:** Of course. And then it happened again and happened again and happened again.

Individuals like Lima took the disaster context challenges in stride and utilized skillsets built from years on the street. They continued accessing preferred resources and took advantage of the plethora of new resources made available by Harvey.

Baker moved on to discuss street homeless individuals who do not carry the survivalist connotation:

**Baker:** For the most part the folks that I was working with at the time, they weren’t survivalists. They were just out there in a tent getting by and when the water came they went somewhere else. And then the water went down and then they came back. And maybe their tent was gone or maybe some of their stuff was messed up. And so they just went back to sleeping on the sidewalk.

The nonchalant manner in which Baker described returning to sleep on the sidewalk underscored the regularity of loss, instability, and reality of homeless individuals. In other words, Harvey didn’t have to occur for this process to unfold. Disturbance regimes frequently strip homeless individuals of their belongings, effectively forcing them “back to sleeping on the sidewalk.”

These findings beg the question “disaster for whom?” While a disaster unfolded around many of my homeless informants, the lives of others in the Houston area who were not homeless plunged into disorder—their homes destroyed, belongings lost, and livelihoods thrown into flux. This disruption thrust them into a situation where they now relied upon the same resources that my homeless informants used for survival. In effect, Harvey survivors’ newfound state of flux, which either temporarily resembled homelessness or led to homelessness, was their individualized experience of disaster. Tare, an HSP informant working directly with street
homeless populations for many years, spoke to his personal experience of Harvey and the surreal nature of his new temporary state of homelessness:

Tare: I was evacuated from my apartment by boat and helicopter….I had eight, eight feet of water….Lost everything to my name. So when I got to the shelter it was like….It was just surreal….it’s like one moment you have, ya know, it’s like your life and then the next moment everything that you know it’s gone….It’s hard to wrap my mind around that reality and so it was traumatizing to say the least. And it was very surreal to know that homelessness can happen to anybody in a matter of a moment….Ya know, I mean, here I am working for….the homeless population and then find myself homeless, sleeping next to the homeless.

The disparity between Tare’s experience of Harvey and nearly all my homeless informants is striking and encapsulates "disaster for whom." For my homeless informants, this state of flux is a normality. As a result, I argue that homeless individuals, and particularly street homeless individuals, have altered experiences of disaster. The disaster context is “like any other day” where new challenges arise that must be overcome.

Baker’s taxonomic classifications, however, are not binary or discrete. Baker described a fluid grouping known as opportunists. They occurred in either prior classification and gamed the disaster to their advantage:

Baker: You know the things that stick out to me were: 1) the opportunists. I remember seeing people running around; our client’s running around downtown with these giant carts full of supplies. And just giddy. Like excited cause they’re like “yeah, I hit the jackpot! I hit the GRB [George R. Brown Convention Center] and I got all this stuff and I’m taking it back to my friends.” It was an excess of resources that they would have been fine without, but they were excited to have.

Opportunists did what many homeless individuals do best: they accumulated materials to improve their immediate circumstances. Every day brings new challenges, making the chance to capitalize on material goods a priority.

However, opportunists were not limited solely to resource acquisition. Some opportunistic homeless individuals were able to leverage the disaster context to an even greater
advantage. As Baker and I spoke about major resources implemented after Harvey, he identified pathways out of homelessness only made possible by the disaster:

**Baker:** So we expected to see a huge amount of people run out of their apartment vouchers after 6 months. We never really saw that. So it seemed like those folks probably actually had apartments before. Probably had jobs and just continued on with life.

**Shawn:** So I guess what you are saying is that you think it (resource program) didn’t actually hit (target) the population that you all work with. As directly.

**Baker:** Yes…except for the opportunist. And so we had a lot of folks that went into the emergency shelter, Red Cross shelter end up in Residences of Emancipation, which held maybe 250 people. I’d say about 200 were our typical downtown homeless clients. And of course there was a special push to make sure all of those folks got housing. So everybody who stayed at Residences on Emancipation till the end got permanent housing. Umm, so who did it affect? If anything it benefited the people who are opportunistic who got into housing and everybody else’s life kind of went on as normal.

Other HSPs spoke to this process. HSP Fox was transitioned to work in an ancillary shelter established at a Houston Community College warehouse after the George R. Brown shelter closed. Fox performed housing assessments with individuals in the shelter to move them into housing. She spoke directly about housing individuals with criminal records that under normal circumstances would prevent an individual from obtaining housing:

**Fox:** I was working with sex offenders. I was working with murderers. All this stuff, huge felonies. And assaults and everything. And it was…

**Shawn:** So I mean those individuals weren’t able to get any of that funding.

**Fox:** No it was…Yeah actually (disbelieving chuckles). I remember getting a guy who was on…

**Shawn:** Oh so they were!

**Fox:** Yeah, depending how hard you advocated if you got somebody. Like I had gotten somebody who did twenty-five years. Umm for it. And he got housed.

HSP Jig reaffirmed Fox’s statements underscoring the leniency granted by properties to house Harvey survivors saying, “*If you got assessed at the shelter then the next step is to find an apartment that would take you. And we had....several properties that were participating that were willing to suspend background checks and credit history and all that just to get people in.*”

HSP Yoke also identified how Harvey influenced the ability to house homeless sex-offenders, which is notoriously difficult, stating, “*So technically there was an eligibility criteria, but no it*
didn’t matter….We have a couple of landlords that would take a limited number of people with sex-offenses, but we were limited to, I want to say we probably got 9 households, 10 households housed that were sex-offenders….that we even got 9 or 10 sex-offenders housed sort of surprised me.”

To display Baker’s taxonomy with greater accuracy, I scored each homeless informant based on survivalist mindsets and opportunistic tendencies. For survivalists, the composite score is based off five categories—adaptability, resourcefulness, emotional regulation, intellect, and motivation. Each category is scored on a 0-5 scale and a composite score is created by taking the mean of the five scores. Informants whose composite score is closer to 0 align with Baker’s non-survivalist category while informants scoring closer to 5 are considered survivalists. For opportunists, a single score on a 0-5 scale is given based on the informants’ opportunistic tendency. I used these two scores to plot my informants within the taxonomic spectrum as illustrated in Figure 29.

![Taxonomic Spectrum](image)
Nevertheless, the reality is that not everyone was housed. All of my homeless informants were Harvey survivors and still street homeless during my fieldwork. While some of them simply chose not to seek out help, others were met with barriers that prevented an opportunistic approach. A common theme among informants was the challenge of being in a shelter environment, let alone a mass disaster shelter with upwards of 10,000 people. Lima, Bravo, and Alpha all expressed displeasure with accessing shelter or continuing to remain at the shelter:

**Lima:** I don’t like being around the people that were over at George R Brown. A lot of people stealing. A lot of people getting stuff that they gonna go sell. You know, I don’t like that. It’s just not me. I don’t like the bullshit….It make me feel like I’m in jail.

*Bravo:* I just don’t like being around too much people man. So I just stick to myself.

**Alpha:** You know what on average I don’t like being around very many people…Well you know what at first it seemed like there was maybe, maybe about 2,500, maybe about 3,000 people for something like the first two days, but after, after maybe about one week it seemed like there was about 10,000 people in there….That’s a lot of humans….I prefer when it was about 2,500 people.

Out of these informants, Lima and Bravo both chose not to seek shelter whereas Alpha sheltered at George R. Brown and eventually left due to the number of people. Leaving the shelter or simply choosing not to go is important because access to the 6-month housing voucher was restricted to those who remained in shelter.

For my homeless informants, only one was able to access this resource, but later was denied housing. Systemic barriers exist that prevent individuals from being housed. Even as a chronically homeless veteran who remained in the disaster shelters until they were closed, Yankee was unable to access housing:

**Yankee:** Then a (person) named Niner, works for Search, found me an apartment and (person) showed me pictures of it. Yeah I want it. It got tooken up from underneath me….I had an apartment promised to me, but then at Fan of the South they didn’t know I was a sex offender. Even though its approved. They gave me twelve hundred dollars to live and throw me in a fucking rat ass motel.
As Yoke expressed earlier, she was even surprised that they were able to house 10 sex offenders. Unfortunately, Yankee was not one of them. Even though disaster offers an opportunity for some, other homeless individuals are bound by a system that perpetuates their existence on the street.

Opportunity did not cease once the shelter transition ended. A targeted program funded by the Qatar Harvey Fund known as “Housing Harvey’s Homeless (H3) Initiative” was conceived to counteract Houston’s first spike in homelessness after nearly seven years (Qatar Harvey Fund, 2020). H3 shifted outreach teams’ approaches and pushed for targeted housing efforts of homeless individuals in the central downtown area. H3 provided yet another opportunity to exit homelessness that was only possible because of Harvey. The results of H3 have yet to be released, but the initiative’s goal was to provide long-term housing for 135 homeless individuals in the central downtown area (Qatar Harvey Fund, 2020).

The findings in this section underscore the contradictory nature of disaster and homelessness. "Disaster for whom" questions whether homeless individuals’ experiences of disaster are altered and less acute. Since they are conditioned to the hardships often associated with disaster, their experience of the turmoil disaster brings to their social and environmental surroundings is inconsistent with the larger society. My findings suggest that street homeless individuals approached the new challenges of Harvey’s disaster “like any other day.” Moreover, Harvey’s disaster offered an opportunity to exit homelessness that would not have existed before.

Context is everything, however. Harvey primarily caused mass flooding, giving homeless individuals the chance to move to higher ground. Additionally, heavy flooding did not occur in central downtown areas where homeless individuals are densely populated. As such, different hazards bring different conditions that could present serious dangers to anyone living on the
street. That being said, based off research findings I argue that certain homeless individuals are predisposed to manage a disaster context given the nature of their constant state of flux. As Lima remarked, “I have been on these streets for a long time….I know how to survive man.”
Vignettes from the Field: “disaster rapid re-housing”

After spending the morning with Kilo and Lima under a bridge next to the Buffalo Bayou, I leave for an interview with a new HSP informant. I meet Yoke at a nice Latin-themed coffee shop. We sit on the patio for privacy. It’s close to 95°F outside and all of the other patrons are inside. Luckily, there are umbrellas for shade, but it is still quite hot. Yoke is a middle-aged Chilean woman who carries herself in an unassuming manner. I quickly learn that she is well-informed of HUD policy and the disaster response to Harvey. As Yoke and I talk about the Harvey response, I express to her that “it sounds like the situation was really organic.” Yoke plainly responds, “There was no plan.”

Yoke described the predicament that the City of Houston and Mayor Sylvester Turner faced in the aftermath of Harvey. As it became time to close the disaster shelters, Houston still had roughly 2,500 individuals living within the facilities. These individuals could not access Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) support and had no housing plans. Yoke
viewed these individuals as comprising two differing groups: 1) “pre-disaster doubled-up” and 2) “pre-disaster homeless.” Yoke conveyed that Mayor Turner saw this number as too high, and directed that something must be done to lower the shelter population by at least 1,000 before closing.

After Mayor Turner’s order, the City of Houston designed a plan in collaboration with Houston’s CoC to create a “disaster rapid re-housing” system for Harvey survivors remaining in disaster shelters. The overhaul of Houston's old CoC in 2013 now paid dividends in the aftermath of Harvey. The CoC structure, personnel, and tools were called upon to build a system for housing individuals, which is what a CoC does every day. The plan involved appropriating CoC agencies’ staff into disaster shelters to conduct streamlined housing assessments, which were a modified version of the CoC’s coordinated entry assessment, to create a prioritized housing list. High-priority Harvey survivors could then access a 6-month rent voucher, a week’s supply of food, a security deposit, a utility deposit, and the potential for extension after the voucher expired. In addition, case managers were assigned to support housing longevity. Importantly, individuals were placed in the CoC’s housing unit stock, which is separate from public housing. This approach allowed CoC personnel to advocate for Harvey survivors and lower eligibility criteria that would normally be in place with landlords.

The result was a unique situation in which individuals with criminal histories and other systemic barriers could potentially access housing. To Yoke’s surprise, even ten sex offenders were able to be housed. Chronically homeless individuals were also placed in these units until they could be transferred to permanent supportive housing at case manager discretion. In a way, the disaster provided a path for many off the street who, under what Yoke called “blue skies”, would not have obtained housing. Yoke claims that the system housed roughly 936 people in 46
days, and, from our conversation, it appears that the major limitation in housing even more individuals was funding.

However, Yoke made the intent of the program very clear: “It’s not a homeless program. It’s a shelter closure program.” The system was designed to transition to shelter closure to avoid political blowback and a media nightmare. After effectively reaching their goal, the shelters were closed, and the last 1,500 individuals, according to my homeless informants, were given $1,200 in hotel assistance.

Two major political goals were achieved by implementing this system. First, not closing the shelter with 2,500 people left and housing over a third of them showed empathy and leadership by Mayor Turner. Second, providing hotel assistance avoided the "kicking people to

Figure 31: Houston during “blue skies” with McDonald’s hostile architecture (see APPENDIX 7: 7.13-7.20) bordering Houston’s “Skid Row”, otherwise known as “Pierce elevated.” (photo by Shawn Griffith)
the street” media storm that would have resulted. But what happened to the remaining 1,500 people given hotel assistance? In all likelihood, they are now on the street just like Yankee.

In the wake of Harvey, a unique situation occurred wherein the City of Houston called upon its CoC—“The Way Home”—to implement a disaster resource. The resulting “disaster rapid re-housing” system created was the first of its kind and involved direct collaboration between the City of Houston and its CoC. The system functioned to rapidly house Harvey survivors stuck in disaster shelters with no housing plan or the ability to access federal disaster resources. The success of Houston’s “disaster rapid re-housing” system set a precedent, and the approach was adopted by Puerto Rico after Hurricanes Irma and Maria (Gobierno de Puerto Rico, 2020) and North Carolina after Hurricane Florence (Back @ Home: North Carolina, 2020).

In this section, I address why the City of Houston leaned on its CoC to provide a disaster resource after Harvey. The discussion begins with the CoC’s “system transformation” that occurred in 2013 and engages why systematic overhaul took place. I argue that the success Houston’s CoC has achieved in lowering its total homeless population since 2012 led to its application during Harvey’s disaster context. Moreover, I identify how changes made during the 2013 “system transformation” influenced the effectiveness of the disaster program. The end result was an external, non-governmental system for housing individuals being judiciously applied during a disaster context to provide streamlined and tailored housing access.

In 2013, Houston’s CoC undertook the difficult task of dramatically reorganizing their homeless service system. But why was a system overhaul needed in the first place? As discussed in the background section, those evaluating these systems in the early 1990s identified a lack of coordination between federal, state, and local governments and homeless service providers in cities across the US. This issue led to the Clinton administration’s federal strategic plan—
Priority Home!—and the call for a “Continuum-of-Care” (USICH, 1994). Fast forward 15 years and the Obama administration enacts the HEARTH act in 2009, which merged federal grant funding under a single grant known as CoC and granted HUD regulatory powers (HUD, 2009). By 2012, HUD mandated communities to form local CoCs to receive federal grant funds with the “CoC Program Interim Rule” (HUD, 2012).

I briefly cover this history again to highlight that Houston’s “system transformation” was not self-induced. The formation of a local CoC was mandated by HUD in 2012 and the transformation was reactionary. Prior to 2012, agencies were siloed and focused on meeting individual grant goals to maintain their funding streams, which created issues with effectively serving Houston’s homeless population. HSP Nan discussed problems that existed prior to 2012:

Nan: I do think that there has to be a total system change, right? Which is what really happened in 2012 with HUD developing the CoC….And having a lead agency in every community so that we did unsilo ourselves….We were so concerned about siloing and….we were afraid that if we worked together that we would lose funding sources…Ironically, working together to provide better services for homeless peoples was against individual agency interests. Speaking to how agencies acted in self-interest, HSP Nan explained that, “prior to 2012, even in most permanent supportive housing programs, we were cherry picking homeless folks….going into those programs. And basically we were cherry picking because we wanted better outcomes.” Agencies acting out of self-interest effectively led to systemic issues in service delivery for Houston’s homeless.

However, HUD’s CoC mandate gave Houston an opportunity to overhaul and integrate its homeless service system as agencies were pressured by possible funding loss. Yoke outlined Houston’s “system transformation” strategy:
**Yoke:** In 2013 we put together….a strategy that said we’re gonna reorient our whole system towards housing and housing-stabilization and away from crisis-management. So we invested all the resources into the backend, added additional housing—PSH (permanent supportive housing) and rapid re-housing, got rid of transitional housing and then put coordinated entry in so we could start funneling the right people to the right resources.

Yoke described Houston’s coordinated entry (CE) system as a “centralized inventory system” akin to Amazon. Houston’s CE allowed the CoC to find intervention gaps and make projections about where investments should be made to keep the system efficient and functional.

Coordinated entry engendered an “integrated system” as all agencies submitted assessments on the platform to connect their clients to the available and appropriate housing. The result was a 49% decline in Houston’s total homeless population from 2012 to 2017 (HUD, 2020a). During interviews, 66% of my HSP informants identified Houston’s “integrated system” as positively affecting homeless service delivery and contributing significantly to the homeless population decline.

Given the system’s substantial success, it is clear why the City of Houston looked to their CoC to implement a disaster resource during Harvey. Moreover, 33% of my HSP informants suggested that there was no disaster plan and that the approach was organic. With no plan, the City of Houston turned to one of its highest performing systems to provide one of its vital services—re-housing—in a disaster context. As Yoke explained, “over three years prior to Harvey….the homeless response system turned into….a re-housing system.”

Thus, the structure, personnel, and funding paths were already in place to house Harvey survivors, and the system just needed to be called upon. In the opening vignette of this section, Yoke outlines how Houston’s CoC was appropriated to become a disaster recovery program and the success the system had in housing Harvey survivors. However, as Yoke and I discussed the implementation of the disaster recovery program, a pivotal conversation provided insight about
how a city without a recently overhauled system might fare. I expressed that the “system
transformation” in 2013 was a key factor for the disaster program’s effectiveness during Harvey
and that other CoCs throughout the US would not achieve the same result as Houston if they
applied their system post-disaster. Highlighting how North Carolina’s Back @ Home disaster
program is modeled after Houston’s H3, Yoke responded:

Yoke: So, Back @ Home is a perfect example….They didn’t have like a rebuilt homeless
system. They are doing it now, but here’s the other cool opportunity though is they are
gonna be able to capitalize on the hurricane to rebuild, to….transform some of their
homeless system….so does it really fucking matter? Like it doesn’t matter which is
first….You get to do system transformation on steroids.

In this way, disaster is not only an opportunity for new pathways out of homelessness but
also an opportunity for CoC “system transformation” to better serve disaster survivors and
homeless individuals during non-disaster times. Moreover, I argue that increasing CoC
functionality, integration, and effectiveness can be viewed as a disaster preparedness measure.
Since a CoC is built and predicated upon housing individuals and helping them maintain their
housing, I argue that the application of this system during a disaster context is an effective
solution for housing individuals post-disaster. However, the approach should expand beyond a
“shelter closure program” to meet the needs of the entire homeless community. Access to this
resource should not be restricted to shelters. Rather, access to this resource should be available to
the entire spectrum of individuals who lack housing in a post-disaster setting as my findings
suggest that shelter environments are avoided by many homeless individuals. On the whole, CoC
bolstering will serve to combat the “everyday disaster that is homelessness” (Vickery, 2017)
while simultaneously making communities better prepared for disaster contexts.
Vignettes from the Field: "accept"

As I sit with Nan in the paper company café that is housed in the Ecclesia church, I am astounded by the social dynamics of the space. The church sits adjacent to a railroad line and the building appears to be a converted warehouse space. It has polished concrete floors and high ceilings. The interior has an unfinished architectural feel and large open space areas. During sermons the congregation area is quartered off with large sliding doors at the corner, but at all other times the sliding doors are open making the space feel even larger.
The coffee shop sits adjacent to the congregation hall in the corner of the large warehouse. The coffee shop is bustling with people from all walks of life. The paper company cafe boasts "a cafe for all" mantra, and for all intents and purposes this is how the space feels. Homeless individuals are scattered throughout the seating space socializing while they charge their electronic devices or connect to the Wifi. The space is open for their use. Anyone can come inside for a reprieve from the elements and to use the restroom facilities. Most importantly, homeless individuals are treated like everyone else and welcomed to be a part of the communal space.

My focus returns to my discussion with Nan who is a younger woman from New Zealand whose voice carries a thick accent. She has worked with the Houston CoC for many years now and has a vast amount of knowledge pertaining to strategic goals and the "system transformation" that started in 2013. Our discussion covers the CoC's response to Harvey and then shifts to the long-term strategy to Houston's homelessness over the years. I ask Nan if anything has changed in Houston's management of their homeless population since Harvey. Nan replies:

Nan: I think that the city...the prior administration and our current administration has really made homelessness part of their strategic plan, right? And really trying to do something to eliminate chronic homelessness...I am not going to be one of these folks that thinks we are seriously going to end chronic homelessness (jokingly laughs)...We won't eliminate it, but we will control it. But we will never eliminate it. It's just impossible. Right?

In that moment, I counter Nan and suggest something that some may view as radical but that is really quite pedestrian. I responded, "I think that it's...just a conceptual shift though. I mean...the words you just used were 'eliminate' and 'control.' What about 'accept'?”
In this thesis, I parse out two convoluted subjects happening at a junction—homelessness and disaster—to learn what it means to see disaster through the eyes of the street. Street homeless individuals are widely understudied at this nexus and this research serves to fill that gap and act as a springboard for further research. I conducted 21 days of socio-ecological fieldwork with a focus on photo-ethnography in Houston, Texas after Hurricane Harvey. My preliminary results were broken into three areas—Disturbance Regimes, Disaster for Whom, and CoC Intervention—to effectively describe the experiences of disaster by Houston's street homeless and the coordinated response by Houston's CoC—"The Way Home."

"Control" is ingrained in my discussion with Nan and acts as the social and political bodies’ modus operandi toward homeless individuals in the US. Control is also a centerpiece of the disturbance regimes section. My preliminary findings suggest that the idea of “control” drives homeless social disturbance regimes and their manifestation increases when social and political bodies feel as if "control" has been lost. Environmental disturbance regimes further compound homeless individuals’ circumstances. Physical and social environments of homeless individuals affect their decision-making, worldviews, and "homeless patch dynamics." As a result, homeless individuals develop a series of adaptations predicated on marginalization and societal exclusion that push beyond societal norms and further entrench their state of "otherness."

"Disaster for Whom?" addresses the recurring nature of homeless disturbances regimes and questions how they affect homeless individuals' disaster experience. My findings suggest that many homeless individuals are conditioned to a disaster context, making the situation "like any other day", effectively altering their experience of disaster compared to the rest of society. Moreover, their prior adaptations to their social and physical environments can prove to be advantageous as a disaster unfolds. The outcome, for some, is an opportunistic mindset aimed at
accumulating more resources to improve their immediate circumstances or pursuing new pathways out of homelessness that were not present before the disaster. Disaster, thus, becomes an opportunity for homeless peoples. Considering that homeless individuals’ daily precarity (Gaillard, Walters, Rickerby, & Shi, 2019) is already extremely high regardless of whether the larger society has succumbed to a disaster context, the abstract notion of "Disaster for Whom?" merits further research.

Viewing disaster as an opportunity is fruitful for CoCs as well as homeless individuals. Within the "CoC Intervention" section, I examine Houston's "disaster rapid re-housing" program. My preliminary findings suggest that disaster is not only an opportunity for new pathways out of homelessness but also for “system transformation” to better serve disaster survivors and homeless individuals during non-disaster times. Since a CoC is built and predicated upon housing individuals and helping them maintain their housing, applying this system during a disaster context is an effective solution for housing individuals post-disaster. As a result, increasing CoC functionality, integration, effectiveness, and funding can be a disaster preparedness measure. In doing so, communities can combat the “everyday disaster that is homelessness” (Vickery, 2017) while simultaneously becoming better prepared for future disaster contexts.

However, a key flaw exists in Houston’s “disaster rapid re-housing” program. The system was specifically designed to be a “shelter closure program.” As such, many street homeless Harvey survivors were unable to access this resource after the disaster. I recommend that future applications of “disaster rapid re-housing” confront this issue by including an outreach-based component to house street homeless individuals who have aversions to shelter environments. Further research into the effectiveness of this strategy and justification for CoC
bolstering is valuable and the efficacy of programs modeled after Houston's "disaster rapid re-housing" program in Puerto Rico and North Carolina should be studied.

While Houston’s CoC exhibits success worth modeling, many of my homeless informants still face daily hardships as documented throughout this thesis. Pragmatic changes need to occur to ease these hardships and lessen the manifestation of social disturbance regimes. Adhering to a critically applied public anthropology approach (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009), I have three major policy recommendations:

1. *Increase public access to restrooms, showers, and waste facilities.* To do so, the City of Houston should utilize mobile toilet and shower facilities (Hicks, 2019) throughout the metropolitan area. CoC staff should be stationed with each mobile toilet and shower for the sites to serve as coordinated entry access points. Additionally, dumpsters and other trash receptacles should be placed within all major encampments and in close proximity to smaller satellite encampments. In conjunction with increased access to trash receptacles, Houston should pilot a public works program that hires homeless individuals to clear encampment trash and sort encampment recyclables to promote self-sufficiency and camp cleanliness.

2. *Decrease ordinance enforcement and increase homeless outreach.* My findings suggest that ordinance enforcement increases instability, lengthens homeless tenure, and "herds" instead of "houses" homeless peoples. Thus, trained social workers should serve as the primary interface with homeless peoples instead of law enforcement, and law enforcement officers should be paired with social workers beyond just the HOT Team. Moreover, social workers should be present during any encampment deconstruction to either connect the individual with resources or note approximate areas where the individual plans to relocate for outreach staff to follow-up.

3. *Allocate general funds for new programming to fill service gaps identified by coordinated entry.* During my fieldwork, an HSP informant acknowledged that no general funds from the City of Houston are allocated to homelessness programs. General funds should be directed toward pilot housing programs, such as cost-effective tiny home communities with wrap-around case management services (Rubino, 2018), that target housing homeless individuals faced with systemic barriers.

On a broader scale, my preliminary results underscore the value that a political ecology framework brings to homelessness research. At the junction of disaster and homelessness, initial findings suggest that disaster is not really an issue for street homelessness individuals. Their
lives exist in a vulnerable state of precarity wherein disaster is a common occurrence. What the political ecology of homelessness shows is that the real issue is power, and lack thereof. Power imbalances exacerbate homeless vulnerability, restrict upward mobility, and increase exposure to environmental hazards. Social and environmental systems constantly influencing each other throughout history produce homeless vulnerability (Oliver-Smith, 2020), and power influences the production and construction of homeless states. In this way, the daily precarity homeless individuals live with engenders the everyday disaster that is homelessness (Vickery, 2015; Vickery, 2017; Gaillard, Walters, Rickerby, & Shi, 2019), and research with this population is intricately tied to broader discussions of power, human suffering, and the interconnection of social and physical environments in anthropology as a whole.

While my early recommendations may ease the suffering of homeless peoples in the Houston area, the fact remains that homelessness will remain a pervasive issue in the city and across the US for years to come. True solutions to homelessness likely involve radical restructuring of our socio-ecological system on a global scale and even if such radical change were to occur, I am not certain that homelessness will cease to exist. However, ecological research contends that humans have the capacity to induce positive change within socio-ecological systems through environmental stewardship (Schmitz, 2017). As such, present socio-ecological systems producing homeless vulnerability can be altered through human action and shifts in ideological constructions.

I suggest that the notion of environmental stewardship be extended to community stewardship and a starting point for community stewardship is the pedestrian notion of "acceptance." Dropping the veil of homeless "otherness" and accepting homeless individuals as members of local communities creates beneficial circumstances for society as a whole. Homeless
acceptance promotes homeless resources within local communities and ends the squabble over which neighborhood is “unfortunate” enough to house the new homeless service program. Acceptance engenders mixed income housing and promotes community diversity. Acceptance allows for a theoretical shift to occur wherein society moves from eliminating and controlling homeless peoples to embracing community-wide solutions to counter the production of homelessness. While my contention is likely radical during a time of heightened isolationism, nationalism, racism, and class inequality with leaders fueling human division, the contention is mundane and extends beyond homeless individuals.

Moreover, this notion is at the heart of many anthropological pursuits to improve circumstances for research participants. Through acceptance, humanity has the capacity to be both environmental and community stewards who combat not only homeless vulnerability but also societal and climate vulnerability, which effectively reduces the production of homelessness in and of itself. Until that time, my homeless informants will continue their day-to-day struggle. Their perseverance, mettle, and adaptations will support their survival, but as Yankee, a 20-year street homeless veteran, simply put, "I'm tired. I'm so fucking tired."
Guided Interview: Homeless Individual

1. Can you please describe what it was like to be here during Hurricane Harvey?
2. What strategies did you use to cope with during the hurricane?
   2.1. Was there anything that disrupted these strategies?
   2.2. What strategies were successful?
   2.3. Do other homeless people help you?
3. How long have you been homeless?
4. Can you describe the homeless community in Houston?
   4.1. What ways do homeless people support each other?
5. What was your day-to-day life like before Hurricane Harvey?
6. When the weather gets tough (Too hot, too cold, rain) what do you do?
7. Did you know Hurricane Harvey was coming?
   7.1. How?
8. What did you do to prepare for Harvey on your own?
9. If you stayed outside during Harvey, what was it like?
   9.1. Is there anything that would have helped during this time?
10. Once Harvey had passed, what was it like on the street?
   10.1. How did you survive?
11. What resources were available to you after Harvey?
Survey Questions: Homeless Individual

1) Were you in Houston before Harvey?
   a) Yes
   b) No

2) Did you stay outside during Harvey?
   a) Yes
   b) No

3) What is your ethnicity?
   a) Hispanic or Latino
   b) Non-Hispanic or Latino
   c) Other __________
   d) Prefer not to answer

4) What race do you identify as?
   a) American Indian or Alaska Native
   b) Asian
   c) Black or African American
   d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   e) White
   f) Other ______________
   g) Prefer not to answer

5) What is your highest level of education achieved?
   a) If you have not achieved a high school degree or equivalent, what was the last grade you completed __________
   b) High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED/HiSET)
   c) Some college, no degree
   d) Associate degree
   e) Bachelor’s degree
   f) Master’s degree
   g) Professional Degree
   h) Doctorate

6) What is your age?
7) What gender do you identify as?
   a) Male
   b) Female
   c) Transgender
   d) Agender
   e) Intergender
   f) Other _________
   g) Prefer not to answer
8) What is your religious affiliation, if you have one?
   a) Christian
   b) Jewish
   c) Muslim
   d) Buddhist
   e) Hindu
   f) Atheist
   g) Agnostic
   h) Other _________
   i) Prefer not to answer
9) Are you from Houston, Texas?
   a) Yes
   b) No
10) Have you ever experienced a disaster before?
    a) Yes
    b) No
11) If yes, what type of disaster(s) have you experienced before? (Please select all that apply)
    a) Hurricane
    b) Earthquake
    c) Tsunami
    d) Wildfire
    e) Flooding
    f) Tornado
g) Drought
h) Blizzard
i) Volcanic eruption
j) Heat wave (extended period < two weeks)
k) Cold snap (extended period < two weeks)
l) Other ___________
Guided Interview: Homeless Services Professional

1. Can you describe your personal experience with Harvey?
   1.1. Can you describe how Harvey impacted the city?

2. Can you describe Houston’s homeless community?
   2.1. Is there anything you think that makes this community unique to other cities homeless communities?

3. What ways does the City of Houston manage Houston’s homeless community?
   3.1. What about Houston Police Department?
   3.2. What has your experience been with these policies and procedures?
   3.3. Do you believe they are effective?
   3.4. Could you describe an example of ways you think they could be improved?

4. According to Houston’s Homeless Management Information System, Houston’s homeless population had been declining since 2008 up until Hurricane Harvey. Do you have any ideas about why this was happening?
   4.1. Is there anything you think Houston’s Continuum of Care was doing differently than other cities to lower the homeless population?

5. Was there a disaster policy in place for the homeless community in Houston before Harvey?
   5.1. If no, do you know if one was ever considered?
   5.2. If yes, can you please describe it?
      5.2.1. Was it successful? Please describe why or why not.
      5.2.2. Were there ways were homeless peoples’ needs not met?
   5.3. Did you observe ways that you think it could be improved?

6. How was the homeless community informed about Hurricane Harvey approaching?
   6.1. How was the homeless community told to access help/resources?

7. Can you describe how/if the homeless community evacuated from the city?
   7.1. How did this strategy workout?
   7.2. How could it be improved?

8. Are you aware of anyways homeless individuals were able to “ride-out the storm”?
   8.1. If so, what did they do to survive?

9. What resources were available after Hurricane Harvey?
9.1. What struggles were apparent with homeless peoples attempting to access these resources?

10. Have any changes been made by the city and Houston Police Department since Harvey?

11. In what ways, if any, has the homeless community’s circumstances changed since Harvey?

12. Is there anything you think I should have asked about?

13. Is there anything that you have noticed, heard about, or experienced that you think I should consider studying in relation to homelessness, disasters, policies and, surviving here in Houston?

14. Is there anything you’d like to ask me?
Survey Questions: Homeless Service Provider

1) How long have you held your current job?
2) How long have you been working with Houston’s homeless population?
3) What is your highest level of education achieved?
   a) If you have not achieved a high school degree or equivalent, what was the last grade you completed _________
   b) High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED/HiSET)
   c) Some college, no degree
   d) Associate degree
   e) Bachelor’s degree
   f) Master’s degree
   g) Professional Degree
   h) Doctorate
4) What is your employment status?
   a) Employed full time (≤40 hours per week)
   b) Employed part time (>39 hours per week)
   c) Student/Intern
   d) Volunteer
5) Were you working with Houston’s homeless community before Hurricane Harvey?
   a) Yes
   b) No
6) Houston’s disaster plan for the homeless was comprehensive and effective.
   a) Agree
   b) Disagree
   c) Neutral
7) What is your ethnicity?
   a) Hispanic or Latino
   b) Non-Hispanic or Latino
   c) Other _________
   d) Prefer not to answer
8) What race do you identify as?
a) American Indian or Alaska Native
b) Asian
c) Black or African American
d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
e) White
f) Other ______________
g) Prefer not to answer
9) What is your age?
10) What gender do you identify as?
   a) Male
   b) Female
c) Transgender
d) Agender
e) Intergender
f) Other ___________
g) Prefer not to answer
11) What is you have a religious affiliation, if you have one?
   a) Christian
   b) Jewish
c) Muslim
d) Buddhist
e) Hindu
f) Atheist
g) Agnostic
h) Other ___________
i) Prefer not to answer
12) Are you from Houston, Texas?
   a) Yes
   b) No
13) Have you experienced disaster before?
   a) Hurricane
b) Earthquake

c) Tsunami

d) Wildfire

e) Flooding

f) Tornado

g) Drought

h) Blizzard

i) Volcanic eruption

j) Heat wave (extended period < two weeks)

k) Cold snap (extended period < two weeks)

l) Other ___________
APPENDIX 2: ENCAMPMENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Figure 2.1 Tent structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.2 Bravo’s camp

Figure 2.3 Scavenged material structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.4 Tent structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.5 Tent structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.6 Tent structure using overpass cover
Figure 2.7 Tent structures along interstate on ramp near Wheeler

Figure 2.8 Scavenged material structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.9 Scavenged material structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.10 Scavenged material structure near Wheeler beeping noise

Figure 2.11 Chartres

Figure 2.12 Hilltop
Figure 2.13 Tent structure over overpass cover

Figure 2.14 Scavenged material structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.15 Tent structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.16 Scavenged material structure using overpass cover

Figure 2.17 Encampment using tree patch cover

Figure 2.18 Encampment utilizing overpass cover
Figure 2.19: Built structure with electricity, kitchen, dish pit and bathroom adjacent to interstate

Figure 2.20: Tarp encampment along Buffalo Bayou

Figure 2.21: Alpha’s pallet structure

Figure 2.22: Encampment adjacent to Whiskey and Echo

Figure 2.23: The Grove

Figure 2.24: Whiskey and Echo’s neighbor
Figure 2.25 Whiskey and Echo's neighbor
Figure 1.1 Sleeping Rough with overpass cover
Figure 2.1 Sleeping rough with overpass
Figure 3.1 Sleeping rough exposed
Figure 4.1 Sleeping rough with overpass cover
Figure 5.1 Sleeping rough exposed
Figure 6.1 Sleeping rough exposed
Figure 3.6 Sleeping rough with overpass cover

Figure 3.7 Sleeping rough with minimal materials
APPENDIX 4: HOMELESS INFORMANT SURVEY RESULTS

Figure 4.1 Homeless informants

Figure 4.2 Homeless informants
Figure 4.3 Homeless informants

What is your ethnicity?
10 responses

- Hispanic or Latino: 90%
- Non-Hispanic or Latino: 10%
- Other:

Figure 4.4 Homeless informants

What race do you identify as?
10 responses

- American Indian or Alaska Native: 50%
- Asian: 10%
- Black or African American: 20%
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 20%
- White: Prefer not to answer
- Other: 10%
Figure 4.5 Homeless informants

Figure 4.6 Homeless informants
Figure 4.9 Homeless informants

Are you from Houston, Texas?
10 responses

80% Yes
20% No

Figure 4.10 Homeless informants

Have you ever experienced a disaster before Hurricane Harvey?
8 responses

37.5% Yes
62.5% No
Figure 4.11 Homeless informants
APPENDIX 5: HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDER INFORMANT SURVEY RESULTS

Figure 5.1 Homeless service provider informants

Figure 5.2 Homeless service provider informants
Figure 5.3 Homeless service provider informants

Were you working with Houston's homeless community before Hurricane Harvey?
8 responses

- Yes: 87.5%
- No: 12.5%

Figure 5.4 Homeless service provider informants

Houston's disaster plan for homeless individuals was comprehensive and effective.
8 responses

- Agree: 37.5%
- Disagree: 25%
- Neutral: 37.5%
Figure 5.5 Homeless service provider informants

Figure 5.6 Homeless service provider informants
Figure 5.7 Homeless service provider informants

Figure 5.8 Homeless service provider informants
Figure 5.9 Homeless service provider informants

Are you from Houston, Texas?
9 responses

- Yes: 66.7%
- No: 33.3%

Figure 5.10 Homeless service provider informants

Have you experienced another disaster before Hurricane Harvey?
7 responses

- Yes: 85.7%
- No: 14.3%
Figure 5.11 Homeless service provider informants
Figure 6.1: Houston homeless sleeping arrangement density with HOT Team ride-along track. It is 7 miles from the center of the densest homeless area to the farthest heat signature.
APPENDIX 7: FENCING PHOTOGRAPHY

Figure 7.1 Wheeler area fencing

Figure 7.2 Wheeler area fencing

Figure 7.3 Wheeler area fencing

Figure 7.4 Wheeler area fencing

Figure 7.5 Wheeler area fencing

Figure 7.6 Wheeler area fencing
Figure 7.19 Hostile architecture near Pierce Elevated

Figure 7.20 Hostile architecture near Pierce Elevated

Figure 7.21 Wheeler area fencing
APPENDIX 8: BRAVO’S CAMP

Figure 8.1 Bravo’s fire pit

Figure 8.2 Bravo’s tent

Figure 8.3 Bravo’s dog kennel

Figure 8.4 Bravo’s work area

Figure 8.5 Bravo’s neighbors

Figure 8.6 Meal Bravo cooked for dinner
Figure 8.7 Bravo’s stove used for cooking or heating the tent during colder temperatures

Figure 8.8 Bravo’s bed

Figure 8.9 Bravo’s dog used for safety

Figure 8.10 Bravo’s shower and bathroom
APPENDIX 9: OPEN DEFECATION & MAKESHIFT TOILETS

Figure 9.1 Open defecation in the Grove

Figure 9.2 Open defecation in the Grove

Figure 9.3 Plastic container used as makeshift toilet in the Grove

Figure 9.4 Open defecation along the Buffalo Bayou
Figure 9.5 Built structure bathroom with electricity
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171


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174


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