Dear Workshop Participants,

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to everyone for reading. I have elected to submit a draft of my dissertation proposal for your consideration. The final dissertation title is “Young Black Gay Men’s Access to Queer Space and LGBTQ Services: A Chicago-Based Examination.” Please note that considerable time has passed since I prepared the document, and therefore the ideas are not always expressed as clearly, nor are they as developed, as they are now. It was my intention to submit my first chapter for this workshop, a conceptual chapter addressing the dominant and interrelated narratives of risk and disease prevention surrounding black gay/bisexual/and other men who have sex with men (MSM), in social work and public health. However, I now have access to a stock of participant observation data; a cache of findings which I am still analyzing. These data will deepen my analysis of the risk-based and prevention-focused narratives which currently exclude consideration of black gay/bi/ and other MSM’s personhood. I will incorporate those findings into that first chapter, which likely means that it will become an analytical one.

Regarding the attached proposal and the subsequent dissertation chapter in progress (chapter two), an important finding relevant to gender and sexuality, relating to how black gay men negotiate space in Chicago, deals with notions of hypervigilance—particularly around performances of gender and sexuality—and the maintenance of “persona,” what a subset of participants expressed to me as an obligatory performance of normative black masculinity, often associated with the occupation of certain spaces, largely aligned with normative gender and sexual dictates. This has emerged in multiple participant narrative accounts, in in-depth interviews and while shadowing—from the South Side to the North Side, and back. A striking example includes a small subset of participants who are currently or were previously gang involved, with these young men articulating to me concerns of remaining ‘respected in the streets’—particularly within the context of their home neighborhoods. I am specifically wondering if there are there established theories relating to the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, that address how these performances, at least for some, may be tethered to a sense of place?

Thank you again!

Best,
Lance
Introduction

Of all major U.S. cities, the social and spatial arrangements of the city of Chicago remain a central topic of investigation within bodies of urban scholarship and thought. Social scientists have traced effects of the city’s histories of exclusion, marginalization, and social isolation among specific racialized groups (e.g., African Americans) (Drake & Cayton, 1945; Shabazz, 2015). Sociologists and social welfare researchers have both shed light on enduring linkages between residential location and health (Sampson, 2008; Allard, 2004). In addressing how structural and ecological factors become determinative of health disparities witnessed across groups (i.e., racial, gender, class) in Chicago and cities like it, studies attending to interconnections between health and place inevitably address interconnections between race and location. In other words, who people are (i.e., social location/subject position) and where they are placed (i.e., residential location, under-resources communities) can substantially shape the resources and opportunities they have access to—and their subsequent health outcomes are often mediated by whether they are situated in geographies of exclusion (Sibley, 2002) or landscapes of opportunity (Collins & Kearns, 2001).

Few studies examine contemporary queer spaces and healthcare institutions located in Chicago’s South and West Sides neighborhoods and communities. These habitable spaces of urban queer life and culture, curated by black LGBTQ youth and young adults, are settings and scenes of cultural interchange for urban black sexual and gender minorities situated at the borders of late adolescence and early adulthood (i.e., between ages 18 and 25). Such queer spaces are cultivated to enhance the health, growth, and development of black sexual and gender minority youth, populations that disproportionately experience familial rejection, housing
instability, street harassment and violence, and underemployment (Bailey, 2013). A ‘queer space’ may be understood in Case and Hunter’s (2012) terms as ostensibly a counterspace, geographic locations that function not only as discrete habitable sites where black queer people can be themselves in opposition to and for transgressing heteronormative space, but also as a cultural context facilitating an important cultural exchange among community members that ‘challenges deficit-oriented societal narratives concerning marginalized individuals’ identities’ (p. 257) (Oswin, 2008; Halberstam, 2005). Institutionalizing a queer space by constructing black queer cultural formations, such as house and ballroom communities, and social organizations based around minoritarian genders and sexualities equally informed by black culture and black cultural expressions are the primary means by which I conceptualize and articulate the concept of queer space in the dissertation.

Chicago, a major urban center and destination city contains multiple queer spaces and subcultures. These include a well-known gay village or ‘gayborhood’ (“Boystown”) (Ghaziani, 2014), as well as the many private and public spaces that may be ‘queered’ for a defined period (e.g., bars/clubs, public parks, festivals). The rapidly gentrifying “Boystown” neighborhood, remains a legible queer space, with visible indicators of its sexually non-normative character discernable nearly everywhere. Yet it is a space experienced differently across queer populations (Daniel-McCarter, 2015). Many non-profit LGBTQ service organizations (e.g., LGBTQ community based organizations, LGBTQ housing, culturally competent HIV/AIDS treatment and care centers and physicians) are situated within this district on the city’s majority white North Side. Such a constellation of queer life within one neighborhood render this locale a draw for queer people across the city, and this includes many young black gay men. However, studies show that most young black gay men ages 17 to 29 in
Chicago report their strongest connection to queer life and community in the city through belonging to the city’s predominantly black house and ballroom culture (Khanna et al., 2016). Social and cultural gatherings and events organized by community members curate a habitable queer space offering young black queer people not only a place in which to be queer, but also access to essential networks of care and support (Bailey, 2011).

In this broader context, I argue it is imperative to gather narratives of what draws young black gay men to these spaces. Furthermore, I seek to investigate questions of how young black gay men negotiate space in general when in-transit (e.g., sartorial choice, gender performance, language). Finally, a central objective of the study is to uncover queer spaces organized geographically proximal to young black gay men.

**Homeplace**

Examining how urban spaces are negotiated by young black gay men at the borders of late adolescence and early adulthood, ages 18 to 25, requires examination of the *homeplace* (hooks, 1990)—the black communities where most urban dwelling black gay men and black queer people in general are located (Konrad, 2014). Homeplace references not only the physical homespaces (i.e., households) in which most young black queer people come of age, but importantly, black neighborhoods and communities of origin. As Joseph Beam, editor of the pathbreaking anthology of black gay men’s writing *In the Life* describes, “When I speak of home, I mean not only the familial constellation from which I grew, but the entire Black community” (1986, p. 231). Theorized by black feminist scholar bell hooks (1990), *homeplace* remains a physical and psychic ‘safe space’ for black people, particularly in urban cities starkly divided along racial and class lines. At home, instead one is “welcomed, invited, accepted, and free to be complete” (Hardy, 1997; p. 6). Moreover, homeplace is theorized as a place of respite
from pervasive anti-black racism and discrimination in the U.S. (hooks, 1990). Immediate neighborhoods, extended family, and churches comprise important social and relational dimensions of the homeplace (hooks, 1990; Konrad, 2013; Hemphill, 1992). While home communities and communities of origin may indeed be spaces of racial homogeneity, and thus provide a measure of security united by shared culture and experience as hooks outlines in her essay, the authors conceptualization is less attentive to how home can be experienced as an occasional location of marginalization and exclusion for gender and sexual minority populations.

Many young black men in Chicago situated at the boundaries of late adolescence and early adulthood including young black gay men ages 18 to 25, presently inhabit a homeplace deeply impacted by the entrenched effects of institutionalized marginalization and social isolation—gang violence, gentrification, unemployment, and underperforming schools (Wang & Arnold, 2008). Certainly, one must not overlook the role of the state in producing marginality and institutionalized exclusion in cities like Chicago, where entrenched racial and class segregation, and fragmentation, has helped shaped the material conditions of many urban black communities in the U.S. (Gilbert, 2010). Documented processes of economic disinvestment, redevelopment, gentrification, redlining, and continuing expansion of the carceral state over black communities disproportionately impact low-income black neighborhoods. Scholars like Shabazz (2015) importantly also detail how urban inequality, poverty, space and place impact black men’s subjectivity in very specific ways, shaping certain performances of black masculinity.

Young black men who may identify themselves as gay, bisexual, homosexual, same-gender loving, or queer in black communities who may transgress or whom do not conform to heteronormative conceptualizations and cultural scripts of black masculinity, for instance, may
experience complex relationships to the homeplace. Failure to perform expected gender roles, homophobia and discrimination within religious/spiritual communities, and peer and familial rejection—may lead to experiencing unstable housing and unemployment, which are a few factors that may drive young black gay men to identify with and participate within various queer spaces (hooks, 1988; LaSala & Frierson, 2012b; Ward, 2005). To be sure, the question of the availability of formal LGBTQ services and/or queer spaces also becomes important. One question this study seeks to explore, by examining black gay men’s perception of queer space in Chicago, is to what extent does LGBTQ services inequality manifest in the city, and if so, how do young black gay men experience it? How do they negotiate it?

A classic narrative in research on queer populations is migration. Specifically, the notion that queers must migrate away from their home communities to participate in queer space (i.e., to “become” queer) (Chauncey, 1994). This is underlined by an assumption that queer life and space is always already geographically set apart from a presumed heteronormative and homophobic homeplace—such that queers must relocate to become queer. However, as the work of Konrad (2013), Bailey (2011), and others make clear concerning black queers in particular, queer space has always also been organized and maintained within or in proximity to the homeplace. And yet, as Konrad (2013) contends, we continue to know little about the urban spaces queered by young black gay men, particularly those spaces that are organized outside ‘gayborhoods’ (Ghaziani, 2014).

This dissertation is fundamentally concerned with how space impacts people, and individuals’ negotiations of space to connect to inclusive queer communities and mechanisms of support (e.g., informal queer spaces, and formal LGBTQ service organizations). The unit of
analyses include the experiences of young black gay men\textsuperscript{1}, the geographic homeplaces they inhabit, and the spaces they articulate as supportive of their racial and sexual identities.

My current study explores: 1) whether and how young black gay men in Chicago perceive and negotiate spatial mismatches to access LGBTQ services, 2) how they geographically, and experientially, characterize existing LGBTQ service delivery systems in Chicago, 3) explore how they contend with social meanings ascribed to both blackness and queerness in accessing these systems, and 4) How do they characterize and conceive of their experience within black queer space in Chicago?

In terms of the study's broader relevance to the field of social work, the study has implications for considering the social determinants of health, health equity and accessibility, spatial distributions of services/care, and interplay between marginal populations and structural factors which may preserve cycles of inequality, using experiences of urban young black gay men in Chicago as a way into exploring this problem.

In the context of the current study, geography is rendered a critical lens through which to consider what Del Casino (2015) describes as the geographic character of inequality and difference. In investigating the lives of young black gay men in Chicago, my study considers the centrality of the “politics of accessibility,” and pays attention to the “intersectionality of class, race, gender, sexuality, and age” (Del Casino, 2015: p. 800) as well as geography as potential factors impacting health equity for queers across the urban landscape of the City of Chicago.

Though I employ the term “queer” throughout, in line with both social work ethics and queer politics, I recognize individuals’ self-naming a political act. Hence, as I write-up additional

\textsuperscript{1} In the dissertation, I write about “young black gay men” and employ “queer” to signify on sexual minority-identified black men in general terms. Following J. Jack Halberstam, and additional queer and queer of color scholars, my use of “queer” references non-normative configurations of sexuality and gender.
empirical chapters, I will acknowledge and address the diverse ways my research interlocutors relate to queer identity outside mainstream and normative dictates of those identity categories, both on grounds of resistance, and potentially for reasons of “cultural, material, and psychic survival” (e.g., Black men and “the down low”) (Munoz, 1999; p. 161: McCune, 2014). In sum, I anticipate young black gay men in Chicago may identify in myriad ways (e.g., gay, queer, bisexual, trade, “DL,”), for various reasons, potentially related to negotiations of space.

Taken together, the current study is concerned with the equitable distribution and accessibility of queer and/or LGBTQ resources across an urban landscape. Within this broader frame, it seeks to illuminate processes and mechanisms that mediate accessibility of such resources from the vantage point of a marginal population (e.g., urban young black gay men). Upon completion, findings may have important implications for scholarship and policy, in the areas of urban issues, health equity, social justice, and literature on the social determinants of health.

**Statement of the Problem**

Current theorizing about how proximity to services impacts service utilization for queer populations, and especially queer people of color, remains limited (Wheeler, 2003). The concept of spatial mismatch was initially theorized in labor market scholarship to consider how urban spatial mobility factors (e.g., residential segregation) impact employment status, particularly among working class black residents in black communities (Kain, 1992; Weinberg, 2000).

Spatial mismatch argues that residential patterns, race, and class, disproportionately impact labor market outcomes of black workers vis-à-vis whites (Kain, 1992). My study reconsiders spatial mismatch to explore accessibility of queer space, including LGBTQ service delivery systems, for young black gay men in Chicago.
Reimagining spatial mismatch to examine access to health and/or social services in general is not without precedent in urban social inquiry. Urban scholarship has examined geographic dispersal/allocation of services across cities, and has extensive history (see Davies, 1968; Hay, 1995). This literature has examined myriad questions such as factors that account for higher levels of services within some neighborhoods vis-à-vis others (Cingranelli, 1981; Mladenka 1989); the significance of distributive politics in “patterned inequality” (Miranda and Tunyavong, 1994); and service accessibility and deprivation relative to service areas (Knox, 1978; Pacione, 1989). These studies find spatial mismatches have measurable impacts on the health of marginal populations (e.g. racial minorities, sexual and gender minorities).

I also consider influences of push-pull-mooring factors. Push-pull-mooring (PPM) is a dominant framework in human migration literature (Bansal, 2005; Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). Push influences are “motivational factors or needs that arise due to a disequilibrium or tension” in localized geographic settings that generate motivation or which “create a desire to travel” (Kim et al., 2003: p. 170). Pull influences, conversely, are “features, attractions, or attributes of the destination itself,” such as “social opportunities” or “historical or cultural resources” (Kim et al., 2003: p. 171) that serve to draw individuals to a particular destination. Mooring variables are personal, social, or situational factors (e.g., family, transportation) that hinder or facilitate such decision-making (Bansal, 2005; Zhang, Cheung, & Lee, 2012). The capacity of marginal subjects (e.g., young black gay men) to ‘migrate’ (or, travel) to access needed and/or desired social services potentially impacts outcomes in a range of domains (e.g., HIV/AIDS status, access to jobs/employment, education, resources, and social services) (Chapple, 2006).

For young black gay men, accessing LGBTQ service delivery systems situated in the queer space of “defended neighborhoods” like Chicago’s “Boystown,” may entail “border
crossing”; scaling the social and symbolic boundaries from “familiar space to an alien one” (Sibley, 1995: p. 32; Green et al., 1998). This may involve negotiating spaces ordered and underwritten by logics of inclusion/exclusion (Sibley, 1995). Indeed the spatial ordering of urban contexts like Chicago often place the burden of mobility upon black populations to access desirable employment, educational opportunities, health resources, recreational sites and other public and private services (Parks, 2016). Urban sociologist Marcus Anthony Hunter elsewhere describes the racialized nature of this phenomenon, for urban black populations, as the “ecological conundrum” (Hunter, 2013).

In addition, less empirical attention, particularly within social work, has focused on queer spaces organized outside formal LGBTQ service institutions. Work by scholars like Bailey (2011), Arnold & Bailey (2009), among others, shed light on how what I conceptualize as ‘counter-hegemonic black queer space,’ may function as sites of “intra-vention,” already existing structures within black queer community networks, that function to provide black queers with access to kinship networks and general support, as well as serving as an informal mechanism of providing access to services, support, and behavioral and sexual health-related information. Indeed, these queer spaces may be affirming and supportive in ways normative queer spaces and LGBTQ institutions are not. This project, in part aims to uncover whether and how black queer spaces may provide similar mechanisms of support as formal LGBTQ service delivery systems.

For young black gay men, accessibility of LGBTQ-affirming service delivery systems, formal or informal, potentially has implications for important outcomes in multiple domains, including HIV/AIDS and health statuses, access to mentors, employment, professional training, and a broader sense of community and belonging to a larger LGBTQ/queer community (Mustanski, Johnson, & Garofalo, 2010).
Purpose of the study

A descriptive study, the investigation may help to identify future areas of research on urban queer populations. Additionally, it may help to inform future social service planning and resource allocation. And importantly, providing embodied and socially situated accounts of young black gay men’s experiences negotiating potential spatial mismatches may illuminate more complex approaches to theorizing intersectionality, as well as strategies of resilience employed by marginal queer populations.

The study hopes to unearth and subsequently articulate: 1) alternate frames to describe urban black queer experiences 2) central motives and perceived barriers for urban young black gay men in accessing Chicago’s LGBTQ service delivery systems (e.g., racism, homophobia, social-geographic factors) 3) How black gay men perceive and experience negotiating ‘queer space’ 4) Identify whether and how urban young black gay men, in the absence of geographically proximal institutional queer spaces, generate and/or produce alternative modes service provision.

Significance of the study

Black men who have sex with men (MSM) between ages 13 and 29 (a broader group that includes emerging adult black gay men) are the population most heavily impacted by HIV/AIDS in the U.S. (Livak et al., 2013). Indeed, from 2010 and 2014, HIV diagnoses among Black MSM increased 22%, and increased 87% among Black MSM ages 13-24 (CDC, 2014). Studies have begun to consider whether and how urban social processes may impact urban black gay men’s health outcomes, including HIV/AIDS status. Geographic factors, in particular, have been identified as potential contributors to HIV prevalence among black men who have sex with men generally (Mustanski, Birkett, Kuhns, Latkin, & Muth, 2014; Schneider et al., 2012). For
example, Chicago’s HIV prevalence varied by “as much as 30 times across community areas, with the highest prevalence rates within traditionally queer neighborhoods and neighborhoods with high concentrations of black residents” (Mustanski, Birkett, Kuhns, Latkin, & Muth, 2014: p. 1039; Chicago Department of Public Health, 2011). To the author’s knowledge, population estimates of the total number of black gay men in Chicago are not available. However, Livak et al. (2013) estimate approximately 4,671 black MSM live on the city’s South Side; no known estimates exist for the West or North sides. Studies suggest spatial allocations of HIV-related health services (including LGBTQ service delivery systems) in the built environment may impact service linkage and utilization among black gay men (Schneider et al., 2012).

Literature on the experience of social and health services utilization among urban young black gay men remains scarce relative to other populations (Wheeler, 2003). Yet, overwhelmingly, current research suggests geographic factors may potentially serve both a motivating and an inhibiting role for black gay men in accessing and utilizing LGBTQ service delivery systems. The current study will further inquire into the role of geography as it relates to social and health services access and utilization among urban young black gay men. In doing so, I work through several conceptual and theoretical frames, including thinking through the lens of intersectionality, and considering how we might rethink intersectionality in geographic terms.

Intersectionality

A substantial literature on intersectionality has developed. It has come to articulate the lived experiences of individuals residing at the intersections of multiple marginal identities. More centrally, it repairs failures within feminist and anti-racist discourse to take seriously interlocking racial, gender, and sexual oppressions—and, it allows for theorizing how individuals
contend with compounding experiences of oppression, discrimination, and marginalization along multiple axes of identity simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1991; Glenn, 1985; Hill Collins, 1986).

Black feminist and women of color feminisms’ writing and scholarship are in large measure responsible for developing what has become codified as “intersectionality,” and widely attributed to legal theorist Kimberle Crenshaw (Cooper, Disch, & Hawkesworth, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1986). More recently, intersectionality has been taken up to examine the experiences of queer individuals with interlocking racial-sexual minority identities (e.g., black gay men).

Overwhelmingly, the latter foreground how black queers negotiate the double burden of racism and homophobia (Bowleg, 2013; Hunter, 2010). Yet, scholars have recently considered intersectionality as a lens through which to consider geographic inequality as well (McDowell, 2008; Oswin, 2005, 2008).

These investigations consider the importance of place, power, and lived experience in shaping the way in which individuals and groups experience diverse geographies (Brown, 2012; Baylina Ferré & Rodó-de-zárate 2016; Rodó-de-zárate, 2014; Valentine, 2007). For example, Valentine (2007) put intersectionality ‘on the map,’ for critical and feminist geographers. Valentine argues place and space are key and complex concepts that structure both people’s lives and lived experiences, and contends that scholars who work on questions of intersectionality would do well to consider their implications, particularly for minorities and marginalized groups (e.g., cis and trans women, queer populations, racial and racial-sexual minorities). Furthermore, Valentine reminds us that “although we may think of class, race and gender as different social structures, individual people experience them simultaneously” (p. 13). Elsewhere, Rodó-de- zárate (2014) draws on Valentine to develop the concept, “geographies of intersectionality,” in which the scholar enumerates three important dimensions: power structure (the social), lived
experienced (the psychological), and place (the geographical). Race and gender scholars of color, like McKittrick and Woods (2007) have theorized, and historicized, the particular importance of both space and place in shaping the lives of black populations. In their words, “…physical geographies are bound up in, rather than simply a backdrop to, social and environmental processes, it follows that the materiality of the environment is racialized by contemporary demographic patterns as shaped by historical precedents” (p. 3).

It follows that geographic locations of urban young black gay men in Chicago, in relation to queer space and LGBTQ service systems, may constitute a dimension of marginality. Young black gay men in Chicago may be more likely than their white queer counterparts to reside in, or in proximity to, communities with higher rates of community violence, in part, due to historical processes of neighborhood segregation, structural racism and racialization (Quinn et al., 2016; Voisin, Bird, Hardestry, & Shiu, 2010). Additionally, mobility, or restricted mobility, related to individuals’ class statuses has been explicated in studies of black queer populations—although factors like cultural loyalty and place attachment have also been suggested to play a role (Arnold, Rebchook, & Kegeles, 2014; Johnson, 2011). To be sure, urban young black gay men contend with mechanisms of marginalization that extend beyond race and sexuality. As Bailey (2013) suggests, marginal and/or vulnerable young black queers may “…come from families, communities, and neighborhoods in which they have had to navigate the often difficult terrain of the streets, which means facing homophobic and transphobic violence and abuse, homelessness and hunger, insufficient education, under- and unemployment, and general sociocultural dispossession” (p. 7). Addressing this matrix of oppression faced by many young black gay men entails social intervention that places intersectional discourse in dialogue with labor market
intervention strategies, improvements in access to education, health, and social services, and broader commitments to social justice efforts for queers of color more generally.

In some measure, the study constitutes a theoretical intervention, one that widens the parameters by which social work scholarship takes up intersectionality as a framework. At present, social work literature on black queers too frequently conceptualizes intersectionality narrowly if not exclusively through a multiple minoritarian lens. That is, studies acknowledge/discuss intersecting identity categories (e.g., Black, gay, black-gay), but do not pay rigorous theoretical attention to the implications of each, nor toward the ways in which these identities, and their material implications are co-constitutive, multiplicative (vis-à-vis additive), and interlocking (Walters and Old Person, 2008; Wagaman, 2014; Parent & Deblaere, 2013). This flattens diversity among black queers, oversimplifies complex lived experience, and occludes analyses of additional mechanisms of marginality such as individuals’ surrounding ecologies, and the uneven geographies in which they may be embedded. Given the salience of these broader contexts in shaping the lives, and life trajectories of urban young black gay men, the current study may challenge social work scholars to supplement prevailing paradigms of intersectional inquiry to arrive at more nuanced and theoretically robust approaches to examining intersectionality.

Queer Theory, Space, and Young Black gay men

A limited number of social work scholars writing at the intersections of race and sexuality have incorporated queer theory into social work scholarship (Callahan, 2007; Willis, 2007). Indeed, queer theory remains more widely taken up in disciplines outside social work (e.g., Sociology, Women & Gender Studies, African-American Studies) (see Eguchi, Calafell, & Files-Thompson, 2014; Johnson, 2001; Walcott, 2006). Major criticism of canonical queer
theory (e.g., Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Diana Fuss, Michael Warner) is an insufficient attention given to considering how individuals come into queerness is always already raced and classed. In relation to how queer theories may be brought to bear upon LGBTQ neighborhoods like “Boystown,” scholars of critical geography like Oswin (2008) interrogate the assumed non-normativity of queer space. In addition to urging us not to think of queer space as always-already “heroic and liberating,” Oswin further suggests such spaces are not “beyond normativity” (p. 91), contending that normativity and power in fact permeate “the heterosexual/homosexual divide,” (p. 90) and may in fact have become in Lisa Duggan’s terms “homonormative” (2002). In sum, though mainstream queer spaces and organizations are putatively non-normative and inclusive, they may in fact function quite normatively, and often at the expense of the most marginal queers, including young black gay men (Cohen, 1997; Oswin, 2008; Valentine, 2007).

Theorizing Urban Young Black Gay Men in Social Work Contexts

Above, I outline service fragmentation concerning access to queer space and LGBTQ services for young black gay men in Chicago. These young men’s positions often at the spatial margins of black and queer communities in Chicago may necessitate negotiation of spatial mismatches (i.e., disparities between people and services) in accessing LGBTQ service systems. Such mismatches may animate a push-pull-mooring (i.e., factors that both motivate/inhibit migration) experience. Further, uneven geographies in Chicago’s LGBTQ service delivery systems may underwrite inequity of access to LGBTQ services, which marginalizes young black gay men. In a city like Chicago, consistently one of the United States’ most racially segregated (Knight, 2016), the distribution of health-related resources, benefits and opportunities across individuals and groups, to be sure, “is shaped at a broader level by historical, social, economic, and political factors” (Patterson, Markey, & Somers, 2012; p. 133). To make sense of this broad
context, exploring queer space, how it is produced and experienced by individuals, becomes critically important.

Though empirical research investigating the lives of black LGBTQ populations in social work has advanced, gaps in the literature remain. Studies frequently rely upon data gathered from large LGBTQ populations (mostly White LGBTQ samples that include a minority of queers of color). Interventions and recommendations developed from these studies may inappropriately be generalized to all LGBTQ populations. Many overlook the myriad, and interlocking circumstances which impact the developmental trajectories of urban black gay men in particular (e.g., employment, education, community violence, health and well-being), or the particular role of urban environments in shaping these trajectories. The current study endeavors to make an intervention by taking a closer look at the lives and experiences of young black gay men in an urban environment (i.e., Chicago).

Theory: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory is rooted in social constructionist thought. The epistemology of social constructionism entails a critical stance toward claims about “objectivity” in research. Hence, constructivists, including grounded theorists who adhere to a constructivist approach, acknowledge themselves as subjects shaped by individual histories, and their embeddedness in particular social, political, and cultural contexts (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006a, 2006b). Furthermore, the specificity of investigators’ experiences inevitably shapes their views of the world, assumptions about the nature of reality, and possible research questions pursued (Mills et al., 2006b). Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) mirrors Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) initial conceptualization of ‘grounded theory’ in many ways. For example, the constructivist
approach requires researchers not commence fieldwork with pre-existing theories, assumptions, or ideas to prove or disprove (Mills et al., 2006b). Additionally, all grounded theory examinations include the following components: theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, constant comparative method, coding, and memoing (Mills et al., 2006b). However, Charmaz (2000), a preeminent constructivist grounded theorist (a former student of Glaser and Strauss—the sociologists who devised grounded theory), contends it adheres to a more subjectivist epistemology than Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) original conceptualization (Mills et al., 2006b).

Constructivists critique traditional grounded theory’s notion of emergence (i.e., theory emerging from empirical data/observation), a distinguishing feature of grounded theory. The constructivist approach, conversely, takes seriously the subjectivity of the researcher, the quality and nature of researcher relations with interlocutors, and broader context of the study shaping both meaning-making and in turn any theories developed as a result of conducting the study (Mills et al., 2006b). This is a central distinction between the two approaches. For constructivists, emergent theories ‘discovered’ during a grounded theory investigation are understood as arising “…from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts” (Charmaz, 2000; p. 524; Mills et al. 2006; p. 6).

One further distinction is constructivists’ insistence on making clear the positionality and biography of the researcher in relation to the work. In this way, researchers become ‘authors’ having “identifiable presence” in relation to the object of study—this stands in contrast to traditional grounded theory’s insistence on the researcher as “silent author” and “distant expert” (p. 11) (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006a). In my study, this will involve situating myself and my subjectivity in relationship to the lived experiences and narratives of the interlocutors I engage.
Subject Position of Researcher

My personal background and professional experience provides experiential and practical foundations to draw on in conducting the study. I share a racial and gender experience with my interlocutors (i.e., African-American and male), and a potential shared identity in that I identify as queer—specifically, a gay man. As with any research project, one’s subject position can enable unique insights and blind spots, these may be made evident at any stage of the research process (Kathard, 2009).

Qualitative researchers employ strategies to manage researcher bias (e.g., data triangulation, participant feedback, reflexivity, negative case sampling). Critical self-reflection, or reflexivity, for example, is a widely used approach (Johnson, 1997). As outlined by Johnson (1997) and others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), critical self-reflection often involves maintaining a journal to grapple with positionality, pet theories, and potential biases throughout the research process.

Negotiating insider/outsider status is an important aspect of qualitative social inquiry, particularly in conducting work with an ethnographic component (e.g., shadowing). Though, scholars have troubled the neat binary of insider-outsider status, detailing how one’s perceived insider status can quickly become slippery and more complex in the field (Merriam et al. 2001). Importantly, Merriam et al. (2000) point out this is the case even in researching populations with whom investigators may share identities and experiences (e.g., a black woman pursuing an advanced degree interviewing similarly situated black women pursuing advanced degrees). Once in the field, issues of access, power/privilege, shared experience (and lack thereof), representation/respectability, often show up in ‘insider’ research just as they may in ‘outsider’ research (Merriam et al., 2001). At core, Merriam et al. (2001) make clear the importance of
problematizing the supposedly neat dichotomy which renders researchers as always either insider or outsider, by illuminating both their overlapping nature and the complexity inherent in both (Merriam et al., 2001).

Research Methodology

Briefly, I'll restate the research questions: 1) Do UYBQM negotiate spatial mismatches to participate in queer space in Chicago? 2) How do UYBQM characterize Chicago's existing LGBTQ service systems (e.g., proximal/distal, accessible/inaccessible, inclusive/exclusionary)? 3) What additional spaces exist to support young black gay men? Research methods to be used include: in-depth interviews, shadowing, and mental mapping. Combining these approaches triangulates the object of study (i.e., urban young black gay men and their conceptions of queer space in Chicago).

Qualitative and Interpretive Research

Qualitative and interpretive methods encompass various approaches (e.g., in-depth interviews, participant observation, ethnography). Broadly, qualitative research explores the why and how of social phenomena, shedding light on underlying processes and mechanisms (Patton, 2005; Banister, 2011). Qualitative inquiry is usually undertaken when investigators desire to explore phenomena in-depth (Patton, 2005). Urban research has a long history of employing qualitative methods to examine urban processes (e.g., inequality, spatial allocation of services) (Drake and Cayton, 1945; Anderson, 2004). Qualitative approaches have also been used widely to examine questions of race, gender, and sexuality (Green, 2007; Ghaziani, 2014, 2015; Moore, 2010).
Data Collection

Semi-structured in-depth interviews. The first mode of data collection is semi-structured in-depth interviews (N = 30). The interviews are designed to gather narratives of young black gay men from two geographic areas of Chicago (e.g. South Side, West Side). I ‘spatially’ sample black gay men who reside and/or who came of age in either or both regions, and for several reasons. First, black people constitute the largest numerical racial group in both. Per the 2010 U.S. census, the West Side of Chicago’s total population was 480,687, with blacks constituting the majority group (44%). Black Americans are in the majority on the South Side also (93%), a geographic area with a total population of 752,496. Second, I am interested in how black gay men socially and geographically situated in black communities perceive and conceive of ‘queer space’ in the city.

Individual interviews will be conducted with all research participants, each will last approximately 90 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded by the investigator. Presently, a single interview protocol has been developed consisting of ten questions. Principal questions contain probes designed to elicit responses from participants concerning the following: descriptions of the geographic neighborhood spaces in which they reside, messages they have received about “queerness,” or being “gay,” and identity more generally, experiences accessing queer spaces near them and others that may be spatially more distal, general experiences of accessing queer or LGBTQ organizations, and to discuss additional queer spaces and networks they may rely upon for support. The investigator will not hold rigidly to these questions, rather they serve as general guidelines. Indeed, the semi-structured nature of the interview strategically allows for additional areas of inquiry to emerge.
Shadowing. Regarded “fieldwork on the move” (Gill, 2011; p. 115), shadowing constitutes a ‘focused’ ethnographic approach to data collection. Its central aim is to characterize the experiences of research interlocutors as they move among shifting settings, scenes, and situations (Trouille & Tavory, 2016). Shadowing generally involves following a single individual over a predetermined period (e.g., a day, one week, one month) (Trouille & Tavory, 2016). Such observations are usually restricted to settings/situations relevant to the object of study, and with potential to be theoretically generative for the substantive frame (e.g., at work, neighborhood, online) (Gill, 2011; Trouille & Tavory, 2016).

In the current study, the investigator will shadow a subsample of young black gay men (n = 6) selected from among the larger study population (N = 30). Each will be shadowed by the investigator for a period of one week. This mode of data collection will capture geographic, linguistic, and social network information related to how individuals negotiate queerness, gender performance and presentation, blackness, and their intersections as they move across settings, scenes, and situations, including the homeplace (e.g., switching codes at home, church, with friends, etc.), identified queer spaces within or geographically proximal to individuals’ homeplaces—and queer spaces that may be more distal from the homeplace—including gay neighborhoods, LGBTQ service organizations, entertainment districts/nightclubs, restaurants/bars, coffee shops, and so forth. Some of the latter may be situated in neighborhoods/communities having a different sociodemographic makeup from the homeplace.

Mental mapping. Mental maps allow interlocutors themselves to visually catalog information, emotion, and ideas related to specific spaces and places (Gieseking, 2013). Mental maps are a qualitative method, often hand-sketched and/or computer-assisted representations of how subjects experience a space (e.g., a university campus, neighborhood, or city) (Gieseking,
They are often employed to complement additional qualitative methods such as interviews and ethnography (Gieseking, 2013). Frequently, they require interlocutors to label a map or add to and label an existing map (Gieseking, 2013). A central contribution of mental maps to social research is the way in which they can illuminate social and spatial disparities, and unveil or make visible what Saarinen (1974) describes as the “invisible landscape” of an environment (e.g., an urban city), including the “invisible effects” of social privilege.

Reflective Journal. Probing and interrogating one’s own subjectivity and exhibiting reflexivity are essential features of qualitative and interpretive work. Contrary to other approaches to investigation, which may privilege “objectivity,” the qualitative and interpretive paradigms generally embrace notions of simultaneously interrogating, and to some extent utilizing one’s own subjectivity to inform one’s thinking about data. Therefore, an additional mode of data collection will be the investigator’s regular contributions to a reflective journal and field notes. Regularly keeping such a journal allows the investigator to reflect upon developing thoughts, feelings, and observations, as well as provide space for examining assumptions and biases that may come to the fore at various points throughout the process of carrying out the research (Morrow, 2005).

Data analysis. Prior to analyzing data, the investigator will transcribe all completed semi-structured in-depth interviews, ethnographic field observations, reflective journal entries and miscellaneous field notes. Though time-consuming, the process of transcription is widely regarded as an important phase of data analysis as it allows the researcher to become more intimately familiar with the data (Riessman, 1993). The investigator will create Microsoft Word documents to create files for each interview, ethnographic observation, and reflective journal. Each of these files will be password protected. All study files will be saved on a personal laptop.
computer stored in the investigator’s home office which only the investigator will have access to. In conducting data analysis, the researcher will use a computer-based qualitative data management and analysis software to conduct coding and comparison within and across various forms of data (e.g., Atlas.ti, NVivo, or Dedoose). Presently, the researcher has extensive experience with both NVivo and Dedoose from work on prior qualitative studies. In carrying out coding and comparison procedures, the investigator will not code data sentence by sentence, but rather will code for meaning. The researcher will generally follow these data analysis steps in conducting this grounded theory study: 1) familiarizing oneself with the data, 2) generation of initial codes, 3) Transcribing and reading through each transcript to acquaint oneself with the data 4) Review emergent codes/themes/conceptual categories, and 5) Define and name emergent theory (or theories) (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Validity. Debates about what constitutes ‘validity’ in qualitative research persist. However, qualitative researchers employ a range of strategies to ensure rigor and credibility in their research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, rigor and credibility will be secured using triangulation, investigator reflexivity, thick (i.e., rich) description, member checking, and peer debriefing.

Data triangulation will be achieved by using multiple modes of data collection: in-depth interviews, shadowing observation, mental mapping, reflective journaling, and field notes. The researcher, whom identifies as a black queer man, but whom did not grow up in what many would consider to be an urban environment (the investigator was born and raised in what may be considered an ethno-racially heterogeneous mid-sized city in mid-Michigan), will designate a segment in the dissertation to describe his story as a black queer man, and Chicago transplant, to explore his stance as well as to acknowledge potential limitations and/or biases. Thick
description of interviews, ethnographic observations, and miscellaneous field notes will be accomplished by not only reporting what black queer interlocutors utter during interviews and subsequently categorizing them under a particular code or theme, rather, the investigator will place these interlocutors’ responses in conversation with conceptual and theoretical literature in critical geography, queer theory, and black queer studies in order to add the contextual richness of the findings. The benefit of this is a conceptual and theoretical deepening of our understanding of the lives and experiences of urban young black gay men in relation to social work. The investigator will facilitate member checking sessions with a small but geographically representative subset of interlocutors. Member checking will also be completed, a process which essentially involves providing an opportunity for members (participants/interlocutors) to check (approve) specific aspects of the investigators preliminary analyses and interpretations prior to moving forward (Carlson, 2010). Finally, the researcher will engage in peer de-briefing with two disinterested peers who have some familiarity qualitative and interpretive research. These two individuals will be identified during the early stages of conducting the current dissertation.

In the next section, I briefly outline the grounded theory method—both its underlying logic, and its central components. Importantly, I used grounded theory to guide both data collection and data analysis for the study. Both approaches to data collection I propose (i.e., in-depth interviews, shadowing, mental mapping) have been employed in previous grounded theory investigations (Veinot, Meadowbrooke, Loveluck, Hickok, & Bauermeister, 2013).

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is an inductive method that seeks to generate theory (or, theories) derived from empirical observations (Charmaz, 2006). Initially developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), the method is designed to provide investigators “…systematic, yet flexible
guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (Charmaz: p. 2). Kathy Charmaz’s (2006) seminal text on grounded theory, characterizes it both “...as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them” (p. 10). Hence, grounded theory may be distinguished from other qualitative methods in that it proceeds precisely from the assumption that theory generation is its central aim (Charmaz, 2006).

The logic of the grounded theory method is iterative by nature. Meaning, it entails going back and forth between data collection and analysis throughout the duration of the research process (Charmaz, 2006). To generate theory or conceptual categories from empirical observation, grounded theory involves moving from the concrete to render a conceptual understanding and interpretation of data (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2002).

**Setting**

Broadly, the research setting is the City of Chicago (i.e., Chicago, Illinois). To examine the central object of investigation, that is, the social processes involved for young black gay men who negotiate the social geography of Chicago to access LGBTQ service systems and/or queer spaces—I will recruit emerging adult black gay men from Chicago’s queer families’ community, the house and ball community, and through LGBTQ service delivery systems. I will primarily recruit young black gay men from the South and West sides. First, on the South Side, I will recruit young black gay men who attend or frequent programming at organizations such as The Chicago Center for HIV Elimination, The Village, and the Howard Brown Health Center (Englewood). On the West Side, I will recruit from one of the few known queer-focused organizations, Task Force Prevention and Community Services. I may also recruit emerging adults from The Night Ministry’s West Town Open Door Youth Shelter, another West Side
program, predominantly serving un-housed LGBTQ youth and emerging adults of color (including young black gay men).

The rationale for the selection of each of the above field sites is manifold. First, the researcher has existing relationships with several organizations—including agency staff, and young black gay men who are service users. Hence, given these established relationships (which have developed largely through volunteer work and assistance on various community-based projects) this potentially helps ameliorate problems associated with access, often a concern in qualitative studies. Second, each organization is known to provide services to queer people, and queer people of color, and this includes young black gay men. Last, recruiting from this mix of organizations will likely yield a diverse and heterogeneous sample of young black gay men.

Furthermore, many young black gay men may have organizational affiliations, formal and/or informal, that are overlapping and multiplex. For instance, many young men whom the researcher has engaged at The Village are also very involved in the Families of Chicago community and culture; a kinship and support network similar to House and Ball communities, but which is a distinct black queer cultural institution. Such heterogeneity and diversity of experience, I argue, has the potential to be quite theoretically rich, by illuminating the range of experiences and perspectives on blackness, queerness, and the implications of either or both for individuals accessing LGBTQ services and/or alternate queer spaces.

**Population**

The researcher will select a voluntary (convenience) sample of young black gay men who live in Chicago, and who are currently involved, at least to some extent, with LGBTQ service systems and/or alternate queer spaces and organizations. The demographics of the population to be studied are emerging adults, between the ages of 18 and 25. Individuals who are eligible for
the study should identify as “Black” and/or “African-American” in terms of ethnic or racial background and identity. Also, to be eligible, individuals should identify broadly as “gay,” or “queer.” To be sure, the investigator recognizes that the category “queer” in many ways, remains a contested term. As such, black men who identify as gay, queer, bisexual, trade, same gender loving, or any other identity category that indexes individuals as not necessarily falling under the definition, label, or social construction of “heterosexual,” I would suggest qualifies as “queer,” as I’ve conceptualized the term within this proposal, and would be eligible for inclusion in this study.

Most study participants will be recruited by the investigator, in-person. However, additional recruitment may be achieved via snowball sampling. This is a procedure which has been employed extensively, and successfully in previous studies with diverse Black MSM populations (Millett et al., 2012; Millett, Malebranche, Mason, & Spikes, 2005). It is a particularly useful approach when one’s research topic focuses on, or unearths sensitive topics, with traditionally “hard-to-reach” populations, wherein having ‘insiders’ to assist in locating people to study is critical (Bernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Millett et al., 2012). Obtaining a successful snowball sampling entails depending upon referrals made by people (usually one’s existing research participants), who share or know of others who possess a characteristic of interest to the investigator (Bernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

Eligible individuals identified both in person and through snowball sampling will be informed that should they volunteer to participate, they will be asked to complete an in-depth interview that will last approximately 75 minutes.

Demographic features such as HIV/AIDS status, education, or socioeconomic status (SES) are not “variables” of interest in this study. Familiarity with the interview participant is of limited concern, though I acknowledge that some of the interviewees I may have some
familiarity with due to my prior volunteer work at various organizations in Chicago. Most participants would be aware that the researcher only serves in the capacity of a volunteer at these organizations, thus I would also communicate to them that their interview responses, perhaps some of which may be evaluative (positive and/or negative) of these LGBTQ organizations, would not be shared with any staff, or fellow service users, at these organizations—indeed their responses would be confidential. The researcher will either seek to interview a maximum of 30 participants, or, will interview participants until reaching theoretical saturation (see section on grounded theory).

Qualitative studies tend to aim for gaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon, often aiming for thick description, and therefore, a smaller $n$ wouldn’t necessarily be detrimental to study findings.

**Ethical Considerations**

Certainly, there are ethical considerations investigators must bear in mind when conducting research with human subjects/participants. The current study examining emerging adult black gay men’s access to LGBTQ service systems and queer space may pose minimal risk to research participants. Many, though certainly not all the young black gay men whom I interview, may qualify as vulnerable and/or as belonging to a stigmatized population (e.g., un-housed, chronically homeless, or unemployed). The substantive frame of the study is also concerned with the ways in which individuals have interpreted their personal experiences, and their feelings, about various aspects of their identity and subjectivity. Unquestionably, interlocking issues of race, gender, and sexuality remain sensitive topics for marginal groups and certainly for racial-sexual minority populations. Asking individuals to reflect upon and share difficult personal experiences and perspectives related to their lived experiences (positive or negative) in diverse neighborhoods, LGBTQ organizations, with family members, and with
peers, may be challenging. A central ethical concern for the investigator then, would be to negotiate the tension between a moral and ethical duty to conduct research alongside a vulnerable population (i.e., young black gay men) toward the ultimate goal of improving care for this population, yet simultaneously understanding that a dearth of available resources, is the very mechanism that motivates the research in the first place. Indeed, ensuring that individuals, who may already be in a vulnerable or stigmatized position will have access to needed resources (e.g., counseling, advocacy, housing), will certainly be secured by the investigator. Indeed, the investigator will make every effort, throughout the research process, to provide young black gay men with information and access to resources at organizations that they may currently frequent, or to connect them with resources elsewhere.
Bibliography


Keene, Lance C.


