

EVERY DAY IS A DISASTER: HOMELESSNESS AND THE 2013 COLORADO FLOODS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Every Day is a Disaster: Homelessness and the 2013 Colorado Floods

Thesis directed by Professor Kathleen Tierney

Although homeless populations are mentioned in studies of disaster vulnerability, discussions of their unique experiences, capacities, and vulnerabilities are often referred to tangentially. In an effort to address this gap in the literature, this research explores the experiences of predisaster homeless individuals and homeless-serving organizations (HSOs) during and following the 2013 floods in Boulder County, Colorado. I present data collected through over 100 hours of participant observation at HSOs, roughly 100 documentary sources, 28 semi-structured interviews with community stakeholders (e.g., staff from HSOs and public officials), and unstructured interviews and focus groups with 27 homeless individuals who were present during the floods.

To situate my research, I draw upon social disaster vulnerability and political economy perspectives. Using the Pressure and Release (PAR) model introduced by Blaikie et al. (1994; Wisner et al. 2003) to organize my theoretical approach, I define political-economic root causes that lead to dynamic pressures, which produce unsafe conditions for homeless individuals and the organizations that serve them. I demonstrate how processes of neoliberalization have resulted in unequal urban design and policy, subsequently criminalizing homeless persons and increasing their vulnerability to disaster. At the same time, these processes have shifted responsibility for social welfare from the state to non-state actors, such as nonprofit community-based organizations, that are often strained in the ability to serve an increasing number of clients in need of their services. Further, in moving beyond social vulnerability studies that tend to homogenize marginalized and underserved groups, I demonstrate factors that increase and decrease homeless individuals' and HSOs' vulnerability and resilience to disaster. The broader implications of this research speak to the need to understand structural factors that create risk and vulnerability while simultaneously hindering efforts to enhance community resilience.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the homeless community in Boulder, who shared their time and wisdom with me. Thank you for your kindness and welcoming me into your community.

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Nnena, I don't think I could have made it through this without you. I am grateful to have gained such an incredible mentor, colleague, and friend during my time at CU. I aspire to be as welcoming and supportive to others as you have been to me throughout my time in this program.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Beginning on September 11, 2013, flooding ravaged parts of Colorado’s Front Range for five days. Dangerous floodwaters ripped through creeks and waterways, cut off roads and communities, destroyed and damaged homes, and carried with them a substantial amount of debris from the built and natural environments. The flooding occurred as a result of a “1000 year” rainfall event from a storm system that hovered over the northern and central parts of Colorado for eight straight days (City of Boulder 2014; Walsch 2013). Flooding and subsequent devastation happened outside of areas identified on flood plain maps, as these were constructed based upon rain- and snowmelt-related estimates that failed to depict potential flooding originating from ground saturation. (See Appendix A for a 2013 map of urban flooding in Boulder.)

This event constituted one of the most devastating disasters in Colorado’s history, resulting in the largest airborne evacuation since Hurricane Katrina, displacing 18,000 residents, isolating communities, taking the lives of ten individuals, and causing extensive damage across the state (Colorado Guard National Affairs 2013; Federal Emergency Management Agency 2013; Jergler 2013). A year after the floods occurred, the Colorado Division of Homeland Security & Emergency Management (2014) estimated that the disaster would ultimately result in “\$3 billion in damage, including \$1.7 billion to the state’s infrastructure, \$623 million to housing and \$555 million to the state’s economy.” Boulder County, the geographical focus of this dissertation, was one of the hardest-hit counties in the state, with four lives lost and 200 homes destroyed (Boulder County 2014). A number of unmet needs persist in the cities and townships within the county that were affected by the 2013 floods. These include infrastructure, housing,

such as buyouts and acquisitions, and creek and watershed needs, totaling roughly \$918 million (Boulder County Trends 2015-2016:80).¹ Before the floods, Boulder County was characterized by a number of preexisting social issues, including high rates of inequality, homelessness, and a lack of affordable housing. The flooding exacerbated housing issues, which continues to be a barrier for those seeking stable, affordable housing in the region (Estabrook 2015; Wallace 2013).

Homeless individuals in Boulder County experienced material losses and faced unique challenges with the flooding, especially in their attempts to access shelter. The disaster occurred outside of the emergency shelter season for homeless-serving organizations' (HSO) that open overnight shelters for the homeless community, as the season typically runs from mid-October to mid-April weather depending.² This meant that many homeless persons camped along creeks and tributaries or in more remote areas in the mountains at the time of the event, increasing their vulnerability. Compounding physical threats to their wellbeing and belongings, homeless persons initially were turned away from a public disaster shelter at the peak of the flooding. During this time, HSOs stepped in as advocates to ensure that the homeless community received equal access to safe shelter and resources. I describe this incident in more detail and present findings from public officials, community stakeholders, HSO staff, and homeless flood survivors in Chapters 4 through 6.

A number of disaster events and weather phenomena have pushed officials to seriously

¹ These cities and townships include Boulder, Jamestown, Lafayette, Longmont, Louisville, Lyons, Nederland, and parts of unincorporated Boulder County (Boulder County Trends 2015-2016).

² In this dissertation, homeless-serving organizations (HSOs) refer broadly to any organization which serves homeless individuals in a specialized manner—meaning that all or some of its programs are designed specifically for homeless persons. This can include emergency shelter, food distribution, and group therapy, to name but a few examples. Some organizations provide summer shelter, but only to a limited number of people.

consider the ways in which they are prepared (or not prepared) to serve homeless communities during disaster (Bush 2014; Canton 2015; Feldman and Hill-Holtzman 1994). In early 2017, for example, Southern California experienced intense and prolonged rainfall that directly affected homeless communities living along creeks, rivers, and other waterways (Nagourney 2017; Wong and Gee 2017). During this time in San Jose, California, a homeless community of roughly forty to fifty people was completely washed out by floodwaters (Gee 2017). Emergency managers and other public officials are still learning how to manage and prevent the mortal dangers homeless persons face, especially those that live outside in hazard prone areas. As another example, in Colorado and other forested regions in the U.S., Forest Service officials and emergency managers are confronting growing concerns with illegal encampments, which enhance wildfire risk and make homeless individuals more susceptible to the negative effects of extreme weather events. This also demonstrates the types of challenges that planners and other public officials face in efforts to simultaneously manage environmental risks and care for homeless populations, while also balancing the safety concerns of the larger community.

Although sociological studies of homelessness exist within the larger discipline, few social disaster vulnerability studies have examined the experiences of predisaster homeless individuals (for exceptions see Fogel 2017, Phillips 1996 and Settembrino 2016, 2017). Additional research also is needed to understand the experiences and vulnerabilities of community-based organizations (CBOs), such as HSOs, that provide pivotal services both within and outside of a disaster context. I address these research gaps by using the 2013 floods in Boulder County as an opportunity to understand homeless persons' and HSOs' experiences with disaster. In so doing, I examine structural and local processes that place individuals within the homeless community and HSOs at greater risk and vulnerability to disaster, while also

highlighting narratives from homeless flood survivors that speak to their capacity to respond to and recover from disaster.³ To situate this research, in the next sections I highlight the state of poverty, inequality, and homelessness in the U.S. I then describe the study context, discuss the purpose of the dissertation, and provide an overview of upcoming chapters.

U.S. Poverty, Inequality, and Homelessness

Over the past fifty years, poverty rates in the U.S. have declined by roughly four percent.⁴ Despite these improvements, roughly fourteen percent of the population, or over forty-three million people, live in poverty in the U.S. (Chaudry et al. 2016; Proctor, Semega, and Kollar 2016). Certain segments of the population are more likely to experience poverty, including Black and Hispanic individuals, single female-headed households, and, increasingly, children and those with lower education levels (Chaudry et al. 2016). Importantly, the percentage of individuals in deep poverty, a measure defined by Chaudry and authors (2016:19) as “income below one-half of the poverty threshold,” has doubled since 1976 from 3.3 to 6.6 percent in 2014.

Poverty rates tend to fluctuate with economic downturns and upturns. For example, during the recessions of the early 1980s and the more recent Great Recession beginning in late 2007, increased rates of poverty and unemployment followed (Danzinger, Chavez and

³ For the purposes of this research, I employ a broad definition of “homelessness” that follows Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act’s (42 U.S.C., 254b), which describes a homeless individual as “an individual who lacks housing (without regard to whether the individual is a member of a family), including an individual whose primary residence during the night is a supervised public or private facility (e.g., shelters) that provides temporary living accommodations, and an individual who is a resident in transitional housing. A homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets, stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle, or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation.”

⁴ Poverty measures are used to determine the ability of families “to meet the basic needs of each family member within the context of the economic conditions of the nation” (Chaudry et al. 2016:2). Poverty thresholds fluctuate from year to year. There are three metrics used for measuring poverty: the official poverty measure, supplemental poverty measure, and the alternative poverty measure (Chaudry et al. 2016). Unless otherwise indicated, all numbers are derived from the official poverty measure.

Cumberworth 2012). Although improving slightly in recent years, poverty rates remain high following the Great Recession (Kneebone and Holmes 2016). Government safety net programs historically have played a substantial role in efforts to scale back poverty and homelessness. Since President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the U.S. “War on Poverty” in 1964, America’s safety net programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Head Start, and later additions including Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Pell Grants have assisted millions of people in their efforts to escape poverty. Such programs are currently at risk owing to actions of the current and previous administrations, which have sought to cut costs by scaling back funds dedicated to serving those most in need. For example, the proposed federal budget for 2018 would decrease funding to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (\$6.2 billion cut), eliminate the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, and scale back roughly \$4.2 billion to community-services programs from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (Semuels 2017). These cuts are proposed despite findings showing that:

Increased long-term investment in human and social capital through early childhood services and education, as well as ongoing investments in targeted training, the creation of employment opportunities, and community development are key. A strong safety net, in combination with these social investments, is needed to alleviate material deprivation, to ensure that vulnerable individuals can attain economic self-sufficiency for themselves and their children, and to pave the way for even more progress for the nation over the next 50 years (Chaudry et al. 2016:7).

Wage stagnation and economic inequality are two additional economic trends in the U.S. that impede efforts to remediate poverty and homelessness. Over the past fifty years, individuals in the highest income brackets have experienced increases in annual income, while those in the lower income brackets have experienced wage stagnation—with very little change in annual income that fails to keep up with increases in costs of living (Gould 2017; Long 2016;

Sommeiller, Price, and Wazeter 2016).⁵ In fact, income inequality has increased in every state since the 1970s (Sommeiller, Price, and Wazeter 2016). Between 2009 and 2013, the top one percent of Americans gained roughly eighty-five percent of the total income growth, and they made more than twenty-five times as much as the bottom ninety-nine percent (Sommeiller, Price, and Wazeter 2016). Income inequality is one of the factors identified as contributing to homelessness in the U.S., and is associated with a host of other issues such as educational achievement gaps, uneven negative health outcomes, and peoples' inability to afford rising rental costs (Pickett and Wilkinson 2015; Reardon 2012).

Affordable Housing and Homelessness in the U.S.

The dire need for more affordable housing in the U.S. is a notable barrier for reducing and preventing homelessness (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2016; Sommeiller, Price, and Wazeter 2016). A report produced by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) (2016) found that demand for low-cost housing exceeds the supply and that many people now pay more than the recommended amount in rent per month. The report goes on to state that, “[s]evere cost burden is a risk factor for housing instability and homelessness, which exacerbates the financial and psychological stress within a family” (4). Increased costs of living and a lack of affordable housing not only create stress for individuals and families living in or on the brink of poverty, but also serve as contributing factors toward homelessness.

According to a 2016 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development report, roughly 550,000 people were identified as homeless in the U.S. on a single night in January 2016. However, other estimates of homelessness in the U.S. suggest that the actual number of

⁵ Wage inequality is also gendered, racialized, and divided along levels of education. For example, men have experienced higher wage growth compared to women, since 2000 wage growth has been slower for Black workers compared to White and Hispanic workers, and education levels interact with race to produce unequal wage outcomes (Gould 2017).

people experiencing homelessness is over three million (Lurie and Schuster 2015). Trends in poverty, inequality, and homelessness have serious implications for disaster planning, resulting in heightened vulnerability for segments of the population that subsequently require emergency managers to adapt plans for a growing population with limited resources. These trends also have resulted in an increased reliance on nonprofits and CBOs, which have struggled to adapt to growing numbers of individuals in need of these organizations' services (Poppendieck 2000; Salamon 2012; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). This increasing reliance on CBOs is worrisome, as clients who utilize CBOs' services will undoubtedly need them—perhaps to a greater extent—during disaster. At the same time, CBOs face obstacles in adequately preparing for disaster, as many often struggle daily to meet the needs of clients (Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010). Acknowledging the predisaster injustices, contexts, and constraints homeless persons and HSOs experience allows researchers to understand more accurately the unique vulnerabilities and capacities of these individuals and organizations. Findings from such research are especially relevant in light of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) call for a “whole community” approach to disaster resilience, which encourages participation of CBOs (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2017; Koch et al. 2016).

Study Context

Boulder County, Colorado

Home to over 300,000 people, Boulder County's population is predominantly White, with eighty-eight percent of residents identifying as Caucasian or Anglo, one percent Black or African American, four percent Asian, less than a half of a percent Native American or Alaska Native, and thirteen percent Latino (Boulder County Trends 2015-2016). Roughly half (49.7%) of the population is female, and a stark majority of residents possess a high school diploma or

higher (94.1%), with over half (60%) holding a bachelor's degree or higher (Boulder County Trends Report 2015-2016).

A flourishing university city and tech hub in the Rocky Mountain region, wealth and high cost of living characterize Boulder County. According to a 2016 Out of Reach report produced by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), Boulder County is the second most expensive county in the state of Colorado. The county reportedly has “bounced back” from the Great Recession, with median incomes higher than state and national averages and a substantial decrease in foreclosures (Boulder County Trends Report 2015-2016). The median household income in Boulder County is around \$71,000—well above the national average of \$55,775 (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). Despite the wealth present in the area, income inequality, a lack of affordable housing, and elevated rates of poverty afflict the region. A Boulder County Trends report (2015-2016:56) states, “[o]ur local poverty rate is substantial and growing: In 2000, 7 percent of the county’s families with children were living in poverty. That grew to 11 percent by 2013.” Indeed, the divide between the “haves” and “have-nots” in Boulder continues to grow. This is attributable to rising housing costs and a lack of affordable housing in the county and region more broadly.⁶

The rising housing costs are a notable concern among residents and city and county officials; they continue to rise disproportionately compared to income and are pushing out lower-income and working-class residents. Even for those who are able to acquire a home or rent in the county, many are spending more than thirty percent of their incomes on monthly rent. As of 2013, nearly sixty percent of all renters in Boulder County spent more than thirty percent of their

⁶ “Affordable housing” is defined in the Boulder County Trends Report (2015-2016: 68) as “homes, usually apartments, that are subsidized with funds including Section 8 vouchers or limited titles, so residents don’t spend more than 30 percent of their household incomes on housing costs.”

income on monthly rent (Boulder County Trends Report: 67). Indeed, the increase of wealth in the county only continues to grow, especially as tech firms such as Google move into the area and bring employees capable of paying for the rising rental and housing costs. This, in turn, effectively has pushed lower-income individuals out of the area altogether.

In an effort to develop a countywide and regional understanding of the effects of the floods on homeless populations and HSOs, and homelessness in the region more generally, I conducted interviews with city and county-level public officials, community stakeholders, HSO staff, and homeless individuals in the cities and townships of Boulder, Longmont, Lyons, and Nederland. These locales range in population size from 107,349 (Boulder), 92,088 (Longmont), to 2,033 (Lyons) and 1,445 (Nederland). Table 1 provides an overview of each of these cities and townships, including poverty rates, median income, education, median age, gender, and race and ethnicity. These cities and townships vary geographically in relation to their location within and near the Rocky Mountains, as illustrated in Figure 1 on the following page.

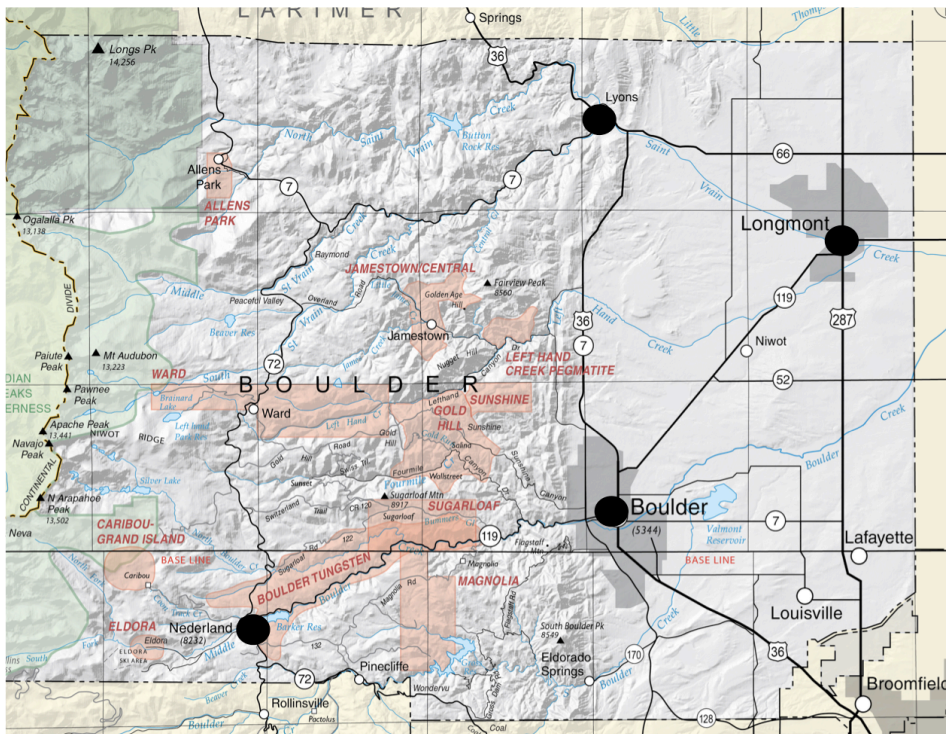
Table 1. Boulder County Demographics by City

City	% in Poverty	Median Income	% Bachelor's or Higher (over age of 25)	Median Age	% Female	% White or Caucasian	% Latino or Hispanic
Boulder	23.1*	\$58,484	72.3	28.3	48.7	88.0	8.7
Longmont	14.1	\$62,208	37.6	36.6	50.7	83.3	24.6
Lyons	9.5	\$90,603	56.5	40.4	50.1	94.1	5.7
Nederland	12.7	\$69,638	28.0	38.9	48.2	95.5	4.1

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Boulder County Trends 2015-2016

*This number includes college students, comprising roughly one-third of Boulder's population.

Figure 1. Map of Boulder County⁷



Numbers for other racial and ethnic groups (not identified in Table 1) represented in these areas are notably low. Slightly less than one percent of residents in the City of Boulder identify as African American, roughly five percent (4.7%) identify as Asian, and less than half a percent as Native American or Alaska Native (Boulder County Trends 2015-2016). Longmont is more ethnically diverse in terms of the number of Latino residents, but its racial composition remains largely White with less than one percent of residents identifying as African American, one percent Native American, and about three percent (3.2%) of residents identifying as Asian. A little over one percent of residents in Lyons identify as Asian and less than one percent identify as African American or Native American. Roughly six percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Nederland has a similar ethnic composition to Lyons, with less than half of a percent identifying

⁷ The black dots on the map represent the four areas within Boulder County where interviews took place. The northernmost location represents Lyons, and the westernmost location represents Nederland. Copyright Colorado Geological Survey (2017).

as African American, and less than one percent identifying as Asian or Native American (U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Boulder County is a unique setting within which to examine the effects of disaster on homeless communities and HSOs. Not only did the area experience some of the most extensive damage from the floods, but the county also has a sizeable homeless population, as I describe in more detail in the upcoming section.

Homelessness in Boulder County

Homelessness and income inequality constitute some of the county's most pressing social issues and are frequent topics of concern among residents and community leaders (Boulder County Trends Report 2015-2016; Byars 2012; Meltzer 2011). It is not uncommon to see people panhandling near highway exits, on street corners, and on the City of Boulder's popular Pearl Street Mall. The presence of the homeless community has resulted in a number of heated debates among residents and city/county officials regarding how to address homelessness in the area and whether Boulder should work to overturn its identity as a homeless "haven" (Byars 2012). For example, in 2014, a Housing First Community in North Boulder was built to serve and support the chronically homeless population in Boulder County. "The Housing First approach," as explained on the Boulder Housing Partners website, "is founded on the belief that the first and primary need for the homeless population is to obtain stable housing." A number of residents close to the proposed facility—as well as residents from the broader community—expressed anger and concern toward the development, arguing that it would only encourage more homeless people to come to Boulder, "hurting" the image of the city. In Chapter 4, I describe this development in more detail, as well as other homeless and affordable housing developments that demonstrate community tension around homelessness in the region.

An annual “Homeless Point-In-Time” (PIT) study conducted by the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) collects information on the rates of homelessness in seven major counties surrounding the City of Denver. On the evening of January 28, 2013—the same year the floods occurred—11,167 homeless men, women, and children were counted in the Denver Metro and seven county region (MDHI 2013). While there are a number of methodological constraints and considerations associated with attempts to quantify homeless populations (Cordray and Pion 1991; Cowan, Breakey, and Fischer 1988; Rosenthal 1991; Williams and Cheal 2002), this survey provides a rough overview of homelessness in the region. It includes demographic information such as gender, race and ethnicity, length of homelessness, and reason for homelessness. The 2013 survey reported 2,366 homeless individuals in Boulder County. These numbers were second only to Denver City and County (4,904), which is a much larger metropolitan area. According to subsequent PIT surveys, there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of homeless individuals reported in Boulder County, but elevated levels of homelessness persist.⁸

As the PIT reports indicate, homelessness remains a critical social issue in Boulder County. This is also apparent in the number and types of homeless initiatives formed to remediate homelessness (Boulder Housing Partners, N.D.; Boulder City Council 2017). For example, in April 2010, Boulder County government officials and HSOs designed a 10-year plan to end homelessness. This includes initiatives dedicated to homelessness prevention, public awareness of and advocacy for homelessness, and supportive programs to lift individuals out of chronic homelessness. Subsequent collaborative efforts include the Boulder Homeless Service Collaborative (BHSC), which began in late 2013 following the floods in an effort to improve the

⁸ Subsequent PIT surveys report the number of homeless persons in Boulder County as follows: 2014: 850 people; 2015: 658 people; 2016: 726 people; 2017: 600 people.

efficiencies and effectiveness of services to the Boulder homeless community through coordination of three major HSOs in the City of Boulder. More recently (2016-2017), the City of Boulder convened a Homelessness Working Group to assist with the restructuring of homeless service provision (Boulder City Council 2017). And in Longmont, for example, the city's Community Services department released a 2016 Homeless Services Assessment that outlined potential future directions for homeless service provision, including a revamped services model, an integrated service delivery system, and opportunities for county and regional collaboration (Zwetch and Capriccioso 2017).

Boulder County's Familiarity with Disaster

Boulder County's experience with the 2013 Floods is informed by the historical occurrences of disaster in the region. Going as far back as the 1894 Great Boulder Flood, Boulder County has become familiarized with the level of flood risk in the area (Boulder County OEM 2017). The area also experiences fires, blizzards, drought, severe weather, and extreme heat. For example, the county has faced several devastating wildfires in the past thirty years, including the 1989 Black Tiger Fire, 1990 Olde Stage Fire, the 2003 Overland Fire, the 2010 Fourmile Canyon Fire, the 2016 Cold Springs Fire, and, most recently, the 2017 Sunshine Canyon Fire (Boulder County 2017a; McGhee 2017). Wildfires and floods alone have cost the state billions of dollars in infrastructure damage in recent years. Public officials within the county continue to navigate the dynamic threats the area faces as a wildland-urban interface. These concerns are coupled with human threats to the environment, such as homeless encampments and wildfire risk, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

Purpose of this Dissertation

The experiences of predisaster homeless individuals are an under-examined topic in disaster sociology. Although there are many discussions in the literature on disaster-induced homelessness and residential displacement (Comerio 1997; Enarson 1999; Gilbert 2001; Nikolopoulos and Tzanetis 2003; Peacock, Dash, and Zhang 2006), little is known about the ways in which disasters affect homeless populations in a U.S. context. Some earlier work examined the effects of disaster on homeless people in the U.S. (Phillips 1996; Sar 1995), but a review of the literature published in the past ten years shows that there has been very little emphasis on the disaster experiences of predisaster homeless communities in a U.S. context.⁹ The 2013 floods provide an opportunity by which to examine preexisting conditions and discriminatory, distancing processes that increase homeless persons' vulnerability to disaster.

Further, when homeless communities are mentioned in the disaster vulnerability literature, they are often referred to tangentially as vulnerable or an "access and functional needs" population without much attention to their experiences or factors that may contribute to their capacity. Indeed, there are several characteristics that many homeless persons possess that may make them more vulnerable to disaster, but such homogenization fails to account for the nuances within the homeless population. Not only does this categorization of homeless individuals as vulnerable fail to acknowledge their capacity to respond to disaster, but it also, as Lurie and Schuster (2015:iv) argue, "facilitates their dehumanization" and "encourages erroneous negative stereotypes, assumptions, and prejudices." In moving beyond social vulnerability studies that historically tend to homogenize marginalized and underserved groups, I

⁹ Research on homelessness and disasters has been conducted in European and Asian contexts (Carcellar et al. 2011; Elvrum and Wong 2012; Paidakaki 2012; Walters and Gaillard 2014).

demonstrate factors that increase and decrease homeless individuals' vulnerability and resilience to disaster by giving primacy to the narratives of homeless flood survivors.

The purpose of this dissertation is to highlight the experiences of homeless individuals with respect to disaster and to understand the disaster experiences and constraints of the organizations that serve them. This research examines the level of preparedness among Boulder County HSOs and the types of experiences and constraints they faced during the floods. Prior to these presentation of findings, I situate social service safety net organizations, such as HSOs, into larger social, political, and economic processes that hinder the ability of these organizations to serve clients during disaster. Specifically, I demonstrate how neoliberalization produces vulnerability by criminalizing homelessness and shifting responsibility for social welfare from the state to non-state actors, such as community-based organizations.

This study will help to broaden the scope of knowledge on homeless individuals and HSOs in sociological studies of disaster and disaster vulnerability. Additionally, this research may serve organizations and local officials in Boulder County and other communities by informing and potentially guiding future policy and management decisions pertaining to disaster preparedness, mitigation, and recovery for homeless populations.

Overview of the Dissertation

In the upcoming chapter, I discuss the theoretical foundations of the study. Using the Pressure and Release (PAR) model introduced by Blaikie et al. (1994; Wisner et al. 2003) to organize my theoretical approach, I define root causes that lead to dynamic pressures, which result in unsafe conditions for homeless individuals and the organizations that serve them. In Chapter 3, I describe the qualitative methods employed in this study and provide an overview of the research design. In addition to the methodological and analytical steps taken in this

dissertation, I draw attention to the unique considerations and lessons learned through working in a homeless community.

The following three chapters focus on the empirical findings from the research, and intentionally move forward with interview findings from individuals that have a broader scope of knowledge about issues of homelessness, costs of living, and disaster vulnerability in the region, to more ground-level perspectives from HSO staff and homeless flood survivors. Chapter 4 details findings from interviews with public officials and homeless community stakeholders in Boulder County. I draw upon these interviews to situate HSOs' and homeless persons' disaster experiences within the larger regional setting. Chapter 5 highlights the experiences and challenges that Boulder County HSOs faced during and after the floods, as well as factors that contribute to HSOs inability to prepare for large-scale disasters. Chapter 6 focuses on the experiences of homeless individuals during the floods, highlighting their narratives of the event and noting stories that demonstrate capacity and resiliency to disaster. In the conclusion chapter (Chapter 7), I present empirical contributions, theoretical implications, and practical recommendations from this research. I close the chapter by outlining future research directions.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the past few decades, disaster scholarship increasingly has focused on unequal disaster outcomes among individuals and communities; however, attention to homeless individuals' disaster experiences is generally lacking in sociological studies of disaster. Further, few studies have examined the experiences of community-based organizations (CBOs) serving marginalized groups during disaster, despite the fact that these organizations play a critical role in the daily lives of their clients and are relied upon even more so during extreme events. To address these gaps and situate this research, I use social disaster vulnerability and political economy perspectives to explain the factors that translate into uneven disaster outcomes among homeless individuals and community-based, homeless-serving organizations (HSOs). In what follows, I provide an overview of social vulnerability theory in the context of disaster research, with a particular focus on the social vulnerability to disaster approach introduced by Piers Blaikie and colleagues (1994) (later updated in 2003 by Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon and Davis). I then discuss neoliberalization as a root cause of disaster vulnerability, which I argue translates into dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions that leave individuals and communities, specifically homeless individuals and HSOs, more susceptible to the negative effects of disaster. I subsequently explore how neoliberal ideology and market-driven governance help to perpetuate a culture in the U.S. and elsewhere that defines "deservingness" and "disposability" of certain populations in relation to participation in the formal economy. I argue that socio-cultural constructions of certain populations as "deserving" or "disposable" directly affect homeless persons' vulnerability to disaster. I conclude by presenting findings from literature pertaining to homelessness and predisaster homeless persons' vulnerability.

Disaster Research & Social Disaster Vulnerability Theory

Disaster research originated with an applied, military focus, leading to selective attention on the general topics of social control, panic, and organizational behavior during times of crisis (Quarantelli 1987; Tierney 2007). Early disaster research was heavily influenced by U.S. military interests, and reflected a desire to understand how the public might react in a wartime situation. As an illustration of this influence, the pioneering field research teams of the early 1950s to mid-1960s focused their attention on topics such as the reduction and control of panic, organizational response, and psychological and reactionary behavior following disasters (Quarantelli 1987). Early research produced a number of findings, including those that challenged and/or debunked widely believed myths on the topics of panic, disruption to community morale, and antisocial behavior following disaster (Quarantelli 1987).

A classical definition of disasters, provided by Charles Fritz (1961:655), characterizes “disaster” as an event concentrated in time and space, where “the social structure is disrupted and the fulfillment of all or some of the essential functions of society.. is prevented.” The nature of this definition is indicative of early systems-based perspectives of the field of disaster research, which identified disasters as events bounded in space and time with an emphasis on physical loss (Quarantelli 1987). This definition guided conceptions of disasters for several decades, and was largely attributed to the field’s preoccupation with systems-oriented, event-based perspectives. In using this perspective, disasters are viewed as *external* rather than *internal* to the social order.

As disaster scholars have come to acknowledge over time, however, disasters are not isolated, acute events originating outside of the social order (Blaikie et al. 1994; Hewitt 1983; Tierney 2014; Wisner et al. 2003). Rather, disasters are socially produced through political, economic, and social forces that place individuals and communities at risk. Not all of these

processes are necessarily intentional in their outcomes, but they have the effect of making certain populations and regions more susceptible to disaster. It is therefore essential to examine “natural” disaster events as bounded to the social. Geographer Kenneth Hewitt, among others, had an influential role in this shift in thinking about disasters away from the long-held view that they represented abnormal events occurring outside of the social order toward a perspective that views disasters as part of normal life (Hewitt 1983). In criticizing technocratic thinking that emphasizes technological control of hazards, Hewitt (1983:16) argues that:

In the technocratic style of work there is a structure of assumptions, and a use of science and management that always situates natural calamity beyond an assumed order of definite knowledge, and of reasonable expectation. More importantly it places disaster outside the realm of everyday responsibility both of society and individual. More important still, it makes assumptions about everyday life—about its being ‘normal,’ ‘stable,’ ‘predictable’—that are in turn debatable.

Geographer Gilbert White, known as the “father of flood plain management,” also called for a shift in understanding of disasters, arguing that the causes of disasters are a result of societal actions or inactions that limit responses to hazards (Mileti 1999; Tierney 2007). This approach, referred to as the “natural hazards perspective,” emphasized the need for adjustments preceding disasters, including structural and non-structural adjustments such as mitigation planning, land-use planning, and implementation of building codes (Mileti 1999; Tierney 2007).

The growth of disaster vulnerability research is indicative of the discipline’s shift in thinking about disasters as being socially produced. In tandem with conceptual and theoretical developments within disaster studies, roughly forty years ago disaster scholars began to tease apart the disparities in socioeconomic outcomes within disaster-affected communities, particularly around subjects of race, ethnicity, and class (Bolin 2006; Peacock and Girard 1997). Many scholars, perhaps most notably Blaikie and his co-authors, were influential in the development of social vulnerability to disaster research. Within their seminal 1994 book, *At*

Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters, Blaikie and colleagues presented a holistic framework for understanding social vulnerability and risk to disaster (explained in more detail below), arguing that social vulnerability results from a lack of capacity to prepare for, manage, and recover from disasters (Blaikie et al. 1994). In the second edition of their book, Wisner et al. (2003:11) describe vulnerability as:

the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme natural event or process). It involves a combination of factors that determine the degree to which someone's life, livelihood, property and other assets are put at risk by a discrete and identifiable event (or series or 'cascade' of such events) in nature and society.

Indeed, vulnerability is determined by a variety of characteristics and factors, including, but not limited to, gender, social class position, age, race, and ethnicity (Enarson 2007; Thomas et al. 2013). Scholars have argued that one's social position in society, indicated by such identities as gender, race, ethnicity, and social class, helps to determine which individuals may be more or less likely to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster (Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson 2007; Fothergill and Peek 2004; Thomas et al. 2013; Tierney 2006, 2012). Importantly, these identities often intersect with one another, illustrating the complexity of vulnerability as a sociological concept (Ryder 2017). Inclusion of previously overlooked populations in disaster research, such as low-income populations, women, youth, older adults, and non-English speaking individuals not only enhanced understanding of uneven social outcomes following disasters, but also signaled a recognition of the work already being conducted in mainstream sociology.

Despite advancements in knowledge that vulnerability scholars have contributed to disaster research, an ongoing critique of vulnerability scholarship highlights the lack of attention to individual agency in determining the capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disaster (Wisner et al. 2003; Morrow 1999). Betty Hearn Morrow (1999:11) addresses these

The PAR model is a *process* model of social vulnerability involving root causes, dynamic pressures, and unsafe conditions.¹⁰ This is represented in the model as “the progression of vulnerability.” Moving from left to right in Figure 2, root causes represent spatially and historically distant processes, such as economic, political, and ideological processes. As Wisner et al. (2003:53) explain, “[r]oot causes reflect the exercise and distribution of power in a society.” They are “mutually reinforcing” in producing vulnerability and are a direct reflection of economic, political, and social-ideological order in society. Arising from root causes, dynamic pressures are “more contemporary or immediate, conjunctural manifestations of general underlying economic, social and political patterns” (Wisner et al 2003:53). Dynamic pressures serve as a conduit between root causes and unsafe conditions, representing such forces as rapid urbanization and population change. Unsafe conditions result from root causes and dynamic pressures and exist in a specific time and place in relation to a hazard. Examples of unsafe conditions include unstable and/or dangerous livelihoods, settlements in high-hazard areas, and a weak social safety net. When unsafe conditions intersect with a natural hazard, such as a flood event, disaster occurs. Importantly, root causes, dynamic pressures, and unsafe conditions are not fixed and must be considered within spatial and historical contexts. The “release” element of this model refers to a reduction in pressure, whereas vulnerability must be reduced in order for pressure to be reduced. As Wisner and authors (2003:87) further explain:

The ‘Release’ aspect arises from the realization that to release the pressure that causes disasters, the entire chain of causation needs to be addressed right back to the root causes, and not just the proximate causes or triggers of the hazard itself or the unsafe conditions of vulnerability.

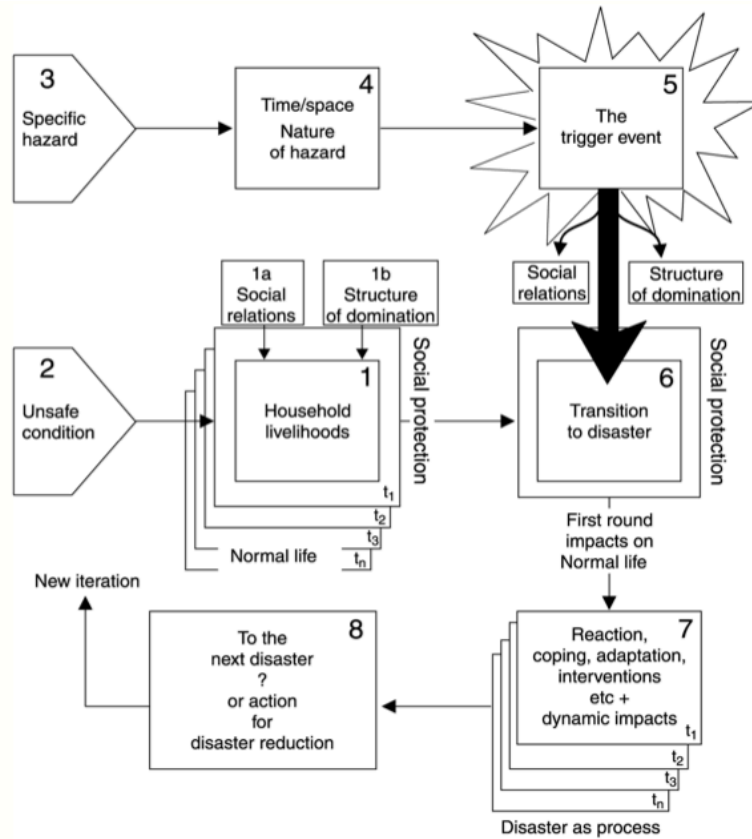
¹⁰ As a process model, PAR also helps to explain the production of disparities in environmental risks (Bolin 2007; Wisner et al. 2003).

The PAR model is meant to be evaluated in conjunction with its complementary framework, the Access Model (shown in Figure 3 on the next page). A weakness of the PAR model, as identified by its creators, is that it is a rather static model and “exaggerates the separation of the hazard from social processes in order to emphasize the social causation of disasters” (Wisner et al. 2003:91-92). The Access Model is meant to make up for this shortcoming, with an emphasis on household-level decision-making and access to tangible and intangible resources such as shelter, money, and social networks (Wisner et al. 2003). In explaining the relationship between the PAR and Access models, Wisner and colleagues use the symbol of a magnifying glass (shown in Figure 2) to visually highlight the point of their convergence. They explain that the metaphor of the magnifying glass is appropriate for illustrating the position of the Access Model within the larger PAR model, because it focuses on micro-level processes of vulnerability at the individual and household levels and describes the pressure point at which a hazard and larger social processes intersect.

The Access Model follows repeated livelihood decisions, which represent “normal life” and how household decisions are made in the presence of unsafe conditions. It then allows for the analysis of household-level decision-making during disaster response and recovery. Depending on the sustainability of livelihood options and resource accessibility, households experience differential vulnerability and outcomes to disaster—a direct reflection of their capacity to respond to the hazard event given their resources and the political and economic contexts in which they operate (Wisner et al. 2003:89). Wisner et al. (2003) account for political and economic contexts in the Access model by including ‘social relations’ and ‘structures of domination’ as two interrelated systems affecting household livelihoods and their transitions to disaster. Respectively, these refer to “the flows of goods, money and surplus between different

actors” and the relationships among people at various levels of interaction (Wisner et al. 2003:94). Wisner and his co-authors elaborate on these structures of domination by adding that such relations include those within the household, larger family and community ties, and relationships between states and individual citizens.

Figure 3. The Access Model



Structures of domination at the highest level of governance, such as between citizens and the state, often reflect and rationalize decision-making based on dominant political-economic ideologies and worldviews, which are also often the root causes of disaster vulnerability (Wisner et al. 2003:95). In summarizing the main points of the Access model, individuals and households respond and adapt to disaster within the constraints of the contexts in which they live. They draw upon resources to the extent that those resources are available and accessible both before and

during time of disaster. Households' ability to use tangible and intangible resources determines their overall vulnerability to hazards. The Access model's utility in identifying the range of factors and processes in the context of various social, political, and economic structures and systems, provides a holistic picture of households' vulnerability to hazards before and after a hazard event occurs. In speaking of the utility of the Access model, Wisner and colleagues (2003:122) contend that, "[t]he framework provides a dynamic and moving 'map' of disaster. Readers will choose which aspect they need to visit, and will bring to it the theories they need." The Access model is an especially useful analytical and organizing tool as I structure my findings from interviews with homeless participants to demonstrate their experiences with disaster (Chapter 6).

Together, the PAR and Access models, while not without critiques, are tools that allow researchers to formulate explanations of disasters at different levels of analysis and at various points in time. Although the Access model is perhaps more appropriate for quantitative analyses at the household level, it is useful for qualitative analytical purposes as it provides a framework for understanding the individual-level processes that occur within larger social structures and processes. Further, it acknowledges individual agency in the context of disaster vulnerability—something that vulnerability scholars are often criticized for in studies that treat vulnerability as static and inherent.

I use the PAR model to guide my analysis and present my research findings because of its usefulness and applicability in illustrating the processes that produce vulnerability among homeless individuals and HSOs. In so doing, I discuss how neoliberal ideology, as a root cause, produces dynamic pressures, such as an increase in camping bans and homeless criminalization

legislation along Colorado's Front Range.¹¹ These pressures subsequently create unsafe conditions that contextualize homeless individuals' and HSOs' vulnerability and capacity in responding to and recovering from disaster. By highlighting dynamic pressures that play out on the ground, I illustrate the types of unsafe conditions homeless individuals face in their day-to-day lives that then constrain their ability to respond and cope during and after disaster. I push this argument further by contending, as other scholars have, that increased privatization of social services and a rollback of the welfare state have resulted in a growing reliance on community-based organizations to fulfill "safety net" services for a growing population in need (Kneebone 2014; Kneebone and Holmes 2016; Lurie and Schuster 2015; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). At the same time, however, CBOs are increasingly strained in their ability to meet the demands of their client base, which stymies efforts toward organizational preparedness for and community resilience to disaster. These processes, in turn, lead to increased vulnerability among some of the most marginalized populations in U.S. society that heavily rely on these social services. Importantly, this research features homeless individuals' disaster experiences in a way that few studies have shown before (for exceptions, see Phillips 1996 and Settembrino 2016, 2017), and also analyzes experiences among community-based social service organizations that are called upon to participate in community resilience-building efforts.

In what follows, I explain the historical development of neoliberalism, describe definitional issues associated with the concept, and define my use of the term. Subsequently, I present findings about the effects of privatization and market-driven governance in the context of disaster. I then discuss what it means to be a neoliberal "citizen" and argue how neoliberal,

¹¹ Following a point made by Wisner and colleagues (2003:56), I use caution when explaining neoliberal ideology as a root cause giving rise to specific, single effects. Although I isolate neoliberal ideology for analytical purposes, I recognize that a number of factors influence the chain of causation from root causes to unsafe conditions.

market-driven regimes of government work to make invisible certain individuals and populations based on their levels of participation in markets. In so doing, I explore concepts of “neoliberal citizenship” and “disposability” as they relate to homelessness in the U.S. I conclude by discussing findings from disaster research and sociological studies of homelessness in the context of homeless persons’ vulnerability to disaster.

Neoliberal Ideology and Market-Driven Governance

Emergence of Neoliberal Ideology

During the Great Depression, economic scholars John Maynard Keynes and Karl Polanyi shifted thinking away from conventional thought at the time that viewed the government as having a limited role in the free market, instead contending that the government needs to have a heavier hand in regulating the economy. Steger and Roy (2010:6) observe that:

Keynes, in particular, advocated massive government spending in a time of economic crisis to create new jobs and lift consumer spending. Thus, he challenged classical liberal beliefs that the market mechanism would naturally correct itself in the event of an economic crisis and return to an equilibrium at full employment.

From the mid 1940s to mid 1970s, Keynesian ideas prospered in political thinking, influencing the development of programs such as the New Deal and Great Society under Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon B. Johnson. Such programs and policies included many initiatives that reflected interventionist, Keynesian thinking, including higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations as well as the growth of the welfare state. During this time in U.S. history, heavy emphasis was placed on the state to intervene in the market as necessary and use government funds to address poverty and stimulate the economy (e.g., via increases in government spending during times of economic crises in order to spur economic growth). Keynesian ideology guided political-economic policy in the U.S. until the 1970s when neoliberalism was revitalized in political-economic thought during a time of economic crisis.

Around the same time Keynesian ideas began to take hold in the U.S., Friedrich Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944, contended that more government control would inexorably lead to totalitarianism. Adams (2012:185) characterizes this book as:

...a “war cry” against socialist planning, endorsing the idea that private sector investments and free market solutions are more efficient and effective than government spending or planning programs. Hayek argued that centralized planning leads ultimately to impoverishment under the tyranny of authoritarian government (his example of Nazi Germany)—a type of serfdom.

According to neoliberal ideology, as perpetuated by Hayek, all aspects of life are open to the forces of the market (Adams 2012, 2013; Giroux 2006; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012; Steger and Roy 2010). After receding from political and economic discourse for decades, neoliberal ideas became prominent yet again during the 1970s when Keynesian policies that promoted increased government intermediation of the market began to lose favor in light of economic crises that plagued the U.S. and the U.K. (Somers and Block 2005; Steger and Roy 2010).¹² Following the 1980 election, the Reagan administration took the position that less government control of the market and regressive welfare reform were necessary to allow the economy to grow—since the market is self-regulating—and to enhance service provision. Policies originating from the Reagan and subsequent administrations began to call for increased privatization and devolution of social provisions, which continues to negatively affect low-income individuals (Marwell 2004; Peck and Tickell 2002; Stoesz 2015). These two phenomena, privatization and devolution, represented a shift in thinking about governance that encouraged market-based and localized decision-making for social services. Rather than the federal government maintaining responsibility for social services, devolution transferred such decision-making and responsibility to lower levels of government, such as states, counties, and

¹² These economic crises included the 1980s “oil glut,” which resulted from a sharp increase in the cost of petrol. During this time, there were also high levels of inflation and unemployment (Steger and Roy 2010).

municipalities (Marwell 2004; Peck and Tickell 2002). Important to note is that developments leading to market-driven governance and privatization did not happen suddenly or even blatantly “from any specific piece of legislation” (Marwell 2004:267); rather, this trend unfolded as a result of a series of political-economic decisions over several years.

This shift in socioeconomic policy organization occurred internationally as well as domestically. Neoliberal ideals and programs, while gaining momentum within the U.S. in the 1980s, also began to spread globally during this time through organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which later became known as the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Peck and Tickell 2002; Tierney 2015). For example, the World Bank and IMF created, and continue to create, development programs that claim to serve countries in need of economic development and reform, but have actually proven to benefit international capitalists, multinational corporations, and other state and non-state elites (Bello 1999; Downey and Strife 2010; Goldman 2005; Harrison 2004; Vreeland 2007). Neoliberal ideology, for instance, is the underpinning for claims made against government intervention in markets, which is also reflected in these organizations’ discourses as to how to “properly” develop (Bello 1999; Chang 2008). Other examples of mechanisms used through these organizations to promote neoliberal development include, but are not limited to, control over knowledge production (Bartley 2007; Domhoff 1990; Downey 2015; Goldman 2005), trade liberalization (Chang 2008; Peet 2009; UNHDR 2000), enforcement of intellectual property rights (Drahos 2003; Shiva and Holla-Bhar 1996), privatization of land and resources (Barlow 2010; Barlow and Clarke 2002; Goldman 2005; The Center for Public Integrity 2002), structural adjustment programs (Bello 1999; Downey 2015;

Goldman 2005; Harrison 2004), and IMF loan conditionalities (Chang 2008; Peet 2009; Vreeland 2007).

Even before the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s, however, networks of individuals supporting neoliberal ideals came together to strategize the spread of neoliberalism in political, educational, and economic settings (Mayer 2016). A series of conservative and neoliberal capitalist think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and the Cato Institute are all examples of the types of knowledge-producing entities that were created to proliferate neoliberal ideals and conceptions of free market fundamentalism (Mayer 2016; McCright and Dunlap 2011). Think tanks are but one example of systematic efforts to instill this ideology. Supporters of neoliberalism, such as the Koch brothers Charles and David and Richard DeVos—co-founder of Amway—have pulled, and continue to pull, their money and influence together to support academic research and politicians at all levels of governance in the U.S. who would stand as exemplars of these ideals in government settings (Mayer 2016).¹³

In situating the origins and proliferation of neoliberalism, Dean (2014:157) argues that,

[i]n this sense one might observe that, as a movement, neoliberalism was born of crisis during the 1930s and 1940s, readied itself for the crisis through which it came to prominence as a public political force at the end of the 1970s, and has flexibly mutated and adapted through each subsequent crisis.

Despite early assumptions of its demise following the Great Recession of 2008-2009, neoliberalism has yet again readapted itself to crisis (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012).

Indeed, neoliberal ideology is unlikely to retreat in the near future, especially given the current presidential administration's stances against regulations that "harm the economy" and

¹³ Importantly, as Steger and Roy (2010:10) explain, although neoliberals adhere to a core set of ideas regarding free trade and markets, "they emphasize different parts of their theory according to their particular social contexts."

government overreach in social service provision (e.g., healthcare and housing) (Lam 2017; Semuels 2017).

Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a contested term, with a number of inconsistencies in its definition and applicability as a concept (Marwell 2004; Peck 2013; Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012; Steger and Roy 2010). Discussions surrounding its definition and operationalization range from labeling it as a regime of government, an ideology, thought collective, cultural phenomenon, policy package, process, or movement (Dean 2014; Marwell 2004; Steger and Roy 2010). Because of the conceptual debates and ambiguity surrounding the term, neoliberalism is sometimes questioned as a useful concept for understanding political and economic outcomes; however, its prevalence and persistence as a set of social forces signals its ongoing influence and applicability in studying the political economy. Peck and co-authors (2012:268) explain that although there may be definitional differences among scholars, “all prevalent uses of the notion of neoliberalism involve references to the tendential extension of market-based competition and commodification processes into previously relatively insulated realms of social life.”

Studying neoliberalization means keeping in mind that although neoliberalism as an ideology possesses agreed-upon characteristics, measuring outcomes of neoliberalism and processes of neoliberalization proves to be difficult, as there is no pure or “ideal type” of neoliberalism (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012; Peck 2013). Neoliberalism takes no linear path that is easily observable (e.g., regulated to deregulated). It comes in many “strands and variations” (Steger and Roy 2010:11), and always exists in conjunction with other ideologies and forms of governance (Peck, Theodore, and Brenner 2012), making it especially difficult to prove

causality or identify any “explicit” outcomes of neoliberalization. It is not a unified ideology, regime, or end-state.

For the purposes of this research, it is important to understand *neoliberalism* as an ideology and *neoliberalization* as a process or set of processes. I follow Peck, Theodore, and Brenner’s (2012:269) conceptualization of neoliberalization, which states that, “neoliberalization represents a historically specific, unevenly developed, hybrid, patterned tendency of market-disciplinary regulatory restructuring.” Neoliberalization proliferates through the state and other institutional forms, including international finance and regulatory organizations such as the WTO and IMF (Downey 2015; Peck et al. 2012). With its emphasis on historical context and process in understanding vulnerability, the PAR model is well suited as an analytical tool to study the effects of neoliberal ideology and neoliberalization on producing hazard vulnerability. This fits nicely with Peck et al.’s (2012:271) argument that neoliberalism must be contextually understood as a process of neoliberalization “across places, territories, and scales.”

Recent work within the political-economic vein of disaster scholarship critiques neoliberalism and market-driven governance, demonstrating the ways in which these processes socially produce disasters and exacerbate negative disaster recovery outcomes (Adams 2012, 2013; David 2010; Gotham 2012; Perrow 2007; Tierney 2014). In *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith* (2013), Vincanne Adams provides an ethnographic account of households that suffered losses in Hurricane Katrina, which explores the challenges experienced by survivors during the long-term recovery process. She demonstrates the ways in which the privatization of recovery has affected and continues to negatively affect disaster survivors and presents damning evidence against “roll back-of-the-state” logic, explaining that these processes have only exacerbated preexisting inequalities and delayed recovery:

The testimonies and analyses of New Orleanians' experiences of trying to rebuild and recover offer a glimpse of the inevitable outcome of what is often called neoliberal capitalism. In New Orleans, we can see in bold relief the contours of our political and social predicament created by neoliberal policies of governing, or what Margaret Somers has more descriptively called market-driven governance (5).

She goes on to argue that market-driven governance appears in disaster settings as a way to protect interests of private industry—not to serve the needs of disaster survivors. Under neoliberal disaster recovery regimes, even emotions like compassion are commoditized. Adams (2012:210-11) describes the “affect economy” in her analysis of Hurricane Katrina recovery by which she contends that:

the process of recovery by the market has produced an emotional surfeit, an affective surplus, in which need has become a circulating resource defined by its affective registers. Affect here is not just the visceral and emotional suffering felt and worn by people... Affect here is also a fiscal potential, with its call for emotional responsiveness and inducement to action and its ability to generate new business investments and free labor for a struggling economy.

Neoliberal practices of shrinking the role of the state in social service provision have made the government essentially incapable of effectively responding to disasters and social issues without outsourcing key services to the private sector. In turn, the government's inability to address crises reproduces discourse that “big government” is unwieldy and incompetent in responding to needs that the market is better equipped to address (Adams 2013).

Government rollbacks in public expenditures for social services and the privatization of disaster response undermine individuals' and communities' efforts in building resilience and exacerbate existing inequalities (Adams 2013; David 2010; Gotham 2012; Tierney 2013, 2015; Wisner et al. 2003). As I demonstrate in the upcoming section, those who rely upon social services provided from the government are often vilified and constructed as “disposable” segments of the population because of their inability to “properly” participate in the market economy. This, in turn, contributes to their vulnerability to disaster.

“Disposability” and the Neoliberal Citizen

The growth and influence of neoliberal ideology and market-driven governance, as it appears through the privatization of social services and other government functions, has changed the way people in the U.S. are governed and the way they are viewed as citizens. At the same time we have witnessed a retrenchment of the nation’s social safety net, what it means to be a “citizen” in the U.S. has transitioned from civic-oriented citizenship to consumer citizenship (Giroux 2006, 2012)—that is available only to those who are able to participate in the economy. Those who do not fit into this model of citizenship, such as those experiencing homelessness, are viewed as “disposable” and pushed to spaces of invisibility.

Neoliberalism, as a political, economic, social, and cultural ideology and movement, justifies exclusion and criminalization of lower-income and minority groups by promoting ideals of individualism and self-reliance. People who cannot “appropriately” participate in the market economy are demonized, pathologized, and viewed as “not deserving” of social support (Giroux 2006, 2012; Reid 2013). Those experiencing homelessness are examples of the social “other” produced and perpetuated by neoliberal ideology. They are seen as “disposable,” and should therefore be eliminated from public view (Giroux 2006). “Under the logic of forces such as neoliberalism,” Giroux (2006:27) explains,

the category “waste” includes no longer simply material goods but also human beings, particularly those rendered redundant in the new global economy—that is, those who are no longer capable of making a living, who are unable to consume goods, and who depend upon others for the most basic needs. As the institutions of the welfare state along with “big government”—a code word for the social state—are deemed inefficient and wasteful by market fundamentalists and are either dismantled or phased out, those populations considered dependent and possessing no positive cultural capital or social role are increasingly viewed as an unwarranted burden to neoliberal society and left unprotected.

Under this ideology, competition is the source of social organization. Any limits on competition, such as regulatory actions, are considered infringements on freedom. Neoliberal ideology

prioritizes meritocracy as way of social organization. If an individual is unable to make ends meet, it is because she or he did not work hard enough and therefore deserve their financial predicament. Those who rely upon government assistance programs, such as food stamps, are condemned for using these services (Reid 2013). For example, Somers and Block (2005:281-82) present an excerpt from a U.S. congressperson from Florida who “described the poor as beasts outside the social order” by comparing people reliant on the welfare system to alligators. In comparing the two, this congressperson explained that people should not feed alligators, because they will then become dependent on external food sources—just as people using the welfare system will become dependent on its services. More recently, on its Facebook page, the Oklahoma Republican Party used a similar “dependence” argument to demonstrate how the welfare system is ineffective in lifting recipients out of poverty (Torp 2015):

The Food Stamp Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is proud to be distributing this year the greatest amount of free Meals [sic] and Food Stamps ever, to 46 million people. Meanwhile, the National Park Service, administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior, asks us “Please Do Not Feed the Animals.” Their stated reasons for the policy is because “The animals will grow dependent on handouts and will not learn to take care of themselves.” Thus ends today’s lesson in irony #OKGOP.

Although the social media post was met with harsh criticism from individuals both within and outside of the party, this kind of dehumanizing discourse serves to separate poor individuals and communities from “normal” society by contending that those individuals who utilize government social services will become dependent and incapable of taking care of themselves.

Homelessness and Disaster Vulnerability

Disaster researchers have increasingly emphasized the need to focus on how disasters affect vulnerable populations, but to date there have been few studies that focus on homeless persons’ experiences with disasters in a U.S. context. Important exceptions include work conducted by Sandra Fogel (2017), Brenda Phillips (1996), and Marc Settembrino (2017).

Sandra Fogel's (2017) study incorporates data from focus groups with homeless persons and service providers in two Florida counties so as to understand the needs of homeless individuals during a disaster event. She finds that many vulnerabilities homeless persons face overlap with those of travelers, migrants, and other transient groups, and concludes with a call for future research to further examine the disaster experiences of people experiencing homelessness after an event. Marc Settembrino (2017) explores the ways in which homeless men mitigate their risks to hazards through qualitative interviews with eleven homeless participants in Central Florida, finding that although operating within structural constraints, the homeless men he interviewed were able to overcome barriers by employing varying forms of social, human and cultural capital. Using the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake as a context in which to examine the experiences of homeless persons in the affected region, Brenda Phillips (1996) discusses the ways place and space are socially constructed to overlook the effects of disaster on homeless persons. She argues against logic that underemphasizes or fails to account for the consequences of disasters on homeless communities, explaining that public spaces also belong to homeless people and that losing these spaces can be detrimental for them on their paths to recovery and permanent housing.

Sociological studies of homelessness have examined the lives and day-to-day experiences of homeless persons and communities. For example, in *Sidewalk* (2001), Mitchell Duneier sought to uncover how homeless individuals in Greenwich Village, New York lived in a moral order and faced exclusion and stigmatization, as well as how their acts intersected with the city's efforts to regulate public space. Through interviews and participant observation, his ethnography illuminated the everyday experiences of homeless street vendors as well as the ways in which these vendors constructed their roles in society. Leslie Irvine's book, *My Dog Always Eats First:*

Homeless People and Their Animals (2013), examines the construction of identity among homeless dog owners, and how their statuses as dog owners create meaning and self-worth. While studies of homelessness have occurred in the broader discipline of sociology (Berk et al. 2008; Irvine, Kahl, and Smith 2012; Irvine 2013; Meanwell 2012; Rossi 1989; Snow and Anderson 1993; Snow and Mulcahy 2001), homelessness has not shared a similar weight of attention in disaster sociology.

Homeless persons' vulnerability to disaster, although seemingly apparent because of their economically marginalized position in society, must be considered as an outcome of a number of political, economic, and social processes. The retreat of the welfare state, growing income inequality in the U.S., and cultural justifications for criminalizing poverty and homelessness contribute to our contextual understanding of homelessness and disaster vulnerability. At an individual or microlevel of analysis, homeless persons typically lack tangible and intangible resources, such as financial capital, human capital, and physical resources such as shelter and transportation, which may limit them from adequately preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disaster. Rosenbeck and Fontana (1994:427) further describe factors that lead to personal vulnerability among the homeless:

Personal vulnerability to homelessness results from accumulated experiences of social isolation, trauma, psychiatric illness, and social dysfunction, with unique causal influences emerging at several discrete points in time. It is misleading to think of vulnerability to homelessness as specifically related to the failure of the mental health care system or of federal antipoverty policies, to cite two examples. Rather, like the proverbial miner's canary, homelessness is a signal that attention must be paid, far more broadly, to the diverse needs of the many vulnerable populations in our society.

Political and economic factors, such as a lack of access to resources, political marginalization, and social exclusion also contribute to the vulnerability of homeless individuals (Elvrum and Wong 2012).

Under a neoliberal governance regime, people experiencing homelessness are “othered” by being viewed as lazy, criminal, a public nuisance, or less than human (Del Casino Jr. and Jocoy 2008; Farrugia and Gerrard 2015). These labels perpetuate underlying discourses of deservingness and disposability, and arguably exacerbate disaster vulnerability. Public perceptions and opinions of homeless persons undoubtedly have an influence on the types of policies that are created to address homelessness (Elvrum and Wong 2012; Rossi 1989). The stigma associated with homelessness directly affects the willingness of community residents to support efforts to care for this population. Elvrum and Wong (2012:10) illustrate the lack of sympathy for poor communities:

The poor, particularly the homeless, are often stigmatized and blamed for their situation. In contrast to other less visible forms of poverty, the inherent condition of homelessness (i.e. being publically visible, aesthetically unappealing due to cleaning and grooming accessibility, etc.), and people’s often limited objective information about homelessness, can lead to inaccurate associations, stereotyping and generalizations.

Stigma, therefore, is a social barrier that can have devastating effects, leading to social exclusion, decreased political efficacy and mobilization, and a lack of access to services during a disaster (Elvrum and Wong 2012; Erikson 1995; Wisner 1998). Snow and Mulcahy (2001:151) describe the origins and proliferation of stigma imposed on homeless communities by situating it within the notion of the American ideal of prosperity, arguing that, “perhaps most important of all, the existence of large numbers of homeless individuals [seems] strikingly discordant with the image of the United States as the land of opportunity with a standard of living among the highest in the world.” Erikson (1995:160) further theorizes the meanings behind exclusionary discourse, explaining that “[the homeless] are a negation of the very idea of society, so the apprehension and revulsion we can scarcely help feeling at the sight of such degradation are a fear of disorder, of infection, of contamination.”

Legislation that criminalizes homelessness has limited the ability of homeless individuals to access consistent shelter and make money via panhandling, to name but a few examples. These “citywide behavioral bans,” as Spurr (2014) describes, “prohibit sleeping in public, begging in public, loitering, sitting, or lying down in public spaces, food sharing, and sleeping in vehicles, among other behaviors.” Locally, the City of Boulder, a site for this study, has received criticism for its exclusionary bans toward the homeless community (LaGarde and Warren 2016; Meltzer 2016a). Recently, an article from the *Daily Camera*, a local news organization, noted that the City of Boulder stands out within Colorado in its increased efforts to criminalize public sleep (Meltzer 2016a). A combination of factors such as the ones previously mentioned combine to create a debilitating environment for homeless persons. Not only are these individuals in a vulnerable position because of a lack of permanent shelter, but their challenges are also “magnified because of a combination of many issues that interact with one another” (Elvrum and Wong 2012:37).

Presently, solutions to homelessness reflect neoliberal, market-driven approaches that place increased responsibility on the market and CBOs, limiting the role of the government in addressing poverty and homelessness (Farrugia and Gerrard 2015). At the same time, due to factors such as decreased federal support for low-income programs, growing inequality and elevated rates of poverty, CBOs are inhibited in their ability to address a growing population in need (Poppendieck 2000; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). Because of CBOs’ role as caregivers for underserved segments of the population, they have been called upon to be active participants in building community resilience (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2017). However, as Tierney (2015:1336) argues in her critique of the concept of resilience as a product of neoliberal thought,

While intuitively an appropriate way to approach the challenge of increasing community resilience, emphasizing the responsibility of all community sectors is also a way of deemphasizing the state's responsibility to ensure the health and safety of community residents and to protect property.

I untangle the implications of reliance on resource-scarce CBOs to serve as pillars of resilience in Chapter 5, where I present findings from interviews with HSO staff.

Chapter Summary and Discussion

Trends originating from neoliberal ideology that prioritizes market-driven governance and social organization have produced negative effects for individuals living in or on the brink of homelessness. Dynamic pressures such as laws and ordinances that attempt to eradicate “undesirable” groups from communities push these populations even further to the margins into areas that are more dangerous and away from critical resource hubs. Simultaneously, CBOs are operating within a political-economic context that increases their responsibility for underserved segments of the population—while also operating on limited resources. The unsafe conditions produced by these processes, when coupled with a hazard event, present unique challenges for homeless communities and HSOs. I describe the implications of these processes during the 2013 Boulder Floods by highlighting findings from interviews with public officials, community stakeholders, HSO staff, and members of the homeless community in upcoming chapters.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

In this dissertation, I draw on qualitative data from in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, participant observation, and documentary sources collected between October 2013 and November 2016. In the upcoming sections, I discuss the use of qualitative methods in disaster research and outline definitional and methodological considerations for conducting research in homeless communities. I then describe my study design, data collection methods, ethical considerations, and insights gleaned through my fieldwork within a homeless community. I conclude by describing my data analysis process.

Qualitative Disaster Research

Early disaster research viewed disasters as abnormal and discrete events occurring outside of the social order (Hewitt 1983; Tierney 2007). The field has since developed its conception of disasters as being socially produced and inherent within the social order, leading scholars to disentangle the preexisting social processes and conditions that produce them (Mileti 1999; Perrow 2007; Tierney 2014; Wisner et al. 2003). Qualitative disaster research, in its ability to identify underlying social processes that create disasters, results in findings that are also applicable outside disaster contexts (Fothergill and Peek 2004; Phillips 2014; Tierney 2007). Following this qualitative tradition, I highlight processes of neoliberalization and cultural definitions of “deservingness,” originating from neoliberal ideology, which increase social vulnerability for homeless persons and HSOs. I designed my study using qualitative methodological inquiry due the ability of qualitative methods to uncover such processes and to gain an in-depth understanding of the context in which homeless persons and HSOs operate. I briefly note below the unique considerations that qualitative disaster researchers must take into

account in constructing their study designs. I subsequently provide additional justification for my use of qualitative methods.

Sociologists studying disaster have long employed qualitative methodologies to uncover social structures and practices that produce uneven social outcomes during and after disaster. Such methods are useful in identifying the needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities within communities, because of the ability of qualitative approaches to uncover details, understand contexts, and capture nuance that would be difficult to uncover using quantitative approaches (Enarson 2007; Fothergill and Peek 2004; Morrow 1999; Phillips 2014; Reid 2013). Uses of these methods have resulted in conceptual and theoretical developments that are useful not only to the field of disaster research, but also to the larger sociological discipline (Erikson 1976; Klinenberg 2002; Kroll-Smith and Couch 1990; Tierney 2007). While disaster researchers employ similar methods used in other qualitative sociological studies, there are additional considerations disaster researchers must acknowledge and incorporate into their study designs to ensure that they are entering the field and recruiting participants in an ethical manner (Browne and Peek 2014; Phillips 2014). For example, timing of field entry following a disaster is critical and is largely dependent on the nature of the research question(s) formulated. Those wanting to understand long-term community recovery processes following a disaster event may not need to enter the field as quickly as those attempting to uncover response and short-term recovery processes. However, many scholars contend that researchers entering the field following a disaster should be cognizant of ongoing activities and constraints that may limit participation, and/or cause harm to, potential participants (Browne and Peek 2014; Phillips 2014; Stallings 2002). In fact, some scholars urge researchers to wait to engage in in-depth inquiry until they have first spent time during the response period in a respectful and unobtrusive manner by

gathering perishable data and making initial contacts, which is the approach I followed before entering the field (Phillips 2014; Stallings 2002).

A qualitative methodological approach enabled me to gain deeper insights into the factors that contribute to homeless individuals' and HSOs' disaster experiences. Especially as related to homeless persons, qualitative methods were essential in capturing the lived experiences of homeless flood survivors, including their vulnerability and agency in responding to the event. Qualitative methods are well suited for understanding the role of agency in determining disaster outcomes and constraints within political-economic contexts and larger social processes that push such populations further to the margins.

Social Science Research in Homeless Communities

Measuring and Defining Homelessness in Social Science Research

Researchers frequently discuss the issues associated with measuring and defining homelessness (Berk et al. 2008; Erikson 1995; Irvine 2013; Rossi 1989; Veness 1993). Definitions of homelessness vary, and keeping an accurate count of homeless individuals is virtually impossible. Kai Erikson (1995:162) elaborates on these methodological concerns, stating “[e]stimates of [the homeless population] size vary from several hundred thousand to several million, depending on the definitions and methods that guide the count and sometimes on the ideological moods that impel it.” Because of the shifting and indefinable nature of the population, it is difficult to achieve an accurate count (Berk, Kriegler, and Ylvisaker 2008; Erikson 1995; Rossi 1989). In order to study this elusive population, researchers have employed a variety of techniques to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. Point-in-time surveys, statistical imputation, observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling are examples of strategies that researchers have used to study

homeless populations (Berk, Kriegler, and Ylvisaker 2008; Donaldson et al. 2009; Elvrum and Wong 2012; Irvine 2013; Metro Denver Homeless Initiative 2013; Rossi 1989; Veness 1993).

Relying on shelter or secondary data is problematic for a number of reasons. Researchers who rely on obtaining data from “conventional dwellings” such as shelters and transitional housing programs leave out those who find residence in unconventional locations such as tents, campsites, and under highway overpasses (Rossi 1989). Furthermore, secondary data that track homeless individuals are not reliable due to the fact that counts of unhoused persons are dependent on data-gathering methods that may not be able to provide a full representation of the population. Relying on shelter intake information or point-in-time surveys, for example, leaves out a substantial portion of the population who do not utilize HSO services or may not be physically present on the night in which a point-in-time survey is conducted. Because of the unique methodological issues associated with measuring the homeless population, statistics provide a “partial picture” of homelessness:

The homeless population at any given point in time includes only some fraction of all the people who are ever homeless. This means there are a variety of interpretations of the question of how many homeless there are (and correspondingly many answers) (Rossi 1989:51).

The range of definitions used to define who is considered homeless further affects national estimates of homelessness in the U.S. For example, a 2016 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Report estimated over 500,000 people as homeless in the U.S. on a single night in January 2016 (U.S. HUD 2016). However, other entities, such as the National Law Center on Poverty, maintain that the homeless population in the U.S. is actually between 2.5 and 3.5 million (Lurie and Schuster 2015). Much of these inconsistencies are derived in large part from how organizations and federal agencies define homelessness differently (National

Health Care for the Homeless Council 2017). Definitional variance also affects terms of eligibility for people seeking social services at state and local levels.

How we define homelessness also has significant political implications. Inclusive definitions may gloss over the differences among individuals at different levels of poverty and the types of dwellings in which they reside, resulting in rather “fuzzy boundaries” around who is considered homeless (Rossi 1989:47). On the other hand, narrow definitions limit how we understand homelessness because such definitions can leave out groups or individuals who do not necessarily fit into a neatly defined category. Many scholars studying homelessness discuss how the types of definitions and terminologies used to describe homelessness can influence how the public perceives this population as well as policies that affect homeless persons (Berk, Kriegler, and Ylvisaker 2008; Elvrum and Wong 2012; Rossi 1989).

Because there is not a generally agreed upon definition of homelessness, credible data are lacking and the data that exist are not comparable. David Snow, Leon Anderson, and Paul Koegal (1994) note their concerns with sociological research on homelessness, claiming that because the field has been preoccupied with survey research, much of what we know about homelessness includes demographic information as well as rates of physical and mental disability within homeless communities. They explain that such methods have resulted in inaccurate generalizations about the prevalence of mental health issues within homeless populations because these studies typically rely on a cross-sectional approach from structured interviews/questionnaires:

The point, of course, is that research based on single encounters, which is characteristic of nearly all survey questionnaire-based research on the homeless, runs the risk of premature generalizations and diagnosis by treating a strip of behavior or communication as indicative of a pattern (Snow, Anderson, and Koegal 1994:463-64).

In her book, *My Dog Always Eats First: Homeless People and Their Pets* (2013), Leslie Irvine echoes many of these concerns with defining homelessness, finding that while some entities define homelessness as living in places not conducive to human habitation, such as vehicles and spaces under freeways, many of her interviewees saw these places as “home” (2013:34). Such qualitative accounts complicate definitions of what constitutes homelessness and reflect the need for qualitative inquiry to understand the ways in which unhoused persons construct their livelihoods and identities.

Based on the above discussion, qualitative approaches are appropriate for this study because of their usefulness in uncovering social processes and understanding lived experiences in ways that would be difficult to capture using more traditional, quantitative approaches. In their study of how people experiencing homelessness view social service providers, Lisa Hoffman and Brian Coffey (2008:219) add that:

Accountability measurements and statistical outcomes offer information about numbers served, but they do not contribute data on the quality of that experience. Thus, qualitative research, specifically examining individual experiences and the stories people tell about their lives, are important tools in the study of policies addressing homelessness.

Additionally, due to the lack of research on homeless persons’ experiences with disaster, qualitative methods are useful in gaining an in-depth understanding of homeless individuals’ disaster experiences in ways that would be difficult to capture using other techniques such as write-in and online surveys or closed-ended questionnaires.

Study Design

Predisaster homelessness, as mentioned in previous chapters, is an under-examined topic in disaster sociology. Because of a lack of knowledge in this area, I employed qualitative methods to obtain in-depth information on homeless persons’ and HSOs’ experiences during the floods, as

well as to gain a deeper understanding of the contexts in which they operate both during and outside times of disaster. I used the following overarching research questions to guide this study:

1. What were the flood experiences of homeless persons and HSOs in Boulder County during the 2013 floods? How, if at all, were these experiences influenced by the marginalized social status of homeless persons?
2. What factors contribute to homeless individuals' and HSOs' vulnerability to and capacity in responding to disaster?
3. What are homeless persons' perceptions of the treatment they received from the larger Boulder community before, during, and after the floods?
4. How does the broader community context inform and influence the disaster experiences among homeless individuals?
5. How do homeless individuals and HSOs in this study conceptualize *disaster*?
6. To what extent can our understandings of homeless persons' and HSOs' experiences contribute to our knowledge of the effects of neoliberalization before and during disaster?

To answer these research questions, I draw on data from in-depth interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and documentary analysis. The study design includes a variety of qualitative methods: 1) unstructured interviews and 2) focus group interviews with predisaster homeless flood survivors; 3) semi-structured interviews with HSO staff, public officials, and other community stakeholders that work in some capacity with the homeless community and/or in flood response/recovery; 4) participant observation; and 5) documentary analysis of media articles, pamphlets, websites, and HSO annual reports.¹⁴

Sampling

As explained in the introductory chapter, I selected Boulder County as my study area due to the severity of the flooding, the prevalence of homelessness, and the number of HSOs present in the area. Because there are more HSOs in the City of Boulder and Longmont, many interviewees come from these cities—with a majority located in the City of Boulder. However,

¹⁴ The Institutional Review Board at the University of Colorado at Boulder approved this study. All participants were made fully aware that participation in this study was voluntary and that they would not receive compensation for participation. IRB Protocol #13-0572.

in an attempt to develop a countywide and regional understanding of homeless flood survivors' and HSOs' experiences during the floods, I reached out to stakeholders and organizations in other communities, such as Nederland, Lyons, Louisville and Lafayette.¹⁵ This allowed for variance in context by city in terms of community setting, severity of the flooding in each region, and the types of services offered to homeless persons.

Prior to contacting potential interviewees, I conducted an extensive web search of articles pertaining to the 2013 floods, including flood stories of predisaster homeless survivors, and a web search for Boulder City and County organizations that served the homeless community either as a central or peripheral part of their mission. From these searches, I compiled a list of names and organizations with contact information into an Excel sheet. Some organizations, for example, worked with low-income families as well as adult homeless individuals where others primarily worked with families on the brink of homelessness. After collecting names and contact information for potential stakeholders, I then contacted individuals at a number of HSOs within the county to arrange informal meetings. These meetings occurred in October and November 2013 and allowed me to identify potential interviewees within the organizations, to receive referrals for potential participants, and to gain insights into the homeless population in Boulder County.¹⁶ Through these meetings, I was able to discuss what approaches would be most appropriate for recruiting HSO staff, public officials, and homeless individuals for my study. It was also during this time I was able to form valuable relationships with facilitators who helped to introduce me to other informants and interviewees in the homeless and service provision communities.

¹⁵ Despite attempts to contact individuals at HSOs in Lafayette and Louisville, I was unable to recruit participants from these areas.

¹⁶ Many of these informal meetings led to formal interviews, given their availability and/or appropriateness for inclusion in the study.

Similar to other qualitative researchers who study homeless communities, I found these initial connections essential in making contact with homeless interviewees (Irvine 2013). Not only did staff provide a comfortable and familiar conduit for arranging initial meetings with homeless flood survivors, but they also helped to minimize suspicion and concern among homeless community members, as they were able to explain and endorse my study. I learned quickly from initial meetings with HSO staff that undergraduate and graduate student research endeavors on homelessness at the University of Colorado Boulder were not uncommon, and members of the homeless community often felt taken advantage of or that they were portrayed in a negative light once stories were written and/or research was conducted.

I decided to first contact staff for interviews in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of internal organizational dynamics, inter-organizational relationships, HSO flood experiences, and information about the Boulder homeless community, including the community's demographic composition and understandings of their flood experiences from staff perspectives. Throughout the course of the study, I interviewed staff, public officials, and community stakeholders to obtain insights into the regional, countywide, and citywide contexts as they pertain to homelessness and disaster planning for homeless and low-income populations. In so doing, I utilized purposive and snowball sampling approaches to contact these interviewees—either through recommendations or via an online search (Berg 2004; Phillips 2014). In cases where someone referred me to a potential participant, I contacted them via phone or email as guided. In all, I was able to interview twenty-eight individuals in these subsamples, which included seventeen HSO staff and eleven public officials and community stakeholders. (See Table 2 for a breakdown of subject populations, methods used, and number of interviewees.) “Public officials and community stakeholders” include individuals who work as an elected official, a government

worker, police officer, or as an informal community leader. Interviews with HSO staff, public officials, and community stakeholders were conducted at locations that were convenient for participants, including their respective work locations or local coffee shops.

Table 2. Subject Populations, Methods, and Number of Interviews

Subject Populations	Methods	Number of Interviewees
Homeless Flood Survivors	Unstructured one-on-one interviews	18
Homeless Flood Survivors	Unstructured focus groups	10
Homeless Service Providers	Semi-structured interviews	17
Public Officials and Community Stakeholders in Boulder County	Semi-structured interviews	11
	Total:¹⁷	55

I initially was able to recruit homeless participants for my study through recommendations and verbal announcements from staff members at three HSOs that serve the adult, single homeless population.¹⁸ From that point, snowball sampling proved useful for acquiring additional interviews from homeless participants. However, I continued to receive recommendations and introductions from HSOs throughout the study. Based on guidance from HSO staff, I also decided to include a research announcement in the form of a flyer to distribute at HSOs, which included information about myself, the study, and the types of questions I would be asking in interviews.¹⁹ Other than providing members of the homeless community a sense of familiarity with me, a majority of homeless flood survivors that I met with did not indicate that

¹⁷ The total number of participants is fifty-five, as one homeless interviewee participated in both an unstructured one-on-one and focus group interview.

¹⁸ Because this study focuses on the experiences of homeless adults, a noted limitation of the sample composition of homeless interviewees is that it is not representative of perspectives from other groups within the homeless community, including immigrants, homeless youth, and families.

¹⁹ I received permission from two HSOs in the City of Boulder to post flyers at their respective locations. I also emailed the flyer to other organizations within Boulder County for their consideration. One organization included the language in a monthly newsletter, but I did not receive responses from others to post flyers.

their participation was based on these flyers. Rather, it was largely a matter of their availability and the convenience of meeting with me on the spot at respective HSO locations. Notably, I recruited roughly half of the homeless participants in my sample through convenience sampling once I received approval through HSOs to arrange meeting spaces for one-on-one interviews at five HSO locations during multiple points in time from January to April 2014. For all but one of the participants, interviews took place at locations where HSOs operate. I discuss recruitment of interviewees in more detail in the upcoming sections.

In an effort to compare experiences among homeless flood survivors, I noted differences in their livelihoods, familiarity with Colorado and the Front Range, choice of residence/shelter, and length of homelessness. Although not all of my participants expanded upon their history with homelessness, as this was not explicitly asked, I was able to gather information from their life stories to sort them into loosely defined typologies. Following categories created by scholars David Snow and Leon Anderson (1993) and Leslie Irvine (2013), I classified my study participants as either 1) recently dislocated; 2) straddlers; 3) campers; 4) travelers; and 5) housed/stably living.

The sample of homeless interviewees that participated in either one-on-one or focus group interviews lacked diversity along the lines of race and ethnicity. However, the sample closely reflected the reported demographics of the larger Boulder homeless community. For example, according to annual reports and information given by HSO staff, their clients, on average, are approximately 65-75 percent male and a stark majority are Caucasian (80-90%). Of the homeless participants in the sample, twelve identified as female and fifteen as male (one male participant agreed to a one-on-one interview following his participation in a focus group). They ranged in age from eighteen to over sixty-five years of age, and all but two participants

(one African American and one Native American) were Caucasian. Self-reported length of homelessness from interviewees also varied from five months (prior to the floods) to decades in and out of homelessness.

Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews with homeless flood survivors provided a space for participants to share their flood experiences and facilitated an open dialogue that enabled them to share their stories without constraining them to a strict interview guide (Corbin and Morse 2003; Fontana and Frey 1994). In an effort to not reproduce the marginalization of their voices, I found it essential to create an interview setting that was both conversational and guided by the participant, especially given the fact that their perspectives and stories often go unnoticed by the general public. During these interviews, I used a skeletal guide with a limited set of questions to move the interview in a general direction (see Appendix B); however, the participants primarily led the interviews as I actively listened. In their study of homelessness in Tokyo, Elvrum and Wong (2012:27) utilized unstructured interviews with stakeholders arguing that, “this is an appropriate method to uncover opinions, experiences, stories, and realities because the respondents [are] not restricted and might give more unexpected responses.” I relied upon such logic in constructing my interview guide, which includes general questions and prompts about participants’ daily routines before the flood, their flood experiences, and their recovery. I also ask them about their access to resources and how, if at all, the assistance provided could have been improved.

Interviews with homeless flood survivors took place at six locations, including day warming centers at two HSOs, two resource centers (one in the City of Boulder and one in Longmont), one emergency shelter, and a local coffee shop. A bulk of these interviews were

conducted between January and April 2014, which overlapped with the emergency shelter season. This enabled me to access people who may have remained in the area following the floods and into the subsequent emergency shelter season. Although I interviewed homeless flood survivors throughout the rest of 2014 and intermittently thereafter, many of the interviews with members of the homeless community were obtained during these initial months to capture stories from people who may have later left the area. My attempts to interview individuals the following emergency shelter season, beginning October 2014, proved somewhat fruitless, as many new individuals using the shelters were not present during the floods. Some of the perspectives not represented in this sample include those individuals who left the area following the floods. When I inquired with members of the homeless community and staff about individuals who had moved away, I was unable to identify any commonalities for reasons why these people left. However, I can safely assume that—given the frequency of travelers entering and leaving the area during the warmer months—many who left may have planned on moving through to another location even before the floods occurred.

The one interview taken outside of an organizational context took place outdoors near the Boulder Public Library. This interview was important because it involved a homeless individual who did not utilize services through one of the main HSOs. Specifically, I was interested in how the decision not to use or inability to access these services played out in a disaster context for homeless persons and how, if at all, their experiences varied from those using such services. In order to reach additional individuals who did not routinely use the services offered by homeless organizations in Boulder, I attempted to conduct a convenience sample of homeless individuals during warmer months of the year (May-September 2014) following the floods by immersing myself in public areas where they regularly gather. Rossi (1989:51) explains the importance of

identifying areas that homeless persons frequent, stating that, “..optimal sampling [of homeless individuals] requires some prior knowledge of spatial distribution.” To locate individuals for this sample, I went to areas where homeless persons typically congregate, which I identified via my personal experience and through HSO staff. These locations included the Pearl Street Mall (particularly the area near the Courthouse), the Boulder Public Library, paths near Boulder Creek, and parks in town. Important to note is that I was unable to access many individuals not using HSO services of some kind, at some point in time. However, interviewees varied in the types of resources they acquired from organizations and how often they visited HSOs. For example, some interviewees gathered toiletries and food from organizations on a monthly basis, promptly returning to their campsites, while others relied on HSO services on a daily basis. Most of those I reached who do not use services identified as travelers and were not present during the 2013 floods. I attempted to gain entrée with such individuals present during the floods in Longmont via a trusted community gatekeeper, but was unsuccessful.²⁰

After summarizing the information included in the informed consent form, I acquired verbal consent from homeless interviewees before the start of each interview. All participants received a copy of the informed consent with my contact information, my adviser’s contact information, and instructions for contacting the Institutional Review Board (IRB). At the start of each interview, I reminded participants that participation in the study was voluntary, that they could choose to skip questions or stop the interview at any time, and I asked if they had any questions about the study. In all, I conducted unstructured one-on-one interviews with eighteen

²⁰ In considering participant comfort by being as non-invasive as possible and keeping my personal safety in mind, I only attempted to access these individuals in public settings, as opposed to more remote or hidden settings, such as campsites and highway underpasses outside of busy areas. I recognize that this may have hindered my ability to obtain more perspectives of those not using HSO services and that this is a limitation of this study.

individuals who are homeless or were homeless/unstably housed during the floods. Of these eighteen participants, five are female and the remaining thirteen are male. The length of time for these interviews ranged from ten minutes to an hour and forty minutes, with the average interview time being roughly thirty-six minutes. With the approval from interviewees, most interviews were recorded, but I was unable to record three interviews due to sound pollution that limited the usefulness of the recorders. While I took extensive notes during these three interviews, I hand wrote notes from all of my interviews and subsequently typed and saved them into Word documents.

Unstructured Focus Group Interviews

I incorporated focus group interviews as an additional qualitative method for capturing homeless individuals' experiences during and after the 2013 Boulder floods. Although this was not included in my original research design, I decided to employ focus groups because of input I received from HSO staff and homeless interviewees. They suggested it would perhaps be a more comfortable setting for homeless flood survivors to speak among familiar faces in familiar settings, rather than one-on-one with someone who is less or not at all familiar. Further, in my decision to use focus groups, I drew upon previous research that noted the usefulness of the method in obtaining data from stigmatized and hard-to-reach populations, and how, in certain settings, it may create a more comfortable environment for individuals to talk freely among friends, acquaintances, or individuals with similar living situations and socioeconomic statuses (Berg 2004; Peek and Fothergill 2009; Phillips 2014). Focus group interviews also alleviate some concerns regarding interviewer/interviewee power dynamics, as they can place the interviewees on "even footing with each other and the investigator" (Berg 2004:127).

Focus groups provide an informal space for interviewees to freely speak and bounce ideas off one another, creating a “synergistic group effect” which allows a collective brainstorming session that generates different, or a larger number of, issues or experiences (Berg 2004). This characteristic of focus groups could make the data much richer or provide different information than what an individual interview alone may be able to provide (Berg and Lune 2011; Morgan 1988). Following David Morgan's (1988:15) argument, “[a]t present, the two principal means of collecting qualitative data in the social sciences are individual interviews and participant observation in groups. As group interviews, focus groups combine elements of both of these better-known approaches.” Focus groups are highly flexible, allow for observation of group dynamics in a particular setting, are appropriate for use with transient populations, and have the potential to yield a substantial amount of data in a short time period (Berg 2004; Berg and Lune 2011; Morgan 1988). Morgan (1988:24) contends that focus group interviews can also serve “as follow-up research to clarify findings in the other data.” This makes them an important component of the research methodology of this study, providing a deeper understanding of homeless participants’ experiences during the floods and in triangulating findings from one-on-one interviews.

I was able to conduct two focus groups with ten homeless participants at two HSOs roughly a year after the floods occurred (August and September 2013). The first group comprised four individuals, two men and two women, and lasted for about an hour. The second focus group interview had six participants and was comprised entirely of women, lasting an hour and a half. Because the unstructured interviews (both group and one-on-one) were rather ad hoc, I was never quite certain beforehand how many participants would be present. Following guidance from qualitative scholars, I organized the focus groups at familiar locations for

interviewees. The first focus group occurred right after lunch was served at a day shelter and the other at an organization that hosts weekly group meetings which serve as therapeutic, spiritual sessions for women in the homeless community. It is important to note that I did not limit participation by individuals who had previously participated in one-on-one interviews.

I recruited participants for the first focus group via assistance from case managers at an HSO that spread the word to clients about my study, who then informed them about the date/time of the interview, which took place during a time block regularly scheduled for a weekly group support session. Following the same consent process as one-on-one interviews, I stressed efforts to uphold participant confidentiality and explained that, because of the nature of focus group interviews, I could not guarantee that discussions would be kept private. All participants were informed of this before the start of the focus group interviews. I brought beverages, such as soda and lemonade, for potential participants as well as for any other individuals who were utilizing the space at that time. For the first focus group, two people had planned to attend while the other two were encouraged by one of my homeless informants immediately before the start of the interview. Because the second focus group interview took place at an already designated meeting time/space, I recruited participants through the help of one of the meeting's organizers who requested participants' permission for me to attend their weekly meeting two weeks prior. While conducting focus groups, I played a limited moderator role—similar to an unstructured interview approach. I guided the focus group along main themes, but did not constrain discussion with a strict set of questions. The same general questions/prompts from the unstructured one-on-one interview guide were used in these focus group interviews (see Appendix C). The themes I outlined for discussion included questions about interviewees' initial thoughts and decisions when they heard about the flooding, what actions they took, as well as the extent to which they

had recovered from the floods. I received approval from all participants in each focus group to record our meetings, but I also took hand-written notes that I typed into a Word document as a digital record.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Staff from Homeless-Serving Organizations

I conducted semi-structured interviews with HSO staff members from January 2014 to November 2016. The interview sample includes seventeen individuals from six HSOs, one church-led initiative that works with homeless women, and one mental health organization. I discuss the characteristics of these organizations in detail in Chapter 6. The responsibilities of these individuals ranged from executive-level and administrative staff to staff that work directly with clients in a volunteer, part-time, or full-time capacity in their respective organizations. I organized questions in the semi-structured guide around four main areas of inquiry: 1) the resources, activities, services provided, and number of employees within the organization; 2) flood experiences of the organization; 3) disaster and emergency planning; and 4) the flood experiences of their homeless clients during and after the floods (see Appendix D).²¹ While the semi-structured interview guides were more structured than those used with homeless flood survivors, they still allowed for flexibility in adapting questions and/or requesting additional information as needed.

The length of the interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour and a half, with the average interview time being roughly fifty-seven minutes. I recruited participants for semi-structured interviews primarily through direct contact—both through email or face-to-face

²¹ This semi-structured guide was loosely based on the interview guide constructed from a study conducted for the Fritz Institute titled “Disaster Preparedness Among Community-Based Organizations in the City and County of San Francisco” (Ritchie and Tierney 2008).

interactions and through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. For example, after I contacted or met with staff, some offered recommendations for future potential interviewees both within and outside their organizations. I audio recorded all but two interviews; one participant was not comfortable being recorded and the other interview took place in a loud setting.²²

Public Officials and Community Stakeholders

As part of the study design, I included interviews with public officials and community stakeholders to gain a city- and countywide understanding of homelessness and disaster planning as it pertains to extremely low-income and homeless individuals in the region. I began by contacting people at relevant departments at city and county levels, such as Housing and Human Services, Emergency Management, the Sheriff's department, and a city police department. The interview guide used with public officials and community stakeholders reflected the guide used with HSO staff, with minor changes in wording as appropriate (see Appendix E). In total, I completed eleven interviews with individuals from these entities. They ranged in length from thirty-two minutes to an hour and ten minutes, with an average length of fifty-three minutes. All but one interview was audio-recorded due to the setting in which the interview took place. I discuss these interviews and findings derived from the data in more detail in the upcoming chapter.

Participant Observation

I incorporated participant observation as an additional qualitative method to gather a more in-depth understanding of the contexts in which many members of the Boulder homeless

²² Before each interview with HSO staff, public officials, and community stakeholders, I obtained written and verbal informed consent and provided them with a copy of the informed consent form, which included my contact information, my adviser's contact information, and ways they could connect with the University's IRB. During this time, I explained how the study was voluntary and that they could skip questions and/or remove themselves from the study at any time.

community operate. In order to comprehend the “feel and constraints” of study contexts, it is necessary to observe how individuals construct meanings and interact in their natural settings (Emerson 2001). “When you are involved with participant observation,” as Bruce Berg (2004:129) maintains, “you are able to observe the naturally unfolding worlds of the population under study. This includes those times when several parties in the field come together to spontaneously hold a conversation, discussion, or argument.”

From October 2013 to July 2016, I engaged in over 100 hours of participant observation at three HSOs and participated in a number of community events pertaining to the floods and homelessness in the area. I conducted participant observation at HSOs as an active member by serving in a volunteer capacity, where I primarily served meals, distributed over-the-counter hygiene and medical products, and assisted in shelter intake processes. As an active member, I took on both an observational and functional role as a volunteer at these organizations (Adler and Adler 1987). Importantly, because of ethical concerns, I did not conceal my identity as a researcher in these settings. I informed HSO staff that by participating as a volunteer, I also wanted to learn about their respective organizations and the Boulder homeless community for the purposes of my research. Unless I was able to discreetly take notes during my participant observation activities, I immediately took notes after each volunteer shift and community event. I then transcribed and uploaded them into a Microsoft Excel file, where I used the following categories to organize the data: location, date, time frame, volunteer duty, and notes.

Participant observation at HSOs enabled me to familiarize myself with the settings in which many homeless persons operate on a daily basis. My duties at each of these organizations varied based upon need, but in each of these positions, I was able to engage in conversation with clients at a basic level and observe their interactions with one another. Further, participant

observation helped me to gain entrée into the community, as I was able to build rapport with clients, volunteers, and staff members who helped identify potential participants for the study.

Documentary Sources

In addition to the above methods, I gathered roughly 100 documents, which included annual reports, media articles, pamphlets, and flyers received from community events for analysis. Immediately after the floods, I began archiving media articles as they pertained to the floods and the homeless community in Boulder County. I retrieved additional documentary sources through my participant observation activities at local events and HSOs. All materials were labeled and archived for content analysis. These documents helped to contextualize and in some cases triangulate findings from in-depth interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research on an economically and socially disenfranchised group such as a homeless community entails unique ethical considerations that must be acknowledged prior to, during, and after conducting research. I am cognizant of the researcher-participant power dynamics present in this kind of research—especially those relationships that involve vulnerable, marginalized, and underserved groups (Berg 2004; Browne and Peek 2014). However, because these power dynamics are not necessarily resolved in IRB protocol processes, researchers must critically examine their influence on participants' comfort and distress as they relate to the research topic and setting. As included in my IRB protocol, I made every effort to make sure that all participants were aware of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, as well as possible consequences of participation. Extending beyond the requirements of the research protocol, I took additional measures to ensure the safety and comfort of participants. I entered the field cautiously and respectfully—first by speaking informally with organizational

staff at HSOs and then by volunteering at local organizations for months before reaching out to homeless participants. This allowed me to build trust and familiarity with members of the homeless community, which I have tried to maintain via continual volunteer time at multiple HSOs in Boulder. Additionally, I requested verbal consent for participation, which is especially important considering that many homeless individuals whom I met were uncomfortable signing forms. The importance of these measures—both in the recruitment of participants and ensuring their comfort—cannot be understated.

To further ensure comfort and confidentiality, I did not require that homeless participants provide written consent or give me their legal names, as many homeless individuals are wary of giving out personal information. Importantly, and in addition to my request for their participation in my study, I left participants and non-participants with a hard copy of the study description, my contact information, and a resource list of available mental health and social services. In acknowledging the privileged access I was granted into the homeless community, I was especially sensitive to ensuring that all transcribed interviews and notes were minimally edited only to increase clarity. The use of unstructured interviews also enabled homeless participants to share their stories without the constraints of strict interview guides that may limit participants' ability to express themselves fully about their experiences. Finally, I upheld participant confidentiality to the fullest extent possible via data aggregation and the use of pseudonyms for participants and organizations.

Fieldwork Reflections: Conducting Research in a Homeless Community

I developed valuable insights from my field research with the homeless community in Boulder County, which have shaped the way I approach qualitative fieldwork both within and outside of research contexts with underserved and hard-to-reach communities. These insights,

which relate to gaining entrée, scheduling and conducting interviews, and researcher positionality, are discussed below.

Gaining Entrée

As I have mentioned previously, gatekeepers and facilitators provided an invaluable connection to members of the homeless community I would otherwise have not had the opportunity to meet. Maintaining communication with these individuals, some of whom were homeless themselves, was rather difficult at times. However, my presence at HSOs serving in a volunteer capacity aided my research in that I was able to remain accessible for months and even years following the start of the study. This resulted in a degree of familiarity and trust that may have been impossible to gain had I not volunteered. The length of time I spent serving food and handing out supplies, for instance, enabled me to connect with people in a genuine way by which I was not “just another researcher or journalist” who quickly entered and left the community.

Many scholars stress the importance of gatekeepers and facilitators in accessing potential interviewees (Berg 2004; Irvine 2013; Phillips 2014). This is especially critical in contexts where it may be difficult to identify and recruit participants for the study, such as homeless, criminal, and youth populations. I cannot state enough the importance of these initial contacts in helping me to gain entrée to the homeless community. Importantly, while understanding that not all gatekeepers or facilitators have access to (or may not be well-liked by) various subpopulations within the homeless community, I tried to develop connections with a range of informants (Berg 2004). Key facilitators for the homeless community in this study included two men who were unhoused during the floods, but who later acquired stable housing, and one previously homeless man who oversaw one of the emergency shelter programs. They were invaluable for my ability

to access members of the Boulder homeless community due to the degree of trust many people placed in them and their willingness to explain my study to potential participants.

Scheduling and Conducting Interviews

Because of their lack of consistent internet and phone access, it was incredibly difficult to schedule interviews with homeless flood survivors in advance. In fact, I was only able to do so in three cases where individuals routinely checked their email at a local library or HSO. The bulk of my interviews with members of the homeless community occurred during times when I set up tables at resource centers or one of the day or nighttime emergency shelters. These settings allowed participants to approach me freely, without me imposing on their lunch, dinner, or bedtime schedules. I was very cognizant of the fact that many people were tired and looking for a place to relax. Therefore, I made efforts to be as unobtrusive as possible, requesting that HSO staff make announcements about my study while I was present at interview locations and informing them of the study during case management meetings, for example.

In order to recruit participants for my study, it was essential for me to set aside large blocks of time—even entire days—at various HSOs and resource centers. For instance, during my first day of interviewing homeless flood survivors, I had planned to meet with one homeless participant who had mentioned that he might be able to connect me with another person while I was there. I had approached the resource center thinking that I would be conducting one, but hopefully two, interviews. Once I arrived, however, the initial interview turned into a two-person interview because of the other individual's availability during that time. From that point the two interviewees directed other potential participants my way. In all, I met with roughly eight people that day, officially interviewing four for my study. Fortunately, I had brought plenty of materials and informed consent forms and had blocked off time the latter half of the day, so I was able to

conduct these interviews in a back-to-back manner. Although I had not anticipated how these interviews would be conducted, I found that this approach was essential in recruiting individuals. Mirroring this first experience, I reserved an entire day at another resource center where I was able to interview five participants back-to-back.

Interviews with homeless flood survivors were challenging at times, due in large part to the settings in which these interviews took place. As I mentioned in my “Unstructured Interviews” section, meetings took place at various locations. All of these locations could be chaotic at times, with people coming in and out of the interview area and noise pollution requiring that I often had to ask interviewees to repeat themselves. Further, many members of the homeless community suffer from mental illness. In three cases, I had decided to remove participants from the study because their mental states were such that they could not focus on the interview questions.

These are important considerations for researchers wanting to work in homeless communities, as they must account for the scheduling constraints and make themselves available at locations for extended periods in order to recruit participants. It is also imperative that researchers have a plan in place for how they will handle meetings with individuals who may be struggling with mental illness or addiction (e.g., participants who are visibly drunk or high). I ultimately decided that I would meet with these individuals, as I did not want to discourage them from sharing their perspectives—however relevant or irrelevant they may have been to the study. Considering the stigmatized status of this population, I did not want to reproduce actions or behavior that further marginalized these individuals and prevented them from sharing their stories.

Researcher Positionality

An important consideration of interviewing members of the homeless community, while also applicable in other qualitative study contexts, is to critically and constantly self-examine the role of researcher positionality throughout the research process. Upon entering the field, I received advice from research mentors and drew upon literature concerning the need to critically self reflect upon the influence of one's positionality throughout data collection, analysis, and in the development of findings. This includes consideration of attained and ascribed characteristics. For example, Brenda Phillips (2014:22) contends that, "[p]ersonal qualities are not the only important characteristics to consider. Ascribed statuses, the ones we are born with, often influence our lives and our access to sites, interviewees, and even organizations (Baca Zinn 1979; Townsend-Bell 2009)." Although researchers generally aim to reduce bias and influence on data to the fullest extent possible, it is essential to acknowledge that our social status, (including the relative social power we may hold compared to study participants), appearance, and other personal attributes may affect the people we are able to meet, the information we receive, and how we interpret findings. Throughout my dissertation research, I continually reflected upon my status as a younger, White, and (comparatively) financially stable woman and how that may have helped or hindered my ability to access certain members of the Boulder homeless community, as well as the types of information they shared with me.

To demonstrate the importance of critical self-reflection and acknowledgement of my positionality during my time in the field, I describe two incidents that greatly influenced me as a researcher. While in the initial stages of my fieldwork, I was given permission by staff to station myself at a table within a resource center that included food distribution, case management, and mental health services for the homeless community. This was during one of the extended periods

of data collection where I interviewed five homeless flood survivors back-to-back. I had my notebook, consent forms, interview guides, water bottle, and two recorders set on the table ready for the next potential interviewee or curious bystander to approach. After inquiring about my presence and the purpose of my visit, one homeless man went on to tell me, “I want you to look at the difference between you and these people,” as he pointed in the direction of the line for chili, “we’re over here eating chili out of Styrofoam cups while you are sitting with two cell phones on the table” (referring to my audio recorders). As he pointed out the blatant disparity between me and the people in line for food, I agreed with him and explained that I was there to learn and understand more about their experiences. I admittedly was taken aback at first, and was not prepared to respond to such a statement. However, it was an important experience to have and helped me to adapt my approach in recruiting interviewees. Rather than explaining the purpose of my study to homeless individuals in a broad sense—that I was interested in their perspectives and experiences regarding the 2013 floods—I adapted my language to include an acknowledgement that I was not just interested in their perspectives, but that they were *essential* to my understandings of the contexts in which they live. This adapted approach was well received by future participants in that I openly recognized that I had a lot to learn.

The second incident occurred before the start of the second focus group session with a women’s support group. I encountered a young woman moments before the start of the interview who appeared to be upset and distressed about something. Although participants gave me permission to attend their meeting two weeks prior, I started by re-explaining my study, explained the informed consent, and again requested their permission to be there and to conduct the focus group. All women gave me their consent, and I began by asking questions about their flood experiences. At that point, the same woman I had seen before the start of the interview

entered the room in a state of irritation, explaining that she was unable to acquire a bus ticket to an upcoming appointment. The group organizer briefed her about my study, stating that I was a PhD student at the University of Colorado. The woman quickly responded, contending that, “She pays \$10,000 a course to go to graduate school. Why would I want to listen to her? How could she understand us?” Before I had a chance to interject, the organizer tried to further explain the purpose of the study, asking again if she would like to participate. The woman declined and hastily left the room. While it was explained to me that this woman suffered from mental health issues and was “having a bad day,” I nonetheless noted this occurrence and genuinely reflected upon her statements. I was aware prior to this incident that identifying as a graduate student at the University of Colorado would perhaps unintentionally make me come across as elitist. This event demonstrated to me that my identity as a graduate student, while often opening doors for me at HSOs and with public officials and community stakeholders, may have limited my ability to access certain groups within the homeless community.

There were several instances, however, where my social status as a young White woman may have benefitted my entry into the community and the people I was able to interview—despite the fact that I experienced several uncomfortable encounters with men while out in the field that asked why someone “like me” was spending her time in shelters. Perhaps some homeless participants were comfortable talking to me because I was a younger woman and was viewed as a non-threatening figure. In recognizing my status within these settings largely dominated by men, I often wondered what types of experiences a male counterpart or person of color may have had in the same settings.

Data Management and Analysis

Throughout the data collection process, I carefully organized the data into password-protected files. Being attentive to keeping identifying information separate from recordings and transcripts, I kept track of interviewees and participant observation notes using tables in Microsoft Excel and Word. While I personally transcribed a majority of the audio-recorded interviews, I also used research funding from the University of Colorado's sociology department to cover costs of outsourced transcription services.²³ Once I received the transcribed interviews from the transcription services, I reviewed and minimally edited transcripts as necessary to ensure accuracy and clarity. For interviews where audio recording was not permitted or the setting precluded its use, I took extensive hand-written notes that were then digitized into a Word document for subsequent analysis. I also digitized journal notes and memos.

Once all of the interviews and hand-written field notes were transcribed, cleaned, and organized, I printed them and uploaded all documents to NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software program. The data analysis process began with an open, manual coding strategy in which I read and re-read transcripts, notes, and memos to identify preliminary themes and create initial codes based on the interview guides and research questions, also known as “first-level codes” or a “first cycle coding strategy” (Miles and Huberman 1994; Saldaña 2009). I subsequently began creating a code list that included descriptive and pattern codes, which I identified during these first phases of data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). Using NVivo 10, I then continued to refine my codes into smaller, more specific codes (second-level or axial coding) while building and refining code lists for each subsample of interviewees.²⁴ Throughout the analysis process, I

²³ I used two transcription services that were bound by confidentiality agreements.

²⁴ Axial coding follows primary coding strategies and its purpose, as Saldaña (2009:159) explains, “is to strategically reassemble data that were “split” or “fractured” during the Initial Coding processes.” The

reevaluated, redefined, grouped, regrouped, and split codes as necessary to capture findings from the data (Miles and Huberman 1994; Saldaña 2009). I concluded the data analysis process by drawing connections among codes, high-level categories, and overarching themes (Saldaña 2009). This involved hand-written diagrams and analytical memoing.

While I manually coded hard-copy transcripts during the initial phases of the data analysis process, I used NVivo to refine these codes. For example, in the first round of open coding with HSO interviewees, I coded for “disaster experiences” and “barriers to preparedness.” Second-level coding consisted of more refined codes, such as “heightened advocacy roles” and “daily concerns.” NVivo 10 allowed me to code text with ease, organize my interviews, notes, and memos in one protected file, and to map codes and their relationships to one another. I followed Johnny Saldana’s (2009) recommendations for analyzing data as a solo coder; I checked my interpretations of the data with interview participants where possible, coded as I transcribed, and used a reflection journal (Saldana 2009:28).

Data analysis occurred in conjunction with data collection, as I took notes and recorded voice memos to highlight initial themes and establish first-level codes. This allowed me to refine my interview guide to ask more relevant questions about flood experiences and recovery as my time in the field progressed, and I became aware of new information and perspectives. For instance, my original unstructured and semi-structured interview guides did not include questions or prompts about homeless persons’ resilience until after I met with HSO staff and homeless flood survivors who explained explicitly or implicitly homeless persons’ ability to “bounce back” from the floods and other daily emergencies that occur.

axis component of “axial coding” represents a category, in that this coding process connects categories to subcategories (Saldaña 2009).

CHAPTER IV

PUBLIC OFFICIAL AND COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

This chapter presents findings from eleven interviews with public officials and community stakeholders in Boulder County. These individuals work in varying capacities with the homeless community and come from a variety of institutions and organizations at both city and county levels: emergency management, housing and human services, law enforcement, a Boulder County school district, the American Red Cross, and an informal service group in Nederland. I also incorporate findings from informal meetings, media articles, press releases from organizations, city council notes and annual reports. Although the focus of this dissertation is on the flood experiences of homeless-serving organizations (HSOs) and the Boulder homeless community, I draw upon interviews with public officials and stakeholders to situate HSOs' and homeless persons' disaster experiences within the larger regional setting.

The first section begins by organizing the study context in more detail, including community tension and debates within Boulder County—primarily within the City of Boulder—regarding homelessness and how to address it. I expand upon previous discussions in Chapter 1 by describing practices and ordinances within the county that have the effect of criminalizing homelessness. Here, I also discuss community concerns around homelessness and wildfire risk. In the next section, I present findings from interviewees regarding evacuation and sheltering issues with the homeless community during the 2013 floods. Subsequently, I describe disaster planning for homeless populations at both a national and local level by incorporating findings from interviews with emergency managers in Boulder County and documents obtained through an extensive web search. Throughout these sections, where appropriate, I reference insights from HSO staff and homeless participants. I conclude with a chapter summary and discussion of how broader trends, such as criminalization and decreased access to affordable housing, increase

vulnerability and pose significant challenges for extremely poor and homeless populations before and after disaster—often conflicting with calls for resilience and effectively pushing “disposable” people out of communities.

A Source of Contention: Homelessness in Boulder County

Homelessness is a frequent topic of conversation and debate within Boulder County, especially within the cities of Boulder and Longmont. Homelessness, income inequality, and a lack of affordable housing are pervasive social issues in the county and region at large (Boulder County Trends Report 2015-2016; Brennan 2016a, 2016b; Burness 2017a, 2017b; Byars 2012). Community members often complain about the “unsightliness” of homeless persons camping, loitering, and panhandling in public areas (Dodge 2013). Debates about how to address the homeless “issue” has resulted in numerous city council meetings, ordinances, the formation of a homeless service collaborative, and, more recently, a major restructuring of homeless service provision in the City of Boulder (Boulder City Council 2017; Burness 2016a, 2017c; Byars 2012; Meltzer 2009, 2011). I discuss five major areas of contention in the upcoming sections: housing for the homeless community, affordable housing, homeless encampments, homeless criminalization trends in the county, and recent developments regarding homeless service provision in the City of Boulder.

Housing for the Homeless Community

Over the past several years, there have been a number of proposed developments, including affordable housing units and a Housing First facility, aimed at alleviating poverty and homelessness in the area. However, when these proposals are brought to the public, they often are met with complaints and concerns from nearby neighborhoods and the larger Boulder community. For example, as I briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, when a local homeless shelter

worked in conjunction with Boulder Housing Partners—the housing authority for the City of Boulder—to build a Housing First facility in North Boulder, some nearby residents were extremely concerned and pushed back against the proposed development (Boulder Housing Partners, N.D.; Meltzer 2014).²⁵ Residents complained that they already had to deal with the burden of a homeless shelter and affordable housing in the area, so they should not have to accept more of this type of development. In this case,

[the residents] called on the City Council to stop the project, but under city code, supportive housing units are treated no differently from other apartment buildings. The project complied with the underlying zoning, and there was nothing the city could do, even if the council had wanted to stop it (Meltzer 2014).

After years of debate within the North Boulder community and city-level officials, the Housing First community opened in early November 2014. Residents worked with the shelter and Boulder Housing Partners to create an operating agreement, which included stipulations such as the presence of security and limits on overnight guests in an attempt to alleviate some neighbors' concerns (Meltzer 2014). Recently, Attention Homes, an organization that serves runaway, homeless, and at-risk youth, proposed a supportive housing facility in an area just north of downtown Pearl Street in Boulder; a building permit for forty apartments for chronically homeless youth (18-24 years of age) is expected sometime by fall 2017 (Attention Homes 2017; Burness 2017d; Grossman 2016). Some local residents have expressed anger toward this proposed development based on a number of concerns, including the building's height and density and concerns about substance abuse, as the facility would not require sobriety. Further, some argue that such facilities will only attract more homeless activity (Grossman 2016).

²⁵ Housing First is a housing stabilization model designed to put homeless individuals into housing in order for them to “stabilize” other aspects of their life, such as obtaining jobs and addressing substance abuse and other mental health issues (Boulder Housing Partners 2017; Meltzer 2014; National Alliance to End Homelessness 2016).

Examples of this type of “push-back” support sentiments that Boulder has become more unwelcoming toward the homeless community.

Another source of contention in the region regarding services for homeless persons, as a City of Boulder employee indicated to me, is the unequal burden Boulder and Longmont experience in the cities’ attempts to remediate homelessness. When I asked Becky about what she would describe as her department’s major concerns and/or challenges, she explained that a big challenge was that:

Only three government entities pick up the weight for addressing homelessness as an issue. City of Longmont, Boulder County, and the City of Boulder. There is a high need to strengthen the regional system, because homelessness is a regional issue. It can’t just be these three entities taking on the issue.

Understanding that solutions to homelessness must be achieved within the larger regional context, many public officials and community leaders have called for increased collaboration and cooperation from other communities within Boulder County (Burness 2017c).

Affordable Housing

To some, Boulder has become increasingly inhospitable not only to its homeless residents and visitors, but to low-income individuals as well. Limited affordable housing availability in the area, coupled with rising rents, produce an unwelcoming environment for those wanting to establish livelihoods in the county (Boulder County Trends Report 2015-2016; Castle 2017). While affordable housing was in short supply before the 2013 floods, the disaster exacerbated existing problems and squeezed lower income groups out of the county (Burness 2015, 2016b; Burness and Byars 2015; Estabrook 2015). This is compounded by the influx of individuals seeking to move to Denver and surrounding areas. A recent article in the Denver Post noted that between July 2015 and July 2016, Boulder County added roughly ten new residents per day, according to U.S. Census Bureau data (Burness 2017e). Eddy, who works for the Boulder Valley

School District, explained that affordable and available housing was an issue even before the floods, but that the situation worsened following the disaster. Speaking specifically about the effects of the floods on low-income families and claims that landlords were taking advantage of the disaster as an opportunity to make more money, he stated:

It came to impact everyone just because it also impacted the vacancy rate..[and] the cost of living. It impacted the lives of so many people [and] it hasn't been the same ever since. Unfortunately the bureaucracy and the monopoly of landlords ..[taking] advantage, making it almost impossible for families to be able to [afford] rent. I mean.. to this day, it's still impacting many of our families that just can't afford to live here.

I asked him further about the county's lack of control over rising rental costs, to which he argued that:

Unfortunately, the housing authority has been—I don't know.. I'm not an expert on that, but they didn't seem to have any control over how the landlords were dealing with this and literally taking advantage of victims and people who could potentially afford, but because they're asking for three times [the previous rent]. It was impossible for several [low-income individuals and families].

The state of Colorado imposed a prohibition on rent control in the 1980s following Boulder's efforts to allow the practice (Carter 2016; Meltzer 2016). A 2000 Colorado Supreme Court case, *Telluride v. Lot Thirty-Four Venture*, solidified the state's position on prohibiting rent controls and has had lasting effects on cities' attempts to enforce inclusionary housing or zoning (Carter 2016; Meltzer 2016b). Despite debates around whether rental control would be an effective solution, Meltzer (2016b) argues that, “[t]hose objections [against rent control], though, can seem abstract and theoretical when families are losing housing every day. The appeal of rent control is likely to remain strong in a market where the median rent has increased 52 percent in five years.” Boulder's approach to addressing this issue through new developments gives developers the choice to either collaborate with the City of Boulder to build affordable rental housing or pay a fee (Carter 2016). However, informal conversations with homeless and affordable housing advocates indicate uncertainty about the viability of this approach, because if

developers have the resources to do so, they would perhaps be less inclined to build affordable units, paying the city's fee instead.

Efforts to build affordable housing have also been met with contention from the larger Boulder community. Many residents acknowledge the need for affordable housing but do not want these developments in their communities for varying reasons. As a recent example, an affordable housing development is currently proposed in the Twin Lakes area of Gunbarrel—a town northeast of the City of Boulder (Boulder County 2017b, N.D.; Fryar 2015, 2016). The proposal, as titled on Boulder County's website, is a "Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity for Affordable Housing" in that it would provide roughly 240 affordable homes for individuals and families (Boulder County 2017b). Some community members express concern over the proposal, primarily on grounds of wildlife and open space protection. In an attempt to stop the development, local and countywide residents organized a nonprofit organization named the Twin Lakes Action Group (TLAG). The organization's mission, as posted on its website, is to "preserve the rural residential look and feel of our neighborhoods and the surrounding areas." They stress the importance of the twenty acres under consideration for development as a wildlife corridor and "prime" farmland (Twin Lakes Action Group, Inc. 2016). The group further states that the area provides wetlands, open space for residents in Gunbarrel, and environmental aesthetics—offering scenic views (Twin Lakes Action Group, Inc. 2016).

Conservation and species protection are important issues to many Boulder residents and reflect a community identity that prides itself on environmental stewardship. This community and cultural characteristic of environmentalism struggles to coexist with the area's need for additional affordable housing, however. In an opinion piece written by Martin Streim, former chair of TLAG, he argues:

Affordable housing is an important community need. But no matter how important the need, the ends do not justify the means. I hope that the Boulder County Planning Commission, the City Planning Board and City Council recognize this when they deliberate on the upcoming land use change decision for Twin Lakes.

I happened to live in Gunbarrel when activism against the development began to take hold. As I approached my mailbox one afternoon, I noticed that someone had pinned a TLAG flyer to a community announcement board. The top of the flyer read, “Do you want your taxes to go up? The food truck parties to stop? The owls at Twin Lakes to die or move? Your neighborhood to become densely populated?” Interestingly, while TLAG justifies its opposition toward the Twin Lakes Development as being based on concerns over open space and wildlife protection, the line on the flyer about the community food truck parties being threatened caused me to pause. Why would inclusion of affordable housing result in an end to Gunbarrel’s monthly summer food truck parties? Importantly, perhaps this flyer was not approved by the group, but it represents underlying discourse against such development in the county as a whole and suggests that opposition against the development, for some individuals, may be rooted in social “distancing” justifications as well. To date, the fate of the development is still uncertain. Debates over the City of Boulder’s autonomy in limiting county control—another point of contention with this development—are ongoing (Burness 2017f; Fryar 2015).

As an example of an attempt to sustain inclusive housing in the county, several months following the 2013 floods, the town of Lyons was faced with a community-level decision to replace affordable housing stock that was wiped out during the floods. The proposal would have allowed Lyons leaders to lease roughly six to seven acres of Bohn Park, which is a twenty-six acre park (Burness 2015). This would have enabled the Boulder County Housing Authority to develop six single-family homes and a sixty-six unit affordable housing project for individuals that lost their homes in the floods (Burness 2015; Burness and Byars 2015). The town had lost

over 200 homes, which included two mobile home parks that were completely destroyed. At the time of the community vote on the proposal, more than sixty households expressed a desire to move back to their community (Burness 2015; Illescas 2015). Many of these families could not afford to move back into the area (Illescas 2015). This development offered a solution for this problem, while working within the limited bounds of available options for development in the town.

While the town acknowledged the need to replace this housing stock, there was disagreement about the placement of these units (Burness 2015; Burness and Byars 2015). Several Lyons residents created a group, Save Our Parks and Open Spaces (SOPOS), that wanted to preserve the park, claiming on their website that, “Proponents argue that the 7 acres is but a small part of Bohn Park, but the overall effect of placing 60 rental units and up to 10 private homes in the park will have a cascade effect on the rest of the park” (Burness 2015). Emily, who works for a social service organization in Lyons, expressed her frustration regarding arguments against the development:

You know, it was that [the development was proposed on] park land even though Lyons has seven times the amount of park land [compared to] the average Colorado town. Seven. Times.. over seven times. We do not have enough money to maintain it. We just were getting another forty acres. We're a tiny little town and we're getting another forty acres because of the [post-flood home] buyouts. I mean, it's just insane.. And the place.. you should have seen the place where they were going to build it. It was a pit. It was a parking lot. Literally. It's used as a parking lot.

SOPOS also questioned who would be moving into these units, asking if it was wise to base this vote on anecdotes of people wanting to come back. Ultimately, SOPOS succeeded in its attempts to deny this development, by a vote of 614 people against and 498 in favor (Burness 2015; Burness and Byars 2015). Emily expressed her opinion as to why some people voted against the development:

Many of the people who voted against it, not all of them, but many of them have lived [in Lyons] 3, 5, 6 years. I mean it was tragic, you know. "I have all the money... I don't want these people living next to me." "My park land, my view. I was told this was a park, and I'd have a view forever." I have a friend who says, "I voted it against it. People say I didn't want them to live out there." And she didn't use this word, but.. [described it] essentially as a ghetto.

SOPOS refuted claims that it was attempting to push people out of the community, explaining that it was a poor choice of location that influenced their decision on the development (Burness and Byars 2015). Similar to the Twin Lakes proposal, we see again how the Boulder area's identity and values associated with the environment, specifically open-space protection, is directly at odds with the dire need for more inclusive, affordable housing. The community vote in Lyons resulted in a loss of economic diversity in the area, following a housing and income inequality trend in the county that effectively distances the "haves" from the "have-nots."

Concerns over Homeless Encampments

Contention around "what to do" with homeless persons extends beyond urban areas and into the western, rural mountainous region of Boulder County. Mountain residents are increasingly concerned about the threat of wildfires posed by campfires (Brennan 2016a, 206b; Stalnacker 2017). This has resulted in community tension around how to handle homeless encampments and the threat of wildfire, as well as any actions that may bring homeless individuals into the area (May 2016; Sallinger 2017; Stalnacker 2017). The Nederland Cold Springs Fire, which occurred in July 2016, confirmed many of these fears and anxieties. The fire started as a result of two young men, identified by officials as transients, who failed to properly extinguish their campfire (Brennan 2016a; Bush 2016).

Forest service officials, community stakeholders, firefighters, law enforcement officers, and concerned residents gathered at a community meeting in Nederland in the fall of 2016 to discuss concerns and issues associated with wildfire risk in the region. This gathering occurred

after the Cold Springs Fire, which had burned hundreds of acres and destroyed eight homes (Brennan 2016a; Bush 2016). While attending this meeting, I noted anxiety surrounding homeless campers from attendees' comments and questions, which, importantly, not only included their concerns about wildfire risk, but violence and pollution originating from these encampments. According to CBS Denver, Nederland Fire Chief Rick Dirr, "says the [wildfire risk] problem is the larger transient camping issue facing Nederland, which has become a hub for homeless campers in the summer months" (Bush 2016). This sentiment was certainly reflected in the questions and concerns presented by meeting attendees.

Earlier in the spring of 2016, before the fire, I met with a community stakeholder in Nederland, Jeremy, who works on homelessness issues, particularly homeless encampments, in the mountainous region of Boulder County and beyond. Jeremy is an advocate for the homeless community, while at the same time calling for more effective solutions for people who choose to reside or are pushed into forested areas. He discussed the complexity in enforcing rules around camping, arguing that,

If you have a building, and you put some rules on the wall, and Joe Bob doesn't follow those rules, you can bounce him. It's easy. In the woods? How do I bounce him? And how do I make sure bouncing that person doesn't mean a campfire turns into something else in a place where we can't get a fire truck?

I also asked him about his familiarity with homeless persons in the community and how many homeless campers he encounters regularly. Jeremy commented on my phrasing of the question:

I: And how many homeless individuals in the community would you say you meet on a weekly or monthly basis?

R: Well, let's start with the phrase you just used, homeless in the community. I mean.. Nederland is not a place where homeless are integrated in the community. There is a part of that,.. it's just because the seasonal nature of homelessness, you're not in the community. You're just up there. I hope that doesn't come off as a distinctive vibe about the community and the homeless. But there's a lot of divide there.

The excerpt included above is not unique to the town of Nederland. As I demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6, homeless residents and service providers often expressed similar thoughts regarding the larger Boulder community's relationship with the homeless community.

In my interview with Jeremy, he also explained why he thinks people choose to camp, which is confirmed by some homeless interviewees I met with who camp all or a majority of the year:

When you feel like the whole world is always telling you to move, threatening you with tickets, there's a freedom from and there's a freedom to do. And those two types of independence—all people, homeless or not, really want. Unfortunately it's really hard to build the education with people about how to manage camping.

While understanding many of their reasons for camping, he notes homeless campers' particular vulnerability and expresses his worries in reaching this population:

What would happen if a fire starts? And those people [camping]... it's not easy getting out from there or way back in one of those gulches [where they camp]. They wouldn't know. It's wide open space... They are so cut off from anything, and so lets say a fire starts—a homeless person or not. It's just that a fire starts. They're cut off from information. There's no way a fire truck can get down there and tell them anything. There's nobody, because nobody is going to go down there to say, "Hey, you all have to leave." They're on their own.

Getting information to members of homeless communities is always an issue—even outside times of disaster. However, because of their heightened risk during a disaster event, communication concerns are enhanced and outreach must be adapted to fit the geographical context.

Once the 2016 Cold Springs Fire had been contained and recovery efforts were underway, I went to Nederland to meet with Jeremy again. While walking around town, I noticed several flyers thanking firefighters for their efforts during the Cold Springs Fire. One sign in particular caught my attention as I walked by:

Thank you to all emergency crews + the Nederland community. Our town has proven that we can take care of the locals in need without the use of “free camping for everyone.” WE caused this problem by attracting transient beggars to this town. Take back W. Magnolia.²⁶

To some mountain residents, as alluded to from the messaging in this sign, charitable food and resource distribution exacerbate the homeless encampment issue. In a letter to the editor of *The Mountain-Ear Newspaper* (2016), a local Nederland news source, Margaret May, a member of the board of directors for the Nederland Food Pantry, defended volunteer and charitable activities in the area for homeless campers, arguing:

Homelessness is a serious problem throughout the United States. There are many reasons individuals and families become homeless including mental illness, unemployment, the high cost of housing and substance abuse. As there is no one cause, there is no one solution. Likewise there is no one reason people are attracted to our community. A few of the factors that might be involved include the closing of [a Boulder homeless shelter] in mid April, Boulder and Denver ordinances that prohibit people sleeping outside, or the nearby national forests that provide legal, dispersed places to camp. However, the meager amount of food provided by the Nederland Food Pantry and the Sox and Sandwich program is not a factor that attracts transients to our community.

In an effort to gain a more in-depth understanding of homeless campers’ perspectives following the Cold Springs Fire, I spoke informally with two homeless campers in Nederland roughly two weeks after the fire was contained and recovery efforts were underway. They expressed their frustration with other campers—not necessarily homeless campers—who do not treat the environment with respect. The two went on to complain about campsites left in terrible condition with trash and human waste scattered throughout informal encampments in the forests. They felt compelled to stress to me that they did things “the right way,” by cleaning up after themselves and leaving it better for the next person who comes along. Despite this, they continue to feel that they are being stereotyped and blamed for the actions of a few.

²⁶ West Magnolia is a campsite frequented by homeless campers in west Boulder County (Brennan 2016b). During the Nederland community meeting in the fall of 2016, this campsite was referenced frequently, as residents explained their frustration with the pollution, violence, and unmanned fires associated with the campsite.

Public officials in Boulder County are struggling to find solutions to the dynamic threats in the forested areas of the county that enhance wildfire risk.²⁷ Concerns about wildfires in the region are nothing new, but in recent years, these concerns have been exacerbated by real and perceived human threats to the environment—particularly in the form of homeless forest encampments (Sallinger 2017; Stalnacker 2017). Such encampments are present throughout the mountainous regions of the state and have been identified as a nationwide problem for reducing and managing wildfire risk (Folsom 2017; Healy 2015; Kelly 2017; Konopasek 2017; Lancaster 2017).

Homeless Criminalization in Boulder County

The cities of Boulder and Longmont have been criticized throughout the past several years for practices and ordinances that have the effect of criminalizing homelessness and poverty (Evans 2016; Fryar 2016; Meltzer 2016a; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty 2014; Robinson 2017).²⁸ In 2011 the City of Boulder instituted a “camping ban” during a time when Occupy Wall Street protestors set up tents within public areas (Evans 2016; Meltzer 2016a). However, the ban effectively allowed law enforcement to distribute warnings and citations to homeless campers that either pushed them out of the area or, at times, put them in jail

²⁷ In recent years, a coalition called the Interagency Council on Homeless Encampments (NICHE) convened to collaborate on issues related to transient and homeless people in the area who seasonally camp along the Peak to Peak highway region. The coalition includes representatives from homeless support and advocacy groups, law enforcement, U.S. Forest Service, Boulder County government officials, businesses, and nonprofit organizations (United Way 2017).

²⁸ The following ordinances are at the center of much contention around homeless criminalization in Boulder: City of Boulder Code, Title 5 General Offenses, Chapter 5-6 Miscellaneous Offenses, Section 5 6-10 Camping or Lodging on Property Without Consent; City of Boulder Code, Title 8 Parks, Open Space, Street, and Public Ways, Chapter 8-3 Parks and Recreation, Section 8-3-21 Tents and Nets Prohibited; and City of Boulder Code, Title 5 General Offenses, Chapter 5-6 Miscellaneous Offenses, Section 5 6-3 Unlawful Use of Vehicles as Residence; City of Boulder Code, Title 5 General Offenses, Chapter 5-3 Offenses Against the Person Section 5-3-12 Begging in Certain Places Prohibited; City of Boulder Code, Title 5 General Offenses, Chapter 5-3 Offenses Against the Person, Section 5-3-7 Aggressive Begging Prohibited (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty 2014).

(Evans 2016; Meltzer 2009, 2011, 2016a). Angela Evans (2016), a reporter covering the effects of the camping ordinance found that, “[t]wo separate reports released within the last month confirm assertions long-argued by homeless advocates—Boulder’s camping ban disproportionately affects and is enforced against Boulder’s homeless population, often leading to a court record and even jail time.” Advocates for the ban refer to fears about violence and public security, although these accusations are largely unfounded, according to Colorado American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Legal Director Mark Silverstein (Evans 2016).

The City of Boulder has also implemented a panhandling ban in the past, although parts of this ban have been retracted (Fryar 2016; Mills 2014). Similar bans in Longmont include an anti-panhandling ordinance, which was struck down in 2015 by a U.S. District Court in Colorado (Antonacci 2017a; Daru 2017). However, Longmont is now pursuing an ordinance that would make it illegal to stand on street medians, which are often frequented by panhandlers (Daru 2017). Advocacy groups such as the ACLU have stepped in to defend homeless residents, explaining that such laws are unfair and inhumane. Regarding some Colorado cities’ “loitering-to-beg” ordinances, Colorado ACLU’s Mark Silverstein explained that homeless persons’ pleas for assistance are protected under the First Amendment and that such laws are unjust in that they directly target homeless and poor individuals (Fryar 2016).²⁹ Important to note, however, is that while some cities have such ordinances in their municipal codes, they are not necessarily enforced or consistently enforced (Fryar 2016).

In October 2016, the Boulder City Council called for stricter enforcement of the local camping ban to combat “an increasing homeless situation” along areas such as Boulder Creek (Gonzalez 2016). While many officers had been giving out warnings to campers, the council

²⁹ In 2016, the ACLU called upon Boulder County and Nederland, among other Colorado cities, to repeal municipal loitering-to-beg-laws (Fryar 2016).

called for a shift in strategy. Some homeless advocates in the area expressed concern about the stricter enforcement, arguing that increased policing would not improve the situation (Gonzalez 2016; O'Connor 2016). Darren O'Connor (2016), a social justice advocate with groups such as Boulder Rights Watch, Denver Homeless Out Loud, and Boulder Coalition and Alliance on Race, pointed to a glaring issue with camping ban enforcement in Boulder, stating:

Ironically, Boulder laws require pet owners to provide an “enclosed structure sufficient to protect the animal from wind, rain, snow, or sun,” yet camping is against the law and prohibits in part using shelter. In the ordinance, shelter is defined such that it “includes, without limitation, any cover or protection from the elements other than clothing.” Thus a homeless person with a pet must both provide it shelter against the elements and avoid use for themselves of any such protection, lest they be ticketed.

Criminalization trends, as I described in Chapter 1, are not unique to Boulder County or the Denver region; rather, these trends reflect a pervasive, widespread ideology that essentially punishes individuals for not appropriately fitting into the so-called free market society. These ordinances have the effect of “distancing” undesirable populations such as homeless persons away from areas where they are visible, increasing their vulnerability by disconnecting them from the community, and essentially pushing them into hazardous and remote areas.

Law Enforcement Relationships with the Homeless Community

Throughout my time in the field, I gathered law enforcement perspectives from city and county-level officers regarding their experience and relationships with the Boulder homeless community before, during, and after the 2013 floods. The officers I spoke with explained that they are trying to move away from models that criminalize homeless individuals toward collaborative and holistic approaches that attempt to address root issues that lead to and keep people in a state of homelessness, such as substance abuse and other mental health issues. Reflecting this trend, in 2016, the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) was created in collaboration with law enforcement, homeless service providers, and advocacy groups (City of Boulder 2017).

According to the group’s page on the City of Boulder government website, HOT was established because, “we found that we were dealing with the same individuals on a regular basis and created the team as a means to break the vicious cycle. Our focus is to get the homeless engaged in resources that will positively change their situation” (City of Boulder 2017). John, who works at the Boulder County Sheriff’s Office, explained jail-crowding concerns in the county and attempts to keep homeless individuals, especially those repeat offenders with mental health disorders, out of jail:

On an everyday basis, the biggest issue that we deal with is jail crowding. Our jail was built in 1987 to hold 287 people. And we in-filled and double-bunked and we have over 500 people there every day. It’s really, really crowded. It’s difficult to do programs.

We work with [homeless] folks all the time—the jail staff—trying to case manage certain individuals. We also work with Vets helping Vets [veterans helping veterans], because a lot of homeless males, particularly the older guys, a lot of them are veterans. And again, there’s services available for them in the community through the VA and other kinds of things, but they don’t hook in very well. Particularly if they’re using drugs or alcohol. They don’t keep Daytimers. They don’t keep appointments, so we try to use groups and peers to help get them directed and hooked into services.

Gill, a City of Boulder police officer who works closely on issues related to the homeless community described the EDGE program (Early Detection Get Involved) implemented in the City of Boulder in 2014, which began in collaboration with the Sheriff’s Office, Boulder and Longmont police departments, an addiction and recovery center, and a mental health organization:

Initially, what the thoughts of the program were, that there are people—mental health clients—out there that commit kind of nuisance crimes, minor crimes. I won’t say a victimless crime, but like a theft.. you know, criminal mischief. Not sure that they actually need to go to jail. Maybe they need to get mental health treatment, maybe they need to pay for the damage they have created, apologize to the person, but maybe they don’t need to go to jail. They don’t need to have a criminal record.

In describing law enforcement’s relationship with the homeless community, another Boulder police officer, Andrew, explained,

We really want to interact positively with the homeless community as much as we can. We don't want to be a police department that writes them tickets and ignores them. That's our goal.

Some homeless flood survivors I met with described positive interactions with police officers, while others expressed frustration with officers who ticketed them for sheltering in illegal areas following the floods. This may be due to a lack of consistency in enforcement as well as variance in the types of relationships established between particular officers and homeless persons.

Relatedly, Andrew described the department's efforts toward working with the homeless community by stressing the importance of appropriately assigning officers to directly work with homeless persons:

We want people in those positions that have a desire to help the homeless and work with the homeless. And we have those people, but there's no staffing to fill [open] positions right now. That's the crazy cycle of trying to hire enough people. So that's a top priority for the police department.

At the time of the interview, there were two officers whose responsibility was to work closely with the homeless community in areas such as along Boulder Creek and the Pearl Street Mall. As part of their role, they inform people about resources, rules and regulations in the city, advising them on where and where not to camp, for example. The City of Longmont also maintains a team of police officers dedicated to working with the homeless community. Three police officers formed the outreach team after they found that traditional tactics such as ticketing were not effective in addressing the problem of homelessness in Longmont (Antonacci 2015). Law enforcement officers, as I explain later, played an important role in the evacuation and oversight of many shelters where homeless individuals sought refuge during the floods.

Recent Developments in Boulder's Homeless Service Community

Within the past year, the homeless service provision community in the City of Boulder has undergone significant changes. Beginning November 2016, a Homeless Working Group was

created in facilitation with the Corporation for Supportive Housing to “develop a focused plan to identify coordinated entry and intake components, emergency day and night sheltering, housing targets, and a plan for data metrics and evaluation” for homeless service provision (Boulder City Council 2017). This group, which dissolved in the spring of 2017, comprised individuals from homeless-serving organizations, formerly homeless individuals, and city and county representatives.

The working group identified weak areas and areas in need of improvement in the current service system, including a lack of consistent data about clients, diminished supply of affordable and supportive housing, and a lack of coordinated entry and integrated data among service providers (City of Boulder 2017). Although differing opinions were expressed by working group members and the larger Boulder community about the best way to transition social services for the homeless community into the new model, many group members agreed that overflow night sheltering and day shelter services should not operate in their current form. This decision was based upon reasoning that cited the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the homeless service delivery system and resulted in a closure of day and overflow shelter services effective May 1, 2017. Further, a resource center—which operated three days a week and provided case management and other basic needs for homeless and low-income residents—also closed at the beginning of May 2017. These changes concern many homeless advocates and homeless individuals, as they are unsure about where to go or what to do without these services (Burness 2017g).

Beginning on October 1, 2017, homeless service organizations in Boulder will begin implementing changes brought forth by the Homeless Working Group. The working group justifies the need for restructuring homeless safety net services, explaining that:

While the community is faced with responding to the short-term issue of emergency shelter capacity, it also viewed this as an opportunity to not just look at emergency shelter in Boulder in isolation, but rather to analyze the effectiveness of the homeless services system in the broader county-wide and regional context in order to inform strategic decisions that ensure the system serves the community efficiently and effectively, and moved people back into permanent housing solutions as quickly as possible. The Working Group plan is intended to be incorporated into the City's Homelessness Strategy, currently in development (Boulder City Council 2017).

As part of the new framework for organizing homeless services, key emphases of the new approach include a coordinated entry plan, common assessment of individuals seeking resources, and emergency or permanent sheltering, as well as a common assessment for ongoing services. Recommendations also include prioritizing services for homeless individuals based upon higher or lower levels need, such as those who need temporary services or those who may need more intensive case management to obtain and sustain permanent housing.

City and countywide housing targets are an additional recommendation brought forth by the working group, in conjunction with navigation programming that would incorporate transportation, referrals to other safety net services, family mediation and rental assistance for homeless persons (Boulder City Council 2017; Burness 2017c). Instead of having day and emergency sheltering services dispersed among three key homeless service organizations in Boulder, these services will now take place at one location with a year-round program shelter that holds 160 beds. Overflow sheltering services that primarily operated out of churches, synagogues, and other community facilities, will no longer be available. These changes are expected to have implications beyond Boulder city limits, as the City of Longmont, for example, braces for the uncertainty that will come the following winter season regarding an influx of new clients to already resource-strained HSOs (Antonacci 2017b). Many of the effects of these recent developments on the homeless community remain uncertain, as the 2017-2018 winter emergency

sheltering season approaches and people experiencing homelessness in Boulder will be left with fewer sheltering options.

Evacuation and Sheltering for the Homeless Community during the 2013 Floods

The September 2013 floods were one of the most devastating disasters in Colorado history. Flooding occurred throughout parts of the Colorado Front Range as a result of eight continuous days of rainfall, causing devastation throughout many areas in Boulder County. During this time, the homeless community experienced a number of challenges, including lost tents, clothes, and personal documents as well as difficulty accessing safe shelter. I describe their flood experiences—and HSOs’ experiences—in more detail in the next two chapters. Public official interviewees described two main issues that arose during the floods with respect to the homeless community: evacuation and sheltering. I discuss these challenges below.

Evacuation

During the peak of the flooding in Boulder County, several homeless persons were told to evacuate areas along the creeks and tributaries and to move to higher ground. In some cases, they were ordered to evacuate to one of the disaster shelters set up throughout the county. Law enforcement officers from the City of Boulder described the challenges with ordering evacuations and disseminating warnings to the homeless community. I present excerpts from our conversations that demonstrate the difficulty they experienced in their attempts to evacuate homeless persons while also considering the safety of officers and other first responders. As part of his job in the City of Boulder Police Department, Gill works closely with the city and county Emergency Operations Center (EOC) when an event results in its activation. He described officers’ experiences attempting to evacuate people along creeks and tributaries, as well as the difficulty in getting warnings out to homeless individuals:

Last September [2013], there were quite a few homeless people that camped out[and] stayed along the creeks. So as the water's rising, there's threats of catastrophic flooding. You got to deal with them. You got to be able to move them out, move them to higher ground, let them know. It's not like they have cell phones and you do a reverse 911 call to them or do the reverse 911 call to their residence. They live under a bridge. So we actually had to send officers out, locate them and let them know that's not a safe spot and we moved them up. So that was one of the things we did during the flooding.

We actually had officers going down to kind of let people—wherever it was safe, because obviously you're not going to go into rushing water or anything—but to kind of let them know, “Hey, get out of the creek bed because this isn't a safe place to be”

He went on to explain that,

For a person who's living under a bridge, you're not having that contact [with the larger community], so you got to literally go out and make sure people are out from underneath the bridges and stuff. Then you've got to figure out where to put them. Like I said before, the shelters weren't open and the warming centers weren't open. You can't just let them stand in the street and get wet. You've got to find a place to house these people.

Balancing the safety of first responders with efforts to clear people away from creeks and tributaries was a noted concern among the officers I interviewed. I followed Gill's response with questions about whether these actions were an order, or if they had something to do with the types of relationships officers had established with people in the homeless community:

I think it was a little of both. So we actually have a very sharp group of officers. We have a group of officers that work the downtown mall—that are specifically assigned to the downtown mall—and they have an ongoing relationship with the homeless transient population. You have to. Officers treat the homeless population with respect, not judgment. I mean, it's not our place to go, “Oh this person's homeless or a second class citizen.” They're not. [They're] human beings just like you and I, and we've got to treat them that way. We got some officers that are really, really good. They interact with them all the time based on their job. So they're always talking to them, and they have an ongoing relationship. They know who all of the homeless people are.

As demonstrated above, preexisting relationships between law enforcement and the homeless community were useful during the flooding in identifying areas where homeless people camped, as well as how to structure interactions in attempts to move them out of harms way. In Chapter 6, I present an instance where a homeless interviewee worked with police officers and other first responders to convince homeless people to leave dangerous areas.

I also asked Andrew, another Boulder police officer, about these existing relationships and how they may have come into play during the peak of the flooding when police ordered people along the creeks and waterways to evacuate. I inquired about officers arriving in these areas—specifically to conduct outreach and convey evacuation orders to homeless people. He articulated,

The administration's aware of where the homeless people camp, so we.. you know. Minimizing death .. was our priority in general. That's how we are going to be judged when this was over. If we didn't warn people soon enough—and we knew this, we planned this for years—if we didn't make sure to try to help everybody in the city.. If we had 100 people killed, it would be disastrous in our eyes. And we knew that. I think we did a pretty good job with the homeless to [get them out].

Law enforcement and other public officials described the efforts to evacuate the areas along creeks and tributaries largely as a success. No deaths within the homeless community were reported. However, some homeless interviewees disagreed, maintaining that they were instead overlooked by members of the media and city/county officials. I now turn to sheltering issues with the homeless community that arose during the peak of the flooding.

Sheltering

Sheltering was the most-reported issue mentioned by public officials in working with the homeless community throughout the 2013 floods. Beginning with an incident that occurred during the peak of the flooding when homeless people were turned away from a public disaster shelter at the City of Boulder YMCA, they continued to face challenges and feel discriminated against—even after the situation was resolved and they were allowed to enter (Gilboy 2013). Important to note is that mass emergency shelters for homeless people were closed during this time of year, since they typically operated during the winter-weather months (October to April). Public transportation out of the area was also inaccessible, because it was difficult, and at times

impossible, to navigate through the pockets of flooding created by the rare rain event. I spend more time discussing this incident in the upcoming chapters.

In a Daily Camera article that covered the discriminatory event, some of the comments following the article were unsympathetic, with remarks such as, “[w]ell that’s one way to remove the homeless problem from Boulder,” and “[y]ou would think with all that Jim Beam in their bellies, they could float with the flood” (Meltzer 2013). Although these sentiments are not generalizable to the larger Boulder community, they characterize the types of discourse used to “other” homeless persons. Once the issue was resolved and homeless flood survivors were allowed to enter the disaster shelter, issues persisted, as housed residents displaced by the floods were uncomfortable sheltering next to homeless people, especially those who appeared more disheveled or were demonstrating odd or aggressive behavior. The findings I present below illustrate the perspectives and experiences of public officials regarding the sheltering challenges that arose.

Once homeless persons were allowed to enter the YMCA disaster shelter, another shelter was opened on the University of Colorado Boulder’s campus. This second location, as an HSO staff member explained to me, predominantly sheltered predisaster homeless persons—though she was uncertain whether this was intentional or not. I inquired about the degree to which the police department was involved in shelter oversight, especially as it pertained to the homeless population. Gill, a City of Boulder police officer, responded,

[The] Red Cross came in and opened up two shelters. They started in the YMCA here in Boulder. They eventually [added another at] CU. Moving to CU was not a bad thing for us, because then it became CU's problem. The university has their own police department. But where we got more involved is we ended up having to send officers to act as security - a couple of officers per day for 24-hour shifts for each of the shelters that were in the City of Boulder. That was where our involvement was. We could get the people there, we could push them in the right direction. That should have been the end of it, but based on the problems bringing, again, transient populations in with mom, dad,

two kids—white picket fence and all that—right next to each other, there were some conflicts. Some of the shelters, the physical location, by way of example, wouldn't allow pets in. No dogs, no cats, no pets. For the transient population that's huge because a good portion of them have a pet. So you've got to find a secondary location for them. So that was the biggest problem for us, is where to house these people. We don't tell the Red Cross what to do. If they have set rules, we have to play by their rules as far as who can come in the shelter [and] who can't come into the shelter. That's entirely up to the Red Cross, because they're the ones that set up the shelters themselves. But.. we've got to deal with the aftermath and the fallout because of it.

Law enforcement grappled with how to manage the needs of individuals from various social backgrounds. Interviewees mentioned the incompatible dynamics between housed and unhoused people, citing examples of unsightly appearances, smell, and behavior of homeless persons next to “white picket” families that lost their homes. Gill felt that the Red Cross was not prepared to work with the predisaster homeless population, and elaborated on the problems grouping housed and unhoused members of the community, stating:

During the September 11 flooding, kind of an issue was, because Red Cross opened up shelters for residential people that were displaced, home owners that were displaced.. a lot of people out of the mountain areas were evacuated to the city and sent to shelters, both in Niwot and the City of Boulder. That's Red Cross. It's Red Cross, not the police department, [opening] the shelters. They help put them up. A lot of the shelters were kind of ill prepared to deal with the transient population that came in. They raise a whole other set of problems coming in. Part of it was, if a person that is used to living under a bridge doesn't shower regularly, [their] lifestyle's a whole lot different than family with the white picket fence and all that stuff, two kids, and you put them together in one small space. There's problems with that.

To gain a better understanding of Red Cross policy concerning the sheltering of homeless populations, I met with Yvonne, who has been involved with the Red Cross for roughly fifteen years and served as a shelter manager in the town of Nederland during the floods. She explained that Red Cross shelter operations initially are run by local volunteers and that they follow the same sheltering protocol across the country:

What happened in Boulder [was] a very localized approach to volunteering, so it's all Boulder County volunteers as much as possible as long as possible, which requires us to have enough volunteers who we can sustain over a period of time. So a week or two, whatever the length of the disaster is. Red Cross, nationally, their approach is to locally

support for maybe a day, maybe two days, and that tends to tap out local resources. Then you bring [volunteers] in from the metro area, from the region, and then ultimately from across the country. Red Cross necessarily has to have standardized approaches to how they work with the homeless. If I go to California, if I go to New York, wherever it might be, it'll be the same protocol, so everybody knows how to work with each other and how they do things. So sometimes there's more bureaucracy than you'd like, which is why we really try to keep it as local as possible because then we're going to do things the way that's best within our community..

Yvonne was not present during the YMCA sheltering incident, so she could not speak specifically to the interactions that took place. However, she did discuss the ways Red Cross shelters adjust to the needs of shelter populations. While the Red Cross follows the same operating plan for shelters, it adapts particular services based on the needs of the shelter population. These populations, of course, vary from disaster to disaster. Yvonne used the example of mental health needs for disaster survivors using Red Cross shelters:

When we have shelters, if there's actually a shelter population, we'll have at least one or more mental health volunteers there, [depending] on what the population of the shelter is like. So if we have a lot of need for that, we would call in more mental health volunteers. We had a shelter down in Denver sometime in the last year where we had a large population of older people who were displaced during an apartment fire. The apartment complex ended up being evacuated. We had health services and mental health on hand because of the population—how difficult it was for them to transition. We usually have one or two [mental health volunteers]. We had probably five or six people, at least, [during that time]. It was a fairly small shelter of operation—15 people—but just because the need was so high.. we also looked at bringing in from other organizations, because we were overwhelming our capacity based on the duration of the event and the dire needs for some of these people.

Transitioning predisaster homeless people out of the shelters proved another challenge, taking roughly a month after the floods for some of shelters to close. Andrew, a Boulder police officer, described the transition as a slow, careful process, since they understood that the water levels of the creek were high for quite some time, and that this was where many homeless people camped. Gill further explained problems that arose once the Red Cross was preparing to close shelters:

Another problem that kind of came up post-flooding when the shelters were open, is [that homeless people] find out that that was a great place to stay. [They] give you three warm meals and a cot and you weren't ..going to jail, so ... there were more transients coming into the city going to those shelters because they were kind of a free place to stay and a free place to get food.

According to some interviewees, the American Red Cross, as part of its policy, will not close a disaster shelter until everyone using the shelter has a safe place to go. However, for homeless populations, disaster shelters offer refuge from day-to-day stressors, with food, showers, and a warm, safe place to sleep. Yvonne mentioned that this is often a difficult issue to overcome with homeless populations:

Yes, we always make sure that everybody has [a place to go]. And it was particularly a challenge with that because legitimately there were chronic homeless people that were displaced because they stayed under the bridges and things like that. They were obviously not accessible, or not safe places for them to be, but we can't tell—and this is a nationwide [issue]—anytime we have shelters, the last population to leave is the chronic homeless, because it's typically going to be a better situation [there] than being on the streets.

Indeed, transitioning disaster survivors out of the shelter system is a nationwide issue following disaster, as the Red Cross often struggles to close shelters long after the a majority of the shelter population has been relocated (Jones 2016; Koh 2016; WAFB 2016; Wise 2008; Yuen 2011). Unfortunately, some survivors—predisaster homeless or not—are left with limited options or no place to go once these shelters close. Andrew, an officer who patrolled the YMCA shelter, shared his perspective about why homeless people stay in these shelters as well as the difficulty transitioning them out:

I think, when you're already homeless, anything can be devastating. You know what I mean? When you have nothing, it doesn't take much. But there were tons of resources for them. The Red Cross doesn't discriminate at all. All they had to do was be sober and they could stay in the shelters [and] be fed three meals a day. So in a lot of ways, they had a lot more resources. And they were honest with me. I was at the Red Cross shelter, which was at the YMCA there at Mapleton and 28th. A lot of homeless people were like, "well this is pretty nice. We're getting great food." You know? A lot of resources [for them], but we were also aware that they lost a lot of their camping gear. Anything can be traumatic when you already don't have anything.

Matthew, who works at the Boulder County Office of Emergency Management (BOEM), expanded on the difficulty of “what to do” with homeless persons using public disaster shelters while also recognizing their needs, stating:

Once folks are in the shelters, then it becomes just that—then everyone’s together, which is fine. But we had a situation in terms of security during the flood, because you have families alongside other folks that cause security issues. And a couple of times, the Red Cross actually had to remove people because they were under the influence of alcohol—noticeably—which, in that situation, it’s easy to remove. Luckily the Red Cross does have contracts to get security in there, to be able to provide a little more reassurance for families that may not feel ..as safe in that situation. But then, quickly, the shelters turned into homeless shelters.. And that’s where we wanted to be cognizant of the fact that those folks obviously also had needs, and also needed to get back to a level of normalcy in order to feel comfortable.

Relatedly, Yvonne commented on the difficulty of moving homeless people out of the shelter, explaining that the Red Cross’s goal is to help them recover, but that this does not necessarily mean that disaster survivors’ lives will be better than they were before. She uses the example of homeless disaster survivors, stating:

You have to look at each person individually and understand what their chances are. Our goal is to make sure people have a place [to go] ... Our goal is not necessarily for us to get them back to where they lived before... Our goal is to help them on their road to recovery, so giving them a place to sleep tonight, and for the next few nights. We’re thinking about how that transition plan is.. so it’s—theoretically what we would be doing with chronic homeless as well. And, in their case, again, it’s not going to be we’re going to try to get them into a permanent housing situation, because that’s way outside our area. But to figure out, is there a place where they can go?

Importantly, not all disaster shelters during the flood were managed by the Red Cross. Some shelters managed themselves, such as churches that opened spaces and offered resources for flood survivors. Therefore, as an employee at the county sheriff’s office explained to me, it was their decision as to whom to allow into their shelters. In discussing future training events for working with various at-risk populations, Jen, a representative from Housing and Human Services (HHS), explained that in the future she would like to conduct joint trainings for HHS employees and Red Cross volunteers in working with different populations. However, she went

on to explain that they have not quite grasped how to address issues with sheltering the predisaster homeless population:

I think it's with the homeless population that we haven't addressed that. So that's why we want to bring in, and have some meetings with [local shelters] and figure out how we can pull them into the mix, so that when we have a shelter, that someone from one of their agencies is coming to help address those needs. And then [comes in] when it's time to close the shelter.

Following up with homeless flood survivors is another impediment toward their recovery, as it is difficult to keep in contact with members of the homeless community. Jen discussed these issues, inquiring:

Even if you had an intake sheet, say, at one of those three locations for someone who's homeless, then how do you follow up with them? Like if you don't offer the services immediately to them, which doesn't usually happen, .. I'm curious about how, well, what can we do? Can there be an advertised place? Like [at one of the homeless shelters or service organizations]?

This suggestion also was mentioned by homeless interviewees when asked about practical recommendations following the floods, which I describe in Chapter 7.

Disaster Planning for Predisaster Homeless Communities

In disaster and emergency planning documents, homeless persons often are categorized as persons with “special needs” or “access and functional needs” without detailing the specific considerations planners need to take into account for serving this population (National Health Care for the Homeless Council 2014).³⁰ In recent years, a number of U.S. agencies and organizations have constructed guidance documents and toolkits for developing comprehensive disaster plans that include more focused attention toward homeless communities and their needs

³⁰ The CDC (2015:19) defines ‘access and functional needs populations’ as, “a population that might require physical, program, or effective communication access. They might have additional needs before, during, or after an incident in functional areas, including but not limited to independence, communication, transportation, and health maintenance.”

during disaster (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2015; Edgington 2009; National Health Care for the Homeless Council 2014; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2017). These materials, designed for emergency managers, city planners, local and county governments, and social service agencies/organizations, outline strategies for identifying and engaging homeless populations prior to, during, and after a disaster. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2015) prepared a guidance document for emergency managers to help them define, locate, and reach at-risk groups, including homeless communities. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (2017) recently released a “Disaster Recovery Homelessness Toolkit” that includes a local planning guide, response guide, and recovery guide that focuses on the ways in which people experiencing homelessness should be included in emergency planning.

Other agencies and organizations such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Veterans Emergency Management Evaluation Center (VEMEC), HUD’s Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPs), the Office of Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response (ASPR), and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC) also have developed toolkits and guidance documents for emergency managers, HSOs, and city planners to reference when establishing preparedness, response, and recovery plans for homeless members of their communities (Edgington 2009; Gin 2015; NHCHC 2014; U.S. HHS (N.D.); VEMEC (N.D.)).³¹ Despite such developments, homeless populations remain overlooked in disaster planning and continue to pose concerns for emergency managers (Bush 2014; Canton 2015). An article written for the “Managing Crisis” blog on the media platform

³¹ Guidance from these toolkits and documents includes approaches for homeless service providers, planners, and health care providers regarding how to identify characteristics and needs of local communities, how to create a culture of collaboration and partnerships, and how to establish operating procedures that are useful and sustainable, to name but a few examples.

Emergency Management discusses the range of considerations for emergency planning for homeless communities, including their lack of resources, social isolation, and fear of authority, to name but a few examples (Canton 2015).

I interviewed one city-level and one county-level emergency manager within Boulder County following the 2013 floods. During these interviews, I asked them about disaster and emergency planning for “access and functional needs” or “vulnerable” groups, specifically focusing on the homeless community. The city- and county-level emergency management offices dedicated time, training, and planning for various at-risk groups in the area, including youth, older adults, and non-English speaking communities. For addressing the special needs of homeless persons, a common concern centers on communication, as emergency managers try to find appropriate and effective ways to disseminate information about preparedness and where to go/what to do during an extreme event. Matthew at the BOEM stated:

R: Getting the word out [is] the biggest thing we have to start in the immediate response. A lot of the homeless and transient populations are setting up shop there near the creeks. They're in those high hazard areas. So the biggest thing is sirens—trying to notify them in the best way possible. That's where the sirens come into play. Even if they don't have a cell phone, sirens blast, [and] they at least know the water is coming and to get to higher grounds. Once that's the case, what we found is that the homeless individuals in Boulder tend to know how to get that information about where a shelter may be open fairly quickly from what we found, which is good. Just because they seem to have their networks [in place] to where they can gather information and the information seems to spread pretty quickly.

I: Through word of mouth?

R: Yeah, word of mouth, which we'd love to [improve]. During the flood, we opened up the emergency shelters very quickly and we [were] having to move [people] around and open up a lot of different evacuation centers just because pretty much every roadway was flooded and you couldn't get from one place to another. It was really difficult for access issues and things like that. So how do you keep homeless individuals apprised of shelters if they're moving around? And not even just those individuals but just everyone across the board, because you don't want people driving through floodwaters or getting themselves in a high hazard situation.

He detailed the types of messaging before an event that would be useful to circulate, including where to get information, paying attention to your surroundings, and knowing when to seek higher ground and/or shelter.

The two emergency managers I met with also described their relationships with organizations that work with underserved groups, such as homeless and low-income individuals, as being collaborative and essential to emergency management planning and practice in the area. Rick, a city-level emergency manager in Boulder County, discussed the importance of these relationships:

I: How would you describe your relationships with organizations that serve low-income or homeless individuals?

R: I think it is very good. And it's something that I place a large emphasis on. And it's something that.. it's a relationship that's important to me, that I try to continue to put resources in.

He continued by later describing planning for vulnerable populations this way:

I think [planning for vulnerable populations] is an office-wide agenda item. I think it's something that we all believe in as being important. I think it's just the actual agency connections that I do, but it's an office-wide.. I think citywide thing, really. I mean it's something that we talk about a lot as we plan across departments. It's not just an [office of emergency management] thing. I think it's a citywide thing. We have a very strong connection with our community service groups, which you know we have kind of a unique—not really unique—but we have a very strong neighborhood group program. We have established city-sponsored neighborhood groups that we put resources in. We have a neighborhood group leader position that kind of helps build relationships with neighborhoods that we use as a vehicle to help emergency management resiliency. So it's not just a me or my office thing. It is a citywide kind of issue.

In talking about organizational relationships following the floods, Rick discussed the sheltering issues that arose with the homeless community and emphasized the importance of these relationships in creating sheltering solutions:

I think one of the key places during this whole recovery period was the disaster shelters... One of the deficiencies that we found during that process that we've since fixed is we have great relationships with our homeless service providers and our social services agencies, but we did not leverage those during that sheltering time. We have since fixed

that, but for example, the city staff that worked at the Memorial Building [shelter]..we used city staff to man our shelters. We don't use the Red Cross.

[We] don't necessarily have the relationship with the homeless that the homeless service providers do, so there were challenges there that we've now fixed. So I think the relationships that we had, we didn't necessarily leverage the best we could. So as soon as we have an activation now, we have homeless service providers come in and help with the homeless [population] and the homeless people that come in because there's a shelter open... So now we can either move that section of the population to a more appropriate place or provide the services that's needed.

Matthew (BOEM) explained that as part of addressing homeless persons' needs during disaster, they have a representative from a homeless-serving organization sit in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) when the EOC is activated:

We have a homeless and transient population advocate who's on the board of—I can't remember specifically what the board's called, but she's very active in that community. She actually works in our Emergency Operations Center as a volunteer. She works with us and can provide support. And that's just as a volunteer, to be able to kind of help when necessary, provide additional subject matter expertise.

Matthew was not aware of how much this advocate worked on the “preparedness side,” but he explained that they rely on the expertise of the Housing and Human Services and Community Services departments for population-specific preparedness-related activities:

For the preparedness side, we typically work through our Housing and Human Services as well as Community Services folks.. just because they're the ones dealing with [the homeless community] on a day to day basis. And they deal with all the different homeless shelters and those types of things.³²

Notably, the summer before the floods occurred in 2013, HSO leadership met with county officials who assured them that the emergency plan for the county includes anyone present in the county, and that homeless people would be treated like any other person if a disaster event were to occur. Matthew began working at the BOEM shortly before the floods, so

³² The Boulder County Community Services Department provides a range of services in the community to promote self-sufficiency and improve quality of life for people in the county. Although none of the divisions within this department work exclusively with the homeless community, they include specialized divisions such as the Area Agency on Aging, Community Justice Services, and Workforce Boulder County (Boulder County 2017c).

he was unaware of these discussions. However, he noted the importance of having homeless service collaborations in place so that BOEM could disseminate messages to those networks and HSOs could then find the most appropriate ways to communicate to their clients or target populations. He later maintained that planning for vulnerable groups is inherent in all planning:

Yeah, because especially for vulnerable groups, it's included in the [whole community] concept... So that whole community concept is part of our doctrine that we're looking at when we're planning to make sure that we're accounting for all populations.

Regarding “best practices” documents created for city planners and emergency planners, Matthew describes the problem with these toolkits and white papers, noting the difficulty with putting these plans into action during response and recovery, stating:

This happens so often, like we have the best practices out there. We just need to put them together.. Because these guidance documents and all these things that are like fifty pages long are great for planning. [But] during the recovery and during the response they're useless because no one has the time to go through them.

He later identified a general need for brief “one-pagers” responders could reference during an event.

As evidenced by the above examples, planning for homeless communities, while challenging—especially in areas with limited or no HSOs—requires preexisting relationships and efforts to build rapport with various members of the homeless community so as to identify avenues for communication, knowledge of where homeless individuals reside, and how to prepare in advance for any issues that may occur during evacuation and sheltering. Planning also necessitates information in quickly digestible formats so that emergency managers, even when working under constrained circumstances, may be able to access these documents and adapt such guidance to the community setting.

Responsibility for the Homeless Community

Throughout interviews with public officials, a common thread of discourse emerged regarding who should be responsible for homeless persons. Although not always explicitly mentioned, there was quite a bit of diffusion of responsibility for how to work with homeless populations during a disaster event. Understandably, HSOs typically work most extensively with the homeless community, but this fails to address homelessness as a holistic social issue that should be attended to on multiple fronts. As Rick, a city manager explained, dealing with the homeless population is always “somebody else’s problem.” This is a frustration that permeates interviews with HSO staff as well, which I describe in the next chapter.

Some of the interviews with public officials and community stakeholders included discussions surrounding the appropriateness of and responsibility for improving the conditions of homeless individuals after the floods. Some maintained that it was not their agency’s responsibility to find housing for homeless individuals as a result of a disaster, but instead to either get them back to the positions they were in before or to provide a more stable source of shelter. For example, Madeline, who works at Boulder County HHS, inquired about her department’s role in improving peoples’ livelihoods after disaster from what it was before the event occurred.³³

*How can I say this? If we don’t have the support beforehand, should we have them during a disaster? Not **should** [verbal emphasis], but .. We can’t all of a sudden find housing for them, right? That’s my perspective. We can’t all of a sudden provide shelter for them long-term. Thank goodness they have some reprieve from their usual circumstances, especially if it’s in winter, but we can’t do more than we normally do. So they can kind of go with the stream of people that are coming through the [disaster assistance centers], but if they were to come for case management and housing*

³³Importantly, not all homeless people necessarily want to move into permanent housing.

assistance, they have to have been flood-affected, right? Or disaster-affected. That's kind of the lens that we look at things through, if that makes sense.

If they were in the path of the disaster and they lost their tent, really our job is to put people back to where they were before. If they lost their tent, do we now provide them a rental unit? I meant that's a struggle. And where do you draw the line?.. We cant provide housing and we can't provide rental assistance for every single person, every homeless person, who are out in the elements in a disaster. There's not the infrastructure for that. There's not the funding for that. And then if we helped them, what about the people that were renting whose house got wiped away? ..So I think what happens is the disasters highlight homeless issues and low income [issues]. It's always the mobile home parks that get wiped out, right?... But we can't use disaster funds to fix the homeless problem.

Homelessness is a complex issue that requires collaborative, evidence-based efforts to remediate. Solutions must also be contextual and must be based upon a number of political, social, economic, and cultural considerations that may vary by region. However, HSOs often take the bulk of responsibility for working with and advocating for homeless persons—both during and outside times of disaster. Especially as social service CBOs increasingly are tasked to serve as essential components of the U.S. social safety net, this calls into question the viability of these organizations to adequately address the unique needs of clients within the financial, political, and social bounds in which they operate. For example, as detailed in Chapter 5, many HSOs experience financial constraints on a day-to-day basis that limit them from preparing for disasters. These considerations must be taken into account as we continue to discuss ways of building community resilience.

Chapter Summary and Discussion

This chapter presented a number of examples that demonstrate the ways in which homeless persons are marginalized both before and after a disaster. For example, actions that attempt to remediate homelessness are often faced with backlash and efforts to prevent affordable housing and homeless-service facilities from being built. I argue that these actions reflect attempts to keep or make undesirable populations invisible and to physically distance

homeless persons from “housed” members of the community, increasing their vulnerability to hazards. In the context of wildfire risk and homeless encampments, it is critical to examine the processes that lead homeless people to camp in these areas, which are typically driven by laws and practices that prohibit homeless persons from seeking shelter in public spaces. People wanting to avoid ticketing may find relief in more remote areas. All of this, of course, must be considered within the context of a lack of affordable housing.

In situating the findings from this chapter within the PAR model, where criminalization and a lack of affordable or supportive housing represent dynamic pressures that create unsafe conditions, it is first critical to understand the neoliberal context of Boulder County. In many ways, Boulder does not appear to conform with what is commonly thought of as neoliberal governance. For example, the city and county is rather progressive in terms of strong regulations around flood plain management, building codes, and land-use planning (Boulder County 2017d, 2017e). However, in other respects, it pursues neoliberal goals by other means through homeless criminalization and limits to growth. Growth limitation may sound counterintuitive to neoliberal goals, however, efforts within the county to limit growth has the effect of making it difficult to build affordable housing and raising property values for those fortunate enough to own their own homes.

While Boulder predominantly is seen as a liberal hub for progressive ideas and initiatives—which in many ways it is—Boulder County still operates within the context of a neoliberal governance regime. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, there are variations in neoliberal political economic arrangements. There is no ideal type of neoliberalism, which makes it difficult to identify spatial units such as cities, counties, and states as being purely “neoliberalized.” Illustratively, if the City and County of Boulder were situated along a spectrum

of neoliberalization it arguably may be described as having minimal neoliberal influence, but processes of neoliberalization, as demonstrated in this chapter, nonetheless exist and produce inequality and vulnerability. As another way of understanding neoliberalization in Boulder County, it is useful to compare it alongside an area that is heavily influenced by processes of neoliberalization: Houston, Texas. Houston, and Harris County more broadly, is characterized by rampant profit-driven development in flood and hazard-prone areas (Bogost 2017; Cohen 2017; Kotkin 2017). In the context of Hurricane Harvey, years of deregulation and unconstrained growth in floodplains has constituted what will certainly be one of the most destructive and costly disasters the U.S. has witnessed (Quealy 2017). At the time of this writing, the effects of Hurricane Harvey continue to unfold, but early reports and preliminary findings point to the heightened vulnerability in the region as having resulted from such unfettered development (Bogost 2017; Cohen 2017; Kotkin 2017).

Rounding back to the PAR model, I have argued that neoliberalism, as a root cause of vulnerability, has produced dynamic pressures in the form of homeless criminalization, decreased federal funding for social services, and increased pressure on CBOs such as HSOs in serving as central components of the U.S. social safety net. These pressures result in unsafe conditions in the form of budget constraints among HSOs in Boulder County and limited options for shelter and housing, which I will discuss in the upcoming chapters. Even in an area characterized by liberal ideals, homelessness is viewed as an abhorrent divergence from what neoliberal regimes identify as being “normal” or successful. Neoliberal ideology justifies exclusion and control of certain populations by defining them as “undeserving” or “disposable.” According to neoliberal ideology, an individual’s inability or lack of desire to participate in the formal economy warrants their exclusion and distancing. Dynamic pressures in the form of

increased criminalization of homeless populations, as well as processes that limit or prevent affordable housing, contribute to homeless persons' vulnerability to disaster in that they must find shelter within the limited confines of what is available.

These trends, in conjunction with increased dependence on social service organizations for providing basic needs, weaken efforts to remediate homelessness and poverty and to enhance community resilience. The growing reliance on non-governmental organizations, such as community-based social service organizations, is an outcome of neoliberalization processes such as increased privatization and outsourcing of social services once managed by the federal government. Processes that exclude certain populations and strain social service organizations directly contradict efforts to build community resilience. In the chapter that follows, I discuss the implications of these trends at a local level, where I illustrate the experiences of HSOs in serving their clients and advocating on behalf of the homeless community during the floods.

CHAPTER V

ORGANIZATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Community-based organizations (CBOs) are essential components of the U.S. social safety net. They provide critical resources to clients in need of food, affordable housing, rental assistance and a number of other indispensable social services on a daily basis. CBOs' client bases often represent the most socially vulnerable groups in society, including, but not limited to, older adults, children, non-English speaking populations, and homeless individuals and families. Especially as trends in poverty, affordable housing, and homelessness proliferate, these non-governmental entities fill service gaps while assisting an increasing number of individuals in need (Poppendieck 2000; Salamon 2012; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). Despite the critical role CBOs fill in U.S. civil society, few studies have examined disaster preparedness within CBOs (for exceptions see Ritchie and Tierney (2008), Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert (2010), Hipper, Orr, and Chernak (2015), and Gin et al. (2016)), and even fewer have analyzed the experiences of CBOs during disaster (Robinson and Murphy 2014). Community-based, homeless-serving organizations (HSOs) perform an important role in the lives of many homeless persons, acting as a conduit between clients and needed resources and services, such as shelter, food, case management, and therapy.

This chapter presents findings from seventeen interviews with staff from six HSOs, one mental health organization that serves homeless individuals as part of its mission, and one church-led initiative in Boulder County. The findings from this chapter speak to three areas of inquiry: 1) What were the flood experiences of HSOs during the 2013 flood?; 2) What influences HSOs' decisions or ability to prepare or not prepare for disasters?; 3) Did they face obstacles in providing services during a disaster event, and how, if at all, are those obstacles related to their

clients' marginalized social status?³⁴ The following sections describe the roles of CBOs during disaster, provide an overview of HSOs in Boulder County, including descriptions of HSOs included in this study and the clients they serve, and present insights from interviewees about the daily concerns of their organizations. In the latter half of the chapter, I present findings from staff interviews regarding disaster planning within their organizations and the experiences of HSOs during the floods. I conclude with a summary and discussion of the chapter. In so doing, I argue that HSOs experience compounded vulnerability in that they operate within a demanding context with limited resources while also serving a population with distinctive needs during disaster.

Role of Community-Based Organizations in Disaster

Over the past several years, CBOs increasingly have taken on responsibility as a critical component of the U.S. social safety net (Hipper, Orr, and Chernak 2015; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). As a result of rising income inequality, decreased federal funding for low-income programs, and elevated rates of poverty, CBOs struggle to keep up with a growing population in need of their services (Poppendieck 2000; Salamon 2012; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). Despite this, they are often called upon to serve as exemplars of resilience and participate in disaster-related activities within communities (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2017; Hipper, Orr, and Chernak 2015; Koch et al. 2016; Tierney 2013). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) identifies CBOs as fundamental actors within the agency's "Whole Community" approach to disaster preparedness. CBOs, in addition to other community actors such as schools, the media, and businesses, are called upon to share responsibility for preparedness (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2017). This approach "recognizes community-based (CBO) leaders and important partners due to their comprehensive

³⁴ Findings from this chapter build upon work discussed within my master's thesis (Vickery 2015).

understanding of surrounding communities” (Koch et al. 2016:1). However, many CBOs are constrained in their ability to prepare for disaster along multiple fronts related to funding, staff time, and a lack of necessary expertise (Gin et al. 2016; Hipper, Orr, and Chernik 2015; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010). As Liesel Ritchie and colleagues (2010:35) found in their study of preparedness of San Francisco CBOs:

Resource shortages, overwhelming staff demands, and lack of concrete guidance are largely responsible for a lack of community-based organization preparedness. Organizations generally lack the funds, staff time, and guidance information that would enable them to become better prepared for future disasters. Community-based organizations’ needs include funding for disaster-planning specialists, advice from consultants and other experts, guidance on what constitutes effective preparedness planning, enhanced funding for preparedness, and other forms of assistance.

In a disaster context, CBOs often expand services and assist individuals outside of their typical client base. This includes helping to address disaster survivors’ unmet needs through resource distribution, donations management, and case management, to name but a few examples. Many of these organizations often conduct such activities even if disaster response is not a central part of their mission (Green, Kleiner, and Montgomery 2007; Stys 2011). Therefore, continuity of operations for CBOs during a disaster are critical, as they will likely be even more relied upon following a disaster (Gin et al. 2016). However, as Thomas Hipper and colleagues (2015:110) found in their study of human service agencies in the metro region of southeastern Pennsylvania, many nonprofit human service organizations believed that they would not be able to meet the heightened demand for their services following disaster:

Many agencies without a traditional disaster relief focus did not perceive that they had a role in disaster response and believed that they could not meet the additional demands of disaster response and preparedness, particularly in light of recent budget cuts. “Every day is an emergency for us,” was a theme that recurred throughout interviews with agency directors.

This narrative is consistent with findings of Ritchie and colleagues in their study of San Francisco CBOs (2010). Clients unable to access services from these organizations may have

limited options for obtaining assistance following an extreme event, further necessitating CBO resources, staff, and continuity planning to maintain operations. Homeless individuals reliant on HSOs, for example, will likely experience additional constraints in receiving aid and have an amplified need for HSO services (Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Tierney 2013). June Gin and co-authors (2016:2) illustrate these issues, stating:

As compared with other CBOs that serve vulnerable populations, homeless-serving organizations providing emergency shelter or transitional housing have unique preparedness responsibilities because of their residential services. Homeless providers often address other basic needs, such as food, counseling, job training, and health care, or facilitate residents' ability to access such services.

It is all the more critical for CBOs working with vulnerable groups to remain a consistent and trusted source of information and sanctuary during disaster. However, HSOs will likely find themselves in unique predicaments during disaster in terms of organizational efforts to maintain continuity of operations for clients dependent on basic needs.

A majority of staff interviews in this study reported a lack of resources, staff time, and funding as major daily concerns within their organizations. This hinders HSOs' ability to prepare for disaster, as resources are allocated to more immediate concerns. Especially as efforts to increase community disaster resilience continue to stress nonprofits, it is imperative to recognize the factors that constrain these organizations on a daily basis. Kathleen Tierney summarizes this concern, stating that "[i]t is especially ironic that civil society institutions, especially those that serve the most vulnerable, have been 'discovered' as major contributors to community and disaster resilience at the exact time when they are most at risk." She further argues, "[f]or them, the disaster is already present, in the form of declining budgets, uncertain funding streams, and ever-expanding service demands" (2013:17). I now turn to descriptions of HSOs in the study, as well as the daily organizational concerns they experience.

HSO Characteristics

At the start of this study, roughly twenty HSOs operated within Boulder County. These organizations offer a multitude of services to homeless and low-income individuals, ranging from case management, emergency shelter, transitional housing, food distribution, to mental health services and job training.³⁵ HSOs in Boulder County also vary in terms of size as well as the type of client base they predominantly serve. For example, while the HSOs included in this dissertation work primarily with single homeless adults and individuals on the brink of homelessness, other organizations serve homeless families and families at risk of homelessness, domestic violence survivors, and homeless and runaway youth. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, a number of HSOs in the City of Boulder recently have undergone either significant programmatic transformations or have shut down key operations. I acknowledge these changes and recognize that this restructuring undoubtedly reduces the ability of existing HSOs to prepare for and respond to disasters. Although not ignoring the changes that occurred in the social service provision landscape in Boulder since the beginning of this study, this chapter focuses on the challenges and experiences of HSOs present in Boulder County during the 2013 floods.

The eight organizations represented in this dissertation include six community-based HSOs, one mental health organization that works with homeless individuals, and one church-led initiative and support group that serves homeless women.³⁶ These organizations operate in multiple cities within Boulder County (Boulder, Longmont, and Lyons). As illustrated in Table 3, the organizations differ in the types of key services they provide. Each organization also

³⁵ I initially retrieved information about HSOs in Boulder County through multiple websites. I recognize that this may not be an exhaustive list of all groups serving the homeless community due to the fact that some groups and initiatives may not have webpages or may not be formally recognized.

³⁶ All but one of these organizations, Homeless Women's Outreach, are registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. This means that they are recognized as tax-exempt through the Internal Revenue Service, because they operate charitable programs.

differs by the number of paid staff and volunteers, ranging from organizations that rely strictly on volunteer time to those with over 400 employees. Aside from these two organizations, the HSOs in this study employ, on average, eighteen individuals. Despite the disparities in paid staff—whether full- or part-time—all but one of these organizations serve hundreds and even over a thousand unique homeless clients each year, with the exception being the informal church group that sees roughly four to seven homeless individuals per week. The HSOs that provide emergency or day shelter annually serve an average of 1,125 unique clients.

In an effort to uphold the anonymity of participating organizations, I refrained from including specific information in the table below, including the number of employees and clients served. I refer to these organizations with the pseudonyms Boulder Helping Boulder, House of Hope, Boulder Emergency Refuge, Boulder Professionals, Homeless Women’s Outreach, Longmont Assistance Group, Longmont Basic Needs, and Boulder County Emergency Assistance throughout the remainder of my dissertation.

Table 3. Overview of Organizations³⁷

Organization	Key Service(s)	Number of Interviewees
<i>Boulder Helping Boulder*</i>	Emergency shelter, transitional housing, food and resource distribution, street outreach, and case management	5
<i>House of Hope*</i>	Day shelter, case management, work programs, transitional housing, resource center	4
<i>Boulder Emergency Refuge*</i>	Emergency shelter	2
<i>Boulder Professionals</i>	Mental health services—psychiatry, therapy, prescription	2
<i>Homeless Women’s Outreach</i>	Women’s support group, faith-based organization	1
<i>Longmont Assistance Group</i>	Basic needs, case management, rental and utilities assistance, transportation, daily hot meals	1
<i>Longmont Basic Needs</i>	Street outreach, emergency assistance, storage, emergency shelter, transportation, showers, case management	1
<i>Boulder County Emergency Assistance</i>	Food pantry, case management, basic needs provision, flood recovery services	1

HSO staff interviewees held a variety of positions, ranging from executive-level and administrative staff to board members and case managers who were heavily involved in the ground-level operations of their respective organizations. While all interviewees interacted rather closely with homeless clients, some worked more with the homeless community than others, such as case managers, shelter managers, and members of outreach teams. They included both paid and volunteer staff. The range of positions afforded me variance in the types of perspectives I received about the clients HSOs serve, the Boulder homeless community more generally, and

³⁷ An asterisk following the pseudonym of an organization indicates that I also carried out participant observation at this site.

the flood experiences of Boulder HSOs. When presenting findings and quotes from interviewees, I note the participant's position within their organization.

Client Demographics

Client demographics vary minimally from one organization to the next, which is due in large part to the fact that clients receiving services from one organization are likely to receive services from other organizations in the area (e.g., showers, case management, and food). Further, each organization tracks clients differently, with some facilities conducting intake directly at the door and others tracking clients through resource distribution numbers and "best guesses." For example, at Boulder Professionals, it is difficult to track the number of clients seeking mental health services because clients are given the choice to schedule appointments formally through Boulder Professionals or to join in "walk-up" sessions at participating HSOs.

Overall, as reported through HSOs, a majority of adult (ages 18+) homeless clients in Boulder County are White (roughly 90%), male (roughly 65-75%), with a large portion of clients in between the ages of forty to fifty-five (though this can vary slightly from year to year). Client demographics provided by HSOs in Boulder County largely reflect demographic data collected from the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) survey conducted by the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative (Metro Denver Homeless Initiative 2016). Methodologically, as described in Chapter 3, point-in-time surveys, while useful, are an imperfect strategy for capturing an accurate "picture" of homelessness.³⁸ Similarly, tracking clients is sometimes a difficult endeavor for certain HSOs—especially those that function as safety-net shelters or resource-distribution centers without strict intake procedures.

³⁸ Examples of methodological limitations include a narrow definition of homelessness and difficulty tracking individuals not present in shelters. A thorough description of limitations can be found in the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative annual survey reports. See Metro Denver Homeless Initiative 2013.

HSO staff noted a seasonal variation in the number of clients they receive, with an increase in clients arriving in the winter for emergency shelter and supplies such as coats, blankets, and socks. Some interviewees referenced a "core group" of homeless clients present in the county year-round. For example, roughly 300-500 homeless individuals reside in the City of Boulder year-round, with 80-100 "core" homeless adults in Longmont. These numbers can increase to over 2,000 during certain times of the year when individuals move through the state to either camp in the summer months or seek shelter and resources in the winter months. The numbers of reported homeless individuals in Lyons and Nederland are more difficult to gauge, as they often camp in remote areas or on private land, but staff and community stakeholder interviewees indicated that the numbers are substantially lower than those found in more urban areas. In addition to the seasonal fluctuation of clients organizations experience, certain services receive more/fewer clients than others and may serve particular subgroups of the homeless community. As an example, Boulder Helping Boulder houses a street outreach program that provides blankets, food, and other supplies to individuals sleeping on the streets or camping. Volunteers distribute these resources and track the number of items they give away each night rather than tracking individuals served. Annette, a staff member in this program, noted,

what really surprised me with starting [my new position with the outreach team] is that there's so many people who [we] see that the larger [Boulder Helping Boulder organization] will never see, so it's definitely a different group that it's serving.

Roughly 50-60 percent of clients at each organization self-report mental health and/or substance abuse issues. However, interviews with staff indicated that this number is likely much higher than what self-reported numbers reveal. As one staff member at Boulder Helping Boulder described:

The amount of mental health issues is incredibly disproportionate to the regular.. "mainstream community," I guess. We have about four out of ten clients [who] will report having mental health issues. But if you just took a poll of staff.. It would probably be

more like eight [out] of ten. We have a lot of people that are afraid of getting a diagnosis or they won't admit to it if they've already had one. So numbers, as far as mental health issues go, tend to be really, really warped.

Several HSO staff pressed that although general patterns exist among the client base (e.g., White, middle aged males), it is important to not generalize this population. While it is difficult to obtain accurate information about clients' histories, staff interviewees explain that there are multiple pathways to homelessness and financial instability. Some clients became homeless as a result of unfortunate financial circumstances, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following their time in military service, and/or substance abuse and other physical health-related conditions that impede their ability to work or pay for health-related expenses.³⁹ The diverse and critical needs of the Boulder homeless community speak to the significance of HSOs as a consistent source of refuge, counsel, and provider of basic necessities. Even for homeless persons who only utilize HSO services seasonally or sporadically, having these institutions in the community provides an essential safety net.

HSOs' Daily Concerns

In order to develop a better understanding of the context in which HSOs in Boulder operate, I wanted to learn about the concerns and pressures HSOs face on a daily basis. While interviewing staff, I asked “Can you describe some of your organization’s major concerns and challenges, other than disasters?” I coded their responses around commonly stated issues, which included: funding, staffing, their ability to provide needed services, the wellbeing of clients, space constraints, and affordable housing. However, funding, staffing, and the ability to deliver needed services to clients were three overarching themes that consistently emerged in responses

³⁹ This information is triangulated with MDHI Point-In-Time survey results from 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016.

from HSO staff. I discuss these themes together, as funding constraints are connected to staffing and service provision concerns.

Several interviewees reported that private donations, both individual and corporate, constituted the largest funding base for Boulder HSOs.⁴⁰ Individual donations constitute a major component of the funding bases for HSOs. On average, individual donations constitute roughly forty percent of the funding for HSOs providing case management, emergency shelter, and food provision. While all but one HSO in this study received government funding (primarily through county grants), the proportion of such funding varies substantially from one organization to the next. For example, Boulder Helping Boulder receives over thirty-five percent of its funding from city and county government grants while House of Hope receives fifteen percent in government funding. Efforts to diversify funding are a top priority for many executive-level staff. Kristin, an executive-level employee at Longmont Basic Needs notes how important it is for her organization to receive funding from a range of sources, explaining that:

I'm working toward a perfect "three-legged stool" [for funding sources]. So equal parts from foundations, individuals, and fundraising. But we're still top heavy on foundations and grants, which includes the city ... You don't want to rely on any individual source for most of your funding. If all the grants go away tomorrow, then uh-oh what are we going to do?

The constant need and efforts to acquire money from a diverse funding base impedes the ability of many HSOs to focus on challenges outside of day-to-day operations. Relatedly, many organizations are unable to keep up with demand even outside of a disaster situation. As one HSO executive-level employee explained,

You know, the biggest challenge is there's always more demand than we can meet. And that ties in to finances and funding things.. But ... that's been a challenge since we opened the doors and it continues to be.

⁴⁰ Note that some interviewees were not in a position to report funding statistics. The numbers presented here came from executive-level employees and/or annual reports from organizations.

As a direct outcome of the funding landscape, several HSOs in Boulder County are heavily reliant on volunteer time to try to meet service provision needs. When volunteers are unable to assist, staff are further strained in their ability to provide assistance and attention to clients. For example, Rita, the sole case manager at Longmont Assistance Group who case manages roughly 250 individuals a month, described feeling overwhelmed by the number of clients she works with:

I had no volunteers this week. So, anyway, I do the best I can. They have started giving me a part-time person next door, because I'm kind of overwhelmed at times with the amount of folks. And we have a lot of new people. I've had like 53 new clients this month, and that may not sound like a lot, but it's a lot to keep track of.

Similarly, Courtney, a case manager at House of Hope, works with two other case managers who in all see an average of 150 clients each day. This severely limits her ability to provide case management services to clients in need, which includes mentoring and assistance for job market preparedness and placement, budgeting, and housing support.

Michelle at Boulder Helping Boulder expressed the desire to increase pay for staff, but notes the obligations her organization has to donors:

Our staff is amazing. They get abused,[and] they make really difficult decisions,. They make above minimum wage, but not enough above minimum wage. It's been a priority for [our organization] for a long time, but it's difficult to weigh out treating your employees right and also providing as many services as you can for the clients. Also, when donors are looking at organizations, sometimes they'll say like, "well what percentage of the funds are going to what?" And they don't view paying staff members as providing a service for the clients, which is bullshit because that's the biggest service that we provide. If we can provide people who are well-rested and who get to leave the stressful job and go home and not worry about how they're going to get dinner that night, that's gonna be the best thing for the clients.

Michelle's point supports findings from Gin and colleagues (2016:2) in that because HSOs are typically nonprofit organizations, "they are embedded within funding structures that are controlled by the government, philanthropic donations, or some combination thereof." Especially

if donors do not prioritize disaster preparedness, HSOs are limited in their ability to plan for disasters. Constraints pertaining to funding and staffing, as I demonstrate in the next section, directly affect the level of attention and time HSOs can dedicate toward disaster planning.

In addition to the aforementioned daily concerns among Boulder HSOs, some interviewees also noted problems with space constraints and the lack of affordable housing in the region. These ongoing issues have direct and indirect effects on HSOs' ability to serve clients. For instance, as Courtney at House of Hope explained to me, "*our operation space is really our biggest hurdle.*" Space constraints were evident during our interview, as Courtney and I met in a cramped office with two desks and another staff member counseling clients while we met. While organizations such as House of Hope expressed a desire to expand or move facilities to accommodate a larger operation, lack of community buy-in for such development presents an additional barrier.

As described in Chapter 4, this type of community pushback is not limited to homeless facility developments, but also affordable housing in the region. Rita, a case manager at the Longmont Assistance Group, describes affordable housing as one of her organization's biggest concerns.

Well, major concerns and challenges is the housing. The affordable housing. First of all, we don't get it here in Longmont. Everybody that works here deserves to live here if they choose to do that. And ... we've got to have these basic service jobs, grocery stores, certified nursing assistants... you know? All of those people that are in the hospitals and nursing homes that help—[and] our food servers that help get this community working, they don't understand that they can't live here if they're making under ten bucks an hour, under twelve bucks an hour. They can't do that. In 2011 they did away with inclusionary zoning—the city council did—and, which [had] meant that everything that was built, ten percent of it, had to be affordable. By doing away with that, the things that have been built since then have been unaffordable ... So, nothing [affordable] has been built. And so, we're advocates and we're helping our clients be advocates for themselves to say "I've lived here all my life. I'm now a senior adult and I'm on disability, and I have been removed from my house." Because... a rental house that I've lived in for 15-17 years,

[now landlords] can get more money. And so, this just doesn't seem right. It's an issue of justice, fairness.

She explained that the floods exacerbated this shortage. Some advocates in Longmont have pushed for inclusionary zoning, but have been met with pushback from realtors and developers who would make less money from such development. Because of lack of affordable housing, Rita indicated that she has nowhere to send clients, so she encourages them to move out of Boulder County to find more affordable places to live. Juanita, a board member and previous employee at Boulder Emergency Refuge, elaborated on the issue with placing homeless clients into affordable housing, stating:

The vacancy rate is now tinier than it was before. There wasn't affordable housing to start out with, and people that are sort of complex, multi-problem kind of people aren't exactly the people that landlords want. Landlords, of course, choose the most functional people that they can choose because of their own economic interest.

Important to note is that the annual point-in-time surveys in the Denver metro region have consistently shown affordability of housing as a top concern and a major precursor to homelessness among those surveyed.

Disaster Planning

CBOs, as found in prior research, experience difficulties in preparing for disasters and prioritizing planning as part of their operations (Gin et al. 2016; Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010). Scholars have noted CBOs' barriers to preparedness, which are typically derived from a lack of funding, limited to nonexistent training and education for developing plans, and staffing constraints (Chikoto et al. 2013; Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010; Stys 2011). Because many CBOs rely on external funding sources—often with conditions—from private donations and/or government grants, they are limited in the ways they can allocate funds. Disaster preparedness activities rarely are included in

these stipulations, as funders prioritize existing programs and activities (Froelich 1999; Gin et al. 2016; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010). Moreover, as Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert (2010:22) found in their study of San Francisco CBOs' disaster preparedness, organizations with larger budgets "were more likely to have a plan than those with lower funding levels." HSOs financial priorities typically lie in making sure that clients' daily needs are addressed and that resources can be apportioned to staffing in order to keep up with demand.

A majority of organizations in this study were unprepared for a disaster of the magnitude of the 2013 floods. In fact, only one organization represented in the subsample, Boulder Professionals, with a staff load of over 400 individuals, had people dedicated to emergency planning and disaster response prior to the floods. In the other organizations represented in this study, emergency planning responsibilities primarily fell on the executive directors and other executive-level staff who were already constrained by other responsibilities. Although nearly all organizations had some type of internal planning for physical location-based incidents, such as a fire, these plans did not incorporate continuity of operations procedures following disaster or communication plans among organizations.⁴¹ For example, HSOs had fire evacuation plans for their physical locations as well as formal and informal communication plans for other organizations. Boulder Serving Boulder had preexisting relationships with the Regional Transportation District (RTD) in the event that the facility would need to be evacuated. This follows similar findings from other studies that have examined CBO disaster preparedness (Gin et al. 2016; Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010).

⁴¹ Organizations such as Homeless Women's Outreach and Boulder Emergency Refuge, did not dedicate much time to internal disaster planning due to the fact that they infrequently operated in a physical setting (Homeless Women's Outreach) or had no stable, organization-owned facility (Boulder Emergency Refuge). Boulder Emergency Refuge, for example, operates out of multiple churches within and around the City of Boulder rather than one fixed location.

Some HSOs in Boulder recognized the need for disaster planning for the homeless community before the floods. Three organizations in the City of Boulder—House of Hope, Boulder Emergency Refuge, and, in a limited capacity, Boulder Helping Boulder—met prior to the floods to discuss inter-organizational disaster communication planning. However, this plan was not solidified before the floods. In fact, the day the flooding began to intensify, as Courtney of House of Hope explained, these organizations had planned to meet to finalize their inter-organizational plan.

So us and [Boulder Emergency Refuge] had been working—at that point it was just us and [Boulder Emergency Refuge]... [We] were working on some internal planning. We were actually supposed to finalize the plan the morning of the flood. And so now it's been, you know, completely revamped because we actually learned a lot from the flood. Like what to expect.. challenges to expect, but also things that we hadn't anticipated—[like] the fact that RTD shut down. None of us had internally thought about the fact that people could.. that the RTD would shut down and that would leave certain staffers stranded and not be able to do things that we put into the plan.

Although some organizations had collaborated before the floods to create an inter-organizational plan, they did not view disaster planning as an immediate concern, because they were operating under the assumption that homeless individuals would be provided the same services and resources as the rest of the community. This is because, the summer before the floods, HSOs were invited by county-level officials to learn about the county-level emergency management plan and were assured that members of the homeless community would be cared for like any other disaster-affected individual during a disaster. One executive director explained that,

[w]e were educated on the county's emergency management plan...that was explained to us as [that] anyone who was in the county [during a time of disaster] falls under the emergency management plan...[we were working under the] assumption that we really didn't need to worry about major disasters because the county sort of oversees that.

Other reasons for a lack of disaster planning were related to the nature of homelessness and the “crisis-like” context that many HSOs find themselves in on a regular basis. Terry, an

administrative-level employee at Boulder Helping Boulder, summarized the reason why his organization did not dedicate time to disaster planning, arguing that, “*homelessness is a disaster. Everything we do is about serving a disaster.*” Other interviewees also viewed homelessness as a disaster and their organizations’ everyday operations as a form of crisis management, meaning that they encounter everyday emergencies in ensuring that clients’ needs are being met and that funding streams are viable.

Since the floods, some interviewees explained that their organizations were undertaking disaster planning that incorporated challenges they experienced or witnessed. For example, some staff noted the need for them to have a more comprehensive understanding of the Boulder County emergency response plan.⁴² However, even after the floods, some staff explained that it's "hard to plan for these things," and that planning for disasters really comes down to available resources and prioritization of funding. Terry at Boulder Helping Boulder illustrated this quandary:

We could really spend a lot of time and effort trying to develop an emergency plan that would coordinate where we would put people if we had to empty the building. And we establish this partnership and this understanding, and then a year later the leadership in one of those agencies would change and everything would be forgotten in a file somewhere, and we'd be at square one once again. So again, what is an effective use of our resources in response to the possibility that we might have to exit this building?

I don't want you to get the wrong impression. If we had all the resources in the world then we could make specific plans, that would probably benefit some of the homeless that would otherwise be affected more by natural disaster than, let's say your average citizen ... there's no question there are certain vulnerable sub-sets of the homeless population that would be more vulnerable than even your average homeless person, and what are we doing for them? If we had all the resources in the world, for sure, but given the infrequency of acute disaster, where do we spend our resources? And so, this is again the challenge that we all face around resources.

⁴² The continuity and applicability of any internal or inter-organizational planning that was developed following the floods is now uncertain as Boulder HSOs undergo significant restructuring.

He went on to express doubt in the effectiveness of disaster planning, arguing that:

I fully believe that no matter how much you try to prepare for some of that... you're really in that moment going to have to use your best resources that are available to you to solve the problem, because every situation is going to be unique. You can prepare, and the whole master plan is going to go on a file somewhere.

However, as I demonstrate in the upcoming sections, many HSO staff reported difficulties during the flood that could have been alleviated through more solidified internal and inter-organizational disaster plans, especially around issues of communication and memoranda of understanding between HSOs and other entities, such as the Red Cross and county-level agencies.

Flood Experiences of Boulder HSOs

Although Boulder County HSOs had varying experiences during the flood, there were a number of overarching themes common across organizations. Only two organizations—Boulder Professionals and Boulder Emergency Refuge—had flood damage at service or sheltering facilities, but they were able to adapt by moving operations to other locations. While staff initially dealt with changes in routine, nearly all interviewees reported that there were no *substantial* lasting disruptions to services. In many cases, organizations were able to conduct “business as usual” within a couple of weeks after the event. Despite minimal disruptions reported by HSO staff, HSOs experienced significant challenges during and immediately after the floods, which entailed heightened advocacy roles, staffing constraints, and communication issues. I describe these challenges in more detail in the following sections.

Heightened Advocacy Roles

In Chapter 4, I described an event in which several homeless persons were turned away from a Red Cross disaster shelter because they could not provide a home address. This incident directly contradicted earlier assurances that members of the homeless community would be taken

care of in a disaster event. During this time, staff from HSOs had to step in on behalf of their clients to ensure that they received the same services as other disaster-affected individuals. Once word had spread about homeless people being turned away, homeless advocates in the community—including executive-level staff and board members of HSOs—called the YMCA and city and county officials to resolve the issue. One executive director described her anger and frustration of having to advocate for homeless individuals during a time when she felt that such advocacy should have been unnecessary:

So on Thursday [during the floods], we gave everyone bus fare as soon as we knew that the emergency shelter—the disaster shelter—had opened, and [we] sent everyone there. And then people started getting turned away. And that was .. sort of [my] false assumption that it would be seamless... I was told, “oh no of course they’re welcome there” and then, “no, they’re not welcome there,” and “the police were called.” So a lot of clients went back to [our facility]... [We] probably would have kind of closed at that point or just at least been able to stay open and not be the only place people were allowed to be. So that was the biggest challenge I think, was figuring out the whole “wait a second, we weren’t prepared, because we didn’t know we had to be.”

She further criticized this incident, arguing:

We had to do a lot of negotiating on the behalf of our clients that felt a little bit.. like we felt responsible for a segment of the community. It shouldn’t just be nonprofits worrying about the poor and the physically frail... and the, you know...the vulnerable. It shouldn’t just be nonprofits that do this. It was like, sort of this lack of... I think acknowledgement that these people were in a disaster and are a part of the community.

Notably, this executive director experienced challenges of her own during the floods, as she was unable to make it to her organization or the disaster shelter due to raging floodwaters that prevented transportation from her home. Because of this impediment, she had to communicate with staff and public officials through her cell phone. In fact, this type of situation was common among organizations, as many HSO staff and volunteers were addressing their own flood-related crises either at home or for neighbors and loved ones. Staffing constraints, as I explain in the upcoming section, proved to be another obstacle for organizations during this time.

Several interviewees, without my initially mentioning the Red Cross incident, expressed anger, sadness, and confusion at what had occurred. To illustrate these sentiments, I provide multiple excerpts from interviewees regarding the event below.

Courtney (House of Hope):

My sense was that they did not even think that homeless people would show up... Natural disasters affect homeless people as well, and in a lot of ways, in a more severe manner than housed people... And you know, one of the comments that was made by a Red Cross worker to [a homeless person] was that, "you didn't have anything before the flood, so why are you so upset now?"

Juanita (Boulder Emergency Refuge):

I don't even know why I'm surprised by people's hatred and prejudice anymore. All I have to do is read the online comments in one Daily Camera article, and they're practically genocidal at times. I don't even read them anymore, because it's so sickening to me. I don't know why I'm surprised that it was just the same during [the floods], but it was... what's the fricking difference between someone who's homeless because their house is filled with water right now and someone that became homeless two weeks ago because of an economic issue?... But we all are vulnerable, and we all have our fault lines. Some people are lucky and theirs don't get triggered, and other people are not.

Judy (Boulder Professionals):

[The flood] does just really make me think about how the whole community relates to the homeless community... And I do think that there is some marginalization of the homeless community, and I think they felt that a little more strongly—at least some of them did—because of their experiences during the flood.

Terry (Boulder Helping Boulder):

But doesn't this just paint the whole picture of the problem in the country as a whole? I mean if someone, for whatever reason, hits the lowest rung on the ladder.. chronically every day, 365 days a year.. [There's] no hope for you, I mean that's an exaggeration but, "we're okay with you sleeping outside." But if some singular event occurs and you're displaced and you may have resources and relationships that can quickly swoop in.. we'll help you—as long as there seems to be an end date in sight—that's okay, we'll do that. But if you really have a big problem, if your life is a disaster, "eh we're not so interested in that." That could keep you up at night and really get you disgusted about how we process impairments and challenges that people face.

These quotes demonstrate the pervasive disconnect and stigma of the homeless community that HSO staff witness both as a result of serving homeless clients and/or living in

Boulder County. This shows how social distancing, as evident in Boulder County neighborhoods and communities when affordable housing or homeless-serving facilities are proposed, also operates in a disaster setting. According to Rita at the Longmont Assistance Group, shelters in the Longmont area also initially had excluded homeless persons, although I could not triangulate this through news articles or interviews with homeless participants and public officials. She explained that, without knowing, she had sent her clients to these shelters.

Initially they weren't going to let homeless people in [the emergency shelters]. So it was for families, and I thought, [a homeless individual is] a family of one.

Although HSO directors and board members quickly were able to remediate the initial exclusion of homeless individuals from public disaster shelters, homeless flood survivors were relegated to certain areas of the shelter or to other “disaster shelters.”

Importantly, not all homeless individuals had negative experiences during and following the flood, as I illustrate in the next chapter. However, an overwhelming number of staff and homeless participants noted the "separation of services" between predisaster housed and homeless individuals, which was directly associated with the stigma and marginalized status of homeless persons that prevents equal access to services that housed people received following the floods.

Even after the exclusion of homeless individuals was remedied, staff members were called upon to assist at the public disaster shelters. As Michelle at Boulder Helping Boulder described,

I was asked to go give support to the Red Cross volunteers, because we do this all the time, and because I know how to ask people to leave even when they're yelling at me. Even when they really have nowhere else to go. So what I was told was that I was going to kind of train and support and just be there for as long as they needed me to try to make it a safe space.

However by the time Michelle arrived, a second public shelter location was established on the university campus to serve homeless individuals:

It seems like they had sent most of their homeless clientele to the second location... And then when I get to the [second location], I knew everyone staying there except for two groups.

Courtney at House of Hope shared her efforts to assist at the public disaster shelter, stating:

There was that first couple of days I was going to the [evacuation] center several times a day for three or four days to try to help the Red Cross with homeless clients, because my personal feeling is that the Red Cross wasn't trained on how to deal with homeless people. There are some differences.. there's some specific concerns that come up around homeless people, which some are valid. Some are not. But [I was] just trying to help them deal with the situation. And almost every time I showed up, there was maybe three homeless people there, but you know, we were trying!

These experiences highlight the way in which homeless individuals' vulnerabilities may be exacerbated during a disaster event, and demonstrates the responsibility many HSOs felt in advocating for their clients to receive equal access to resources and services. This type of mediation work continued into recovery, as case managers assisted their clients with FEMA paperwork and the process of obtaining funds for lost items. Homeless persons lost a number of essential items during the floods, including, but not limited to, clothes, tents, important documents, and bikes. One HSO, House of Hope, worked closely with FEMA on behalf of homeless flood survivors, while other organizations provided addresses and phone numbers for clients to remain in contact with FEMA agents in their attempts to receive financial assistance for lost items.

Courtney, a case manager at House of Hope, described the challenges and frustration she experienced in attempting to learn and navigate the FEMA processes for clients. In the four months following the disaster, she extended her normal case management duties to act as a liaison between FEMA and her disaster-affected clients.

So, part of my role after the flood was.. all the letters came to me, [had to be] signed, notarized, and I [had to verify] that this person was a client of ours, how long we had known the client, and, to the best of my knowledge, where their camp spot was.

She did this kind of work for multiple clients over the course of roughly four to five months following the floods. Because the FEMA system was difficult or impossible for several clients to navigate on their own, case managers like Courtney had to learn the necessary language and processes for applying for assistance. This also included writing letters and making phone calls on behalf of clients. The absence of a home address before the flood in many ways hindered the recovery of homeless individuals trying to replace lost belongings. Fortunately, some clients were able to receive assistance for lost items, but according to case managers who worked with FEMA, there was no rhyme or reason as to who received resources and who did not, especially for homeless clients who kept their belongings in storage units that were damaged by the floods, some of whom were unable to receive assistance from FEMA.

Staffing

Many interviewees reported staffing as an additional issue their organizations experienced during the floods. All HSO staff that I interviewed lived within the county and many were located within flood-affected areas. A majority of interviewees were at home when they heard about the flooding, making it difficult for some to assist during a time of increased need. Vehicle and public transportation had become impossible in many areas within Boulder County, as roads were severed by floodwaters. For example, Susie at Homeless Women's Outreach explained that she was unable to drive into Boulder from her home in Longmont since Longmont was essentially "cut in half" by floodwaters. One executive director, as I mentioned above, was stranded at her home and physically could not come in to work or advocate in person about

sheltering issues with public officials and Red Cross shelter staff. Rita, a case manager at an HSO in Longmont, had to leave work early during the floods:

My house was flooding, and I needed to go see if I could get things taken care of. [But] I could not get in my neighborhood, so I came back to work... Because there wasn't anything I could do. So I, and at that time, I could not [get in contact] with my husband. So yeah, it was pretty dramatic...But I continued working. I mean, there wasn't anything I could do until the water subsided. You know, we left our animals in our house, [and a] boat came and got my husband.

Elizabeth, a staff member who worked closely with homeless individuals at Boulder Helping Boulder, was also affected during the floods. She commented that she and another staff member had experienced flood damage:

I lost like almost everything... I was homeless for a little while, which was interesting because I would tell people at the shelter and they would be like, "oh it's cool to have a staff member be homeless while working here."

During this critical time, staffing was certainly an issue as organizations scrambled to contact and recruit employees to step in on behalf of their clients and the larger homeless community, and to assist with extended operations.

HSOs that operated emergency shelters for the homeless community during a period that typically runs from mid-October to mid-April (weather depending), faced considerable challenges in calling in staff to work. When the floods hit in September, these operations were not open, nor were there enough staff on hand to open their facilities to a larger group of homeless persons.⁴³ It was difficult for mass emergency sheltering operations to open during the floods since they have fewer staff outside of the winter season. Zachary, an executive-level staff member at Boulder Helping Boulder, described the initial chaos in opening up the shelter early:

⁴³ During the floods, some HSOs such as Boulder Helping Boulder and Boulder Emergency Refuge, organized summer shelters for a limited number of homeless persons, but they did not have the staff or space to provide additional accommodations. During warmer weather, some homeless persons choose to camp outside or migrate to another location within or outside the state of Colorado.

We had to scramble to find staff to be able to open up early. And it was an incremental expense for us. The county has graciously offered to reimburse us for those expenses. So financially it wasn't a "burden." You know, one of those challenges that presented itself to us and some of our sister agencies as well was around our staff... We were trying to staff up in a time when we weren't anticipating. At the same time, we had a couple of our staff members essentially lose their houses, so they weren't available. We have a couple of people who live in the mountains or in the foothills who got stranded, who couldn't get in. The roads were washed so they couldn't get here. So we struggled a bit just to keep the place staffed because of all the challenges around transportation and the battles that other people were fighting personally. So that was probably as challenging as anything was the impact on the employees.

Michelle, another staff member at Boulder Helping Boulder, commented on the reasoning for opening their shelter early, stating:

We're open during the summer, but we only house the transition residents. So we have sixty-five people in the building instead of 160... We opened up one night during the flood, but we closed our doors again. And then we ended up opening ahead of schedule because the city and county asked us to. [This is] because the Red Cross is not allowed to close while anyone still needs to stay there. And so they couldn't close until we opened.

In order to open three weeks early and pay for an increase in staff, Boulder Helping Boulder received funds from Boulder County Housing and Human Services. Without this financial assistance, the organization would have been unable to adequately staff for the increased sheltering load requested of them by the City and County of Boulder.

Communication issues

Communication issues were another reported obstacle for HSOs during the floods. While some interviewees noted problems with communication among HSOs, several reported concerns with reaching members of the homeless community. An example of inter-organizational miscommunication occurred when Boulder Helping Boulder had opened its facilities for twenty-five additional people. Unaware of the limited space, staff from House of Hope and Boulder Emergency Refuge sent homeless persons to the emergency homeless shelter. Elizabeth at Boulder Helping Boulder also described her frustration during this time, explaining:

We have more space than [twenty-five beds]. We can house.. I don't know, 200 and something beds and we only added twenty-five people. And I get that it might be a staffing thing, but I just feel like there are way more than twenty-five people [that could have been sheltered]. ... I also wish that this had been communicated a little bit, because people weren't quite sure. People didn't hear about us having twenty-five extra beds until like, later than I wished. I wish that word would have gotten out more and more people would have known [about it.] ... I wish that communication with the homeless community could have been better.

Communication with homeless individuals is always difficult, but attempts to communicate with members of the homeless community during the floods presented unique challenges. Many homeless persons have limited access to cell phones and/or the internet, which during the floods resulted in increased risks to health and safety, and accurate and timely communication was essential. Several HSO interviewees noted the effectiveness of word-of-mouth communication among homeless persons. Pam, a board member at Boulder Emergency Refuge, expounded on this source of communication, stating:

You know, word of mouth really travels in [the homeless] community. ... We always publish at the library where things are and so we try to [use] the process of the grapevine and try to get all the different entry points into the grapevine so that it spreads as much as it possibly can, because a lot of the people do have phones but they consider them emergency phones and they don't call [or get called] very often ... so word-of-mouth is very, very important.

But relying on word-of-mouth communication can be problematic, as information is not given in real-time and may be misconstrued or misspoken from one person to the next. For instance, at different occasions during the peak of the flooding, homeless persons were told by police officers or other members of the homeless community to go to certain locations that, by the time they arrived, were already flooded.

Chapter Summary and Discussion

The above discussions shed light on the unique considerations HSOs, and CBOs more generally, must take into account in planning for a disaster event. Staffing constraints,

communication, and increased demand for mediation and advocacy on behalf of clients presented difficulties that are likely to span across CBOs serving underserved and marginalized groups.

Social service community-based organizations provide a critical service outside times of disaster. In the context of elevated rates of poverty, social and economic inequality, and decreased funding prioritization at the federal level, these organizations are placed in predicaments, or unsafe conditions, that inhibit their ability to contribute to community resilience. CBOs fill a critical role in the U.S. safety net, but the ability of these organizations to provide sufficient resources for the populations they serve is becoming increasingly challenging. The broader implications of these findings, as I discuss in the last chapter, is that it is necessary to understand the root causes and structural processes that create disaster risk and vulnerability while simultaneously hindering efforts to enhance resilience. Because CBOs are an essential component of the U.S. social safety net for the welfare state under the contemporary U.S. neoliberal governance regime, they are increasingly limited in their ability to provide adequate resources and services to a growing client base in need. For example, as Kathleen Tierney (2013:17-18) contends,

The current status of the nation's social safety net is a stark reminder that broader social conditions and trends, and not disaster-specific legislation and programs, are the factors that matter in enhancing or eroding disaster resilience. It is those macro-societal, macro-economic forces that produce both disaster vulnerabilities and resilience-related capabilities, and thus it is at the macro level that battles over resilience will be lost or won.

Additionally, the stigmatized status of HSOs' client base further presents distinctive challenges for HSOs in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Throughout the 2013 floods, Boulder County HSOs had to advocate for their clients during a time that they did not anticipate having to do so. Similar to how individuals and communities can experience

compounded vulnerability (Morrow 1999), these structural and client-based considerations result in compounded vulnerability for HSOs and CBOs working with underserved populations. The stigma associated with homelessness, coupled with a lack of resources, is an additional characteristic that places homeless individuals at heightened risk during disaster. This results in unique service needs that HSOs must consider in disaster planning, such as procedures to follow if homeless persons are denied services.

The PAR model is useful for providing a framework by which to examine how vulnerability for HSOs and the homeless community in Boulder County is socially produced. HSOs in Boulder County operate within a neoliberalized context that produces dynamic pressures, such as outsourcing of social services from the state to non-state actors, decreased federal funding, and limits to affordable housing. These processes produce unsafe conditions for HSOs in the form of budget constraints that then limit efforts toward disaster preparedness. This creates additional problems during disaster including miscommunication and lack of clarity around the roles of HSOs in disaster response. At the same time that HSOs are unable to adequately prepare, they are called upon to be resilient. This is a predicament for HSOs and CBOs more broadly as they dedicate time, money, and energy to every day “disasters.”

CHAPTER VI

HOMELESS FLOOD SURVIVORS' NARRATIVES

Homeless communities are recognized as one of the most socially vulnerable groups both within and outside of the disaster context. As explained in Chapter 2, disaster vulnerability researchers have identified a number of characteristics that make homeless persons more susceptible to the negative effects of disaster (Fogel 2017; Phillips 1996; Ramin and Svoboda 2009; Settembrino 2017; Walters and Gaillard 2014). Despite these findings, few studies have examined the experiences of homeless individuals from their own perspectives during a large-scale crisis event (for exceptions see Drabek 1999, Fogel 2017, and Settembrino 2017). Further, although homeless persons are certainly vulnerable, their capacity and agency in disaster contexts historically has been under-examined in studies of disaster vulnerability (Settembrino 2017), just as disaster vulnerability research in general tends to downplay individual agency (Campbell 2016; Fothergill and Peek 2015; Settembrino 2017; Wisner et al. 2003). Therefore, a goal of this dissertation is not only to highlight the experiences of homeless flood survivors, but also to critically analyze ways in which some members of the homeless community demonstrate resilience during disaster. I intentionally placed this chapter toward the end of the dissertation because the logic of the dissertation is first to show how broader processes, such as homeless criminalization and a lack of affordable housing in the region, shape the flood experiences of HSO staff and homeless flood survivors. In so doing, I argue that tropes such as that of the “deserving disaster victim,” reflect cultural trends, partly rooted in neoliberal ideology, which deem certain populations as “undeserving” or “disposable.” This type of framing results in further marginalization of these communities both socially and physically.

This chapter draws upon qualitative interview data from unstructured one-on-one and focus group interviews with twenty-seven homeless flood survivors about their experiences

during the 2013 floods. I begin by describing overarching themes from the data regarding the concerns, barriers, and opportunities that homeless and unstably housed participants experienced during and following the floods. This includes a discussion of how some participants either worked with FEMA to acquire aid or viewed others who attempted to do so. Subsequently, I argue that although homeless persons retain characteristics that make them more susceptible to the negative effects of disaster, they also have characteristics and lived experiences that increase their capacity to respond and recover. I conclude with a chapter summary and discussion of disposability in the context of the 2013 floods. While the primary focus of this chapter and the dissertation more generally is to highlight the narratives of homeless flood survivors, I also incorporate into the chapter HSO staff perspectives regarding the flood experiences of their clients. This allows me to triangulate findings and to include stories of homeless individuals' flood experiences not represented in my sample of homeless interviewees.

Disaster Experiences among Homeless Flood Survivors

Nearly all homeless participants explained that although the floods minimally interrupted their daily routines, the event did not result in any long-term disruptions. Many of the disruptions they experienced, as I explain in the upcoming subsections, had to do with losing material possessions and the barriers they faced in acquiring shelter. For those who camped in forested areas and along waterways, many lost entire campsites and all of the belongings they had not carried with them. Some of these campsites remain closed or were completely destroyed by floodwaters. Further, it initially was difficult for individuals—both housed and homeless—to access transportation within the county and surrounding region, as floodwaters had damaged roads and bridges. I share such flood stories below while noting common themes and diverging narratives throughout. The upcoming sections are organized as follows: homeless individuals'

disaster losses and concerns during the floods; barriers and discrimination they faced' positive experiences and opportunities that arose during and after the floods; and experiences with FEMA.

Disaster Losses and Primary Concerns

Homeless interviewees reported a number of losses and concerns that they and other members of the homeless community experienced during the 2013 floods. Their material losses included sleeping bags, tents, camping supplies, bikes, clothes, and important documents such as birth certificates, pictures, and drivers' licenses. Many homeless persons lost entire campsites, some of which have either not been replaced or have become prohibited camping areas. Others received injuries, and some, according to HSO staff, contracted hypothermia after being out in the rain. Homeless participants also reported a number of concerns about the wellbeing and safety of others as well as concerns about their own abilities to seek shelter. In the following paragraphs, I feature findings from the data pertaining to material losses and overarching concerns during the floods.

During my time at a resource center in Boulder, I briefly interviewed a young man, Dustin, before he had to catch a bus for an appointment. He remarked on his physical losses during the floods, stating:

All I had was my t-shirt and a pair of shorts. And when I got to my [camping] spot, which was by the river, all my stuff had washed away. All my stuff. All my backpacks. And all my changes of clothes. Everything was washed away. And I guess it was.. it didn't really come as a surprise, but it still hurt.. Because it was everything I had. It was everything. And it was all gone. I didn't have any clothing. I had to go sit on Pearl Street, and I was asking anybody, "does anybody have a spare coat, gloves, hat.. anything that I could have?"

I asked Dustin how, if at all, the floods affected his ability to go about his daily routines. He described his losses during the floods as being an impediment to keeping in touch with loved ones and potential employers:

I don't know how to explain it... I didn't feel like I was getting as much done, because normally I'm walking up and down Pearl street trying to get job applications and stuff like that. I just sent in a job application to [a kitchen store], actually. After the flood, I didn't feel like I could get very much done because I didn't have anything, so I didn't get any job applications filled out. I didn't talk to my mom for two weeks because my phone had washed away with the flood and everything so I had no way of talking to her... Yeah, [and employers] don't like it when they can't get in contact with you. So, it made things more difficult for a while. It put a lot of my plans on hold.

Lost possessions that were stowed in flood-affected storage units presented additional complications for some individuals. Homeless flood survivors and HSO staff explained that some members of the homeless community utilize storage units to protect clothes, furniture, pictures, and important documents so that they do not have to transport them on a daily basis. The floods devastated storage units located in north Boulder. Several members of the homeless community who were able to afford the monthly rent used these units, which were convenient given their proximity to HSOs and the bus line. During a focus group interview at House of Hope, Eliza, who uses a storage unit, discussed the losses such people had experienced:

All those people lost all their worldly possessions. And if you go up there now, their [items are] still out there in big ole piles of mud and moldy clothes and stuff. It's in big piles that people haven't bothered to clean up yet.

I almost rented a storage unit [at that place], but I ended up with the one across from Boulder Helping Boulder. I had one thing in the very front of my little storage that got [wet]. It was a sleeping bag that got all wet.

Marianne, another focus group participant, added,

You know, [the storage unit] wasn't just about a place to go. It was also everybody's worldly possessions. And if you're lucky and blessed enough to have a storage unit to put all of your stuff in.. that's everything you own in the world and that's another aspect too that people don't talk enough or think about. But like so many of those people at that storage unit that [we] were talking about lost everything. Clothes, pictures of their babies, addresses to their families.. all kinds of shit that's not replaceable.

Tom, who was unstably housed during the flood, also shared experiences of people he knew in the community who utilized storage units.

One [person I know] lost their storage, but she didn't have any way to take pictures of it or whatever to prove [what she had lost].. so she pretty much just blew it off... So pretty much she had what was left on her back. And like I said, a lot of people use up storage units as their closet, in a way. Because at [Boulder Helping Boulder] you only get a little locker about this tall, maybe that wide (gesturing the shape of a box about one foot by one foot). So you can't put a lot of stuff in that thing.

He provided his reasoning for why he minimally uses such services at Boulder Helping Boulder, stating:

At [Boulder Helping Boulder], I had a cot, I had coffee anytime I wanted, you know. I kept stuff in there—the stuff I would use daily. Everything else I put in storage. So I usually carry a pack even though I didn't need to. I would carry a 70lb bag all day long. That's just.. that's the way I am. ... You get the drunks, you get the stinky feet, and you know.. sometimes you gotta get away from it all otherwise you'll just end up like them. You gotta get away. I think that's why a lot of people get motel rooms so they can get away. They feel like normal humans. They got a place to go, they can sleep in.. [and] take a shower anytime they want.

Courtney, a case manager at House of Hope, worked with some individuals who tried to obtain aid from FEMA because they had lost possessions in their storage units. However, as she portrayed to me, FEMA typically would not provide assistance for such items:

There are people whose storage units—storage units was a huge issue when it came to FEMA—Um, and FEMA for the most part, in ninety-eight percent of the cases, would not cover storage units.. so that's an issue. The [storage units] up north—the one that's up by [Boulder Helping Boulder] is still in recovery, like the actual storage unit [facility]. You have a population that stays in the storage units. And so .. you know, they've lost their dwelling or they've lost their unit—everything that was in it. So .. although they're starting to replace stuff, it's not what it was.

These individuals' inability to acquire aid from FEMA, as I describe in further detail below, presented barriers for some homeless persons in their attempts to recover lost items.

Jeff and Steve were the first two homeless interviewees I met following the floods. They were both technically working at Boulder Emergency Refuge as day shelter managers during our

interview, but explained that it would be the most convenient place for them to meet. Throughout the interview, the two men had to step away multiple times to enforce rules, conduct “pat-downs,” and guide people toward the food line at the day shelter. Once we were able to sit down and talk, they shared their flood stories with me, recalling that they had lost critical physical possessions. For example, Steve explained that:

[My friends and I] had three different sites right [by Folsom and 28th street]. I went back there [once floodwaters had subsided] and my sleeping bag was up in a tree. And I couldn't find my laptop or anything. I had to replace all of it.

Jeff, who is originally from Boulder, provided a detailed account of his flood experiences, and described how the safety of individuals in the Boulder community was a primary concern for him during the floods. He shared a story of how he, in conjunction with law enforcement officers, played an active role in evacuating homeless campers along creeks and low-lying areas in the City of Boulder:

Anytime there is a flood, some of us start volunteering with the cops and the fire department and say look, “because we’re homeless, we know where everybody hides.” So I went with a cop and a deputy sheriff, and I took \$25, which [included five] \$5 bills and five packs of cigarettes. [This is] a way of bribing people off flood prone areas. “I’ll give you five bucks if you roll it up and go.” I said, “you’re in a flood path. If a flood comes down here, you will be washed away.” ... And I came across one person and he said, “well I’m not leaving my camp.” And I said, “if you don’t leave your camp, they’re going to find you in Broomfield dead.” I said, “The reservoir at Lyons broke. Lyons is under water. That water is coming here, so you probably got forty minutes to get out of here. I’m not going to argue. I’ll give you five bucks and a pack of cigarettes. Roll it up. Either or.” His girlfriend says, “I’ll take the pack of cigarettes.” So I flipped her a pack of Marlboro’s. He goes, “No, no! You can’t go! You can’t go!” She says, “I’m not being washed away.” She goes, “This is serious stuff.” And I said, “either that or I’ve got a police officer and a deputy sheriff that will make you leave. I’m volunteering just asking you brother, so if you want to give me grief, you can give them grief—they’ll put you in handcuffs and take you out of here. That’s the way it goes.”

I kept going up the trail on the other side of Settler’s Mountain and just a rush of water from up there was plowing through. It was really [loud].. like a freight train loud. And this one guy was trying to help his friend, you know, and I run over there and his friend was trying to wash out a dog dish, and I said, “hey, man. Get out of there dude! You fall in that you’re gone!” And then the next day, it was a state of emergency.

Jeff also explained how while attempting to evacuate homeless campers, he rescued a young man trying to take pictures:

We went back up the creek and there was a college boy taking pictures. I kind of turned away and I looked down, [but when] I looked back, I saw his little camera flying in the air. He was gone. I dropped my backpack, took off my jacket, and ran over there—forgetting about my [hurt leg]. I'm not supposed to run on this leg, but I did. I ran over there and he's hanging on to one limb and has water up to [his chest], and [he's] screaming. So I grab the seat of his pants, and I said, "take your arm and put it around my shoulder." A police officer rolls up 'cause I'm laying on the ground. He's running over there and comes up and goes, "here, I'll help you!" I said, "grab the seat of his pants. Help me pull him out of the water!" I pulled him out of the water and I said, "do you have a blanket in your police car?" And he says, "yeah." I said, "go get it. He's gonna need it and get an ambulance as well." [The boy] goes, "Oh no, I don't need an ambulance." I said, "you're going to the hospital. You were in the water for ten minutes. The water is ice cold. You'll get hypothermia. Please listen to what I'm telling you. Do as I say." So the ambulance came and he went to the hospital. The police officer said, "You know, you're a hero."

However, he was not interested in being called a hero, explaining that he was happy he was able to save someone. In describing his own losses, Jeff later told me that he was two payments away from acquiring a mobile home in Lafayette—a town east of the City of Boulder. Unfortunately, he lost this home in the floods:

I was like two payments away from ownership of a mobile home, and so I make it out to Lafayette after the flood to go see my boss and he goes, "I've got some bad news for you." I said, "what else can happen?" I mean, I almost got washed away in a flood saving peoples lives and sending people to higher ground and stuff—what else is going on? He says, "your mobile home fell in a sinkhole of 30 feet." ... So, for the second time around, I've lost a home.

Although the flooding prolonged homelessness for Jeff, he reported that he was glad that he spent his time during the floods helping others as opposed to trying to protect his future property.

Like Jeff, several homeless interviewees reported that their biggest fear during the floods was for people's safety and wellbeing. For instance, during and immediately after the peak of the flooding, Kathryn expressed the anxiety she felt about the safety of her friends and other members of the homeless community. Although she had become homeless less than six months

before the floods, she had come to familiarize herself with many people through summer emergency sheltering at Boulder Emergency Refuge. Kathryn explained:

What was hard for me is that I knew a lot of people in the community, [and I] had no way of knowing if they were ok... It was hard, because I couldn't go out and find anybody and see if they were okay. I did talk to one [Boulder Emergency Refuge] employee and he said that a wall of water came in [and damaged] where they were sleeping, and they ended up having to move to three different churches [throughout the floods] because they were all flooding. So, even though I was very glad I was not a part of that, I had a lot of guilt... I knew a lot of people in the community, [and I] had no way of knowing if they were ok.

When I met with homeless women during a focus group at Homeless Women's Outreach, all six participants agreed that they were unsettled and worried about other people in the homeless community as the flooding intensified. Roberta, who had become homeless shortly before the floods, was staying at a domestic violence shelter and provided a story in which one of her roommates in the program was trapped:

My housemate needed to be rescued. At the time, she was taking care of two big dogs up in the mountains [for a friend]. She had a heart issue and needed to be taken to the hospital. I was worried to death about whether [she was] safe.

Such findings are triangulated by HSO staff that noted the frequency that clients would come in to HSOs to inquire about the safety of friends and acquaintances. For example, Juanita, a board member and former executive employee at Boulder Emergency Refuge, indicated that many homeless individuals asked her about the wellbeing of others:

People that I talked to expressed a lot of anxiety about the wellbeing of other homeless people. There were specific conversations like, "Do you think we're going to find people swept away?" "Are we going to find bodies?" There was a lot of furor around, "I haven't seen so and so for this many days. Are they okay?" So there was a lot of ..anxiety.

Elizabeth, who works at Boulder Helping Boulder, described similar interactions, stating that:

Everybody was like "Is this person alive?" "Has this person come in?" I feel like when I was working, there was just questions of who would come in and if their friends were alive.. [to see] that they didn't get washed away, because people had nowhere to go. Literally nowhere to go. And when you're homeless you have no way to get warned,

because it's not like people were opening their doors or anything. They were to friends, but not to just random strangers—especially people who look homeless.

An important point of divergence among homeless interviewees regarded the reported loss of life within the homeless community. Although official reports do not identify any lives lost among individuals experiencing homelessness, some interviewees argued otherwise. Homeless flood survivors presented conflicting accounts about the number of homeless individuals who lost their lives during the floods, with some explaining how fortunate they were as a community to not have lost anyone and others maintaining that a number of individuals were killed during the disaster. For instance, George, a young man I interviewed at a resource center in Boulder, contended that:

There was some amazing concern about where people are because days after the rain finally stopped, there were concerns about the missing. There were like eight people [reported] dead. And dozens and dozens and dozens of people missing. And of course the papers wanted to [talk about the] "important people" and.. they never mentioned anything about homeless that were missing or anything like that so there was a complete bias in the city. I mean, it's always like that and I think it always will be. It doesn't make it right. It's just the way it is.

Community indifference or hostility toward homeless persons was a common perception among interviewees, as I demonstrate in the next section. Mel, who was unstably housed during the floods, told me:

We lost 19 homeless people...We had a funeral for them on the band shell. One of them was my best friend that died. He drowned.

Fighting back tears as she described her loss, Mel emphasized the camaraderie present within the homeless community: *"we take care of each other."*

Other homeless interviewees, however, commented on how fortunate they were as a community to not have experienced any loss of life. For example, during a focus group interview

at House of Hope, Marianne expressed gratitude for how fortunate they were to have not lost anyone:

To me, the biggest miracle is that we didn't lose anyone. The fact that we didn't—to this day—still shocks me. The number of people up the canyon [with] no warning. (Gesturing a shocked face.) The only reason we didn't end up dead was because the cops came through and swept through [campsites].

I was unable to find additional information through written materials or insights from public officials and HSO staff that would inform this divergence among interviewees. Generally, HSO staff were thankful that none of their clients or other members of the homeless community were killed during the disaster. However, one staff interviewee, Elizabeth of Boulder Helping Boulder, commented on the rumors that some individuals were swept away by floodwaters:

Most [clients] were asking me if people had come in because they were worried that they had died and were convinced that there's two people that had died and I still don't know. I still don't know. But they have.. like, a lot of people are like, "yeah, we still don't know about these few people." I don't know about them either because I haven't seen them, but they might have left, too.

Another HSO staff member at House of Hope said:

I mean luckily we didn't lose any homeless people that I know of. And I think the community actually pulled together to support each other.

Although a number of homeless participants reported lost tents, clothes, and documentation, they frequently downplayed the severity of their losses—claiming that they were “lucky” and that “it could have been worse.” As Glenna explained during a focus group interview at Homeless Women’s Outreach:

Hey, I'm alive. My man's alive ... So I consider that a blessing in disguise. Like I said, we lost all the other stuff..[but] that's possessions, man. We had our lives. A lot of my friends were out on the streets. When they went missing for a couple of days, we were pretty worried. But we did our welfare check and everyone turned up. Head up. Alive.

In addition to the physical losses, several members of the homeless community identified barriers and incidents of discrimination in their efforts to obtain resources and consistent shelter during flood response and recovery. I now turn to these findings.

Barriers and Discrimination

The homeless community encountered a number of barriers and incidents of discrimination during the 2013 floods. While some of these barriers resulted from flood damage, such as the inability to access transportation and return to campsites, many reported that they faced discrimination as they tried to seek shelter and obtain resources. Based on media reports and insights gleaned from HSO staff, public officials, and community stakeholders, I previously described situations in which homeless individuals were turned away from public disaster shelters. I now present homeless individuals' perspectives of these incidents. Some interviewees directly experienced discrimination, while others shared stories about people they knew who had problems accessing shelter and resources. About two-thirds of homeless flood survivors in this study reported some kind of discrimination they or others experienced during the floods, with roughly half of all interviewees discussing their experiences or thoughts about the Red Cross incident. Many indicated that they were either not surprised by these actions or were disheartened to learn that the discrimination they experienced on a daily basis had been transferred into a disaster setting. Before discussing their perspectives on discrimination they or others faced during and after the floods, I provide examples of other barriers interviewees experienced as they tried to respond to and recover from the disaster.

Tom, who worked as a church bus driver and a part-time employee at Boulder Emergency Refuge, explained that one of his biggest barriers during and immediately following the floods was not being able to access his broken-down vehicle, which he had left in Nederland.

The road between Boulder and Nederland was not open for weeks following the disaster, as it had been severely damaged by floodwaters. Once he was able to make his way up the canyon to Nederland, he was still unable to access and move his vehicle. The cost of going back and forth to try and retrieve it became a financial burden:

It was four bucks a pop to get up [to Nederland] and then four bucks to find out I couldn't get [to my truck] and [had to] come back down. It was killing me. I just couldn't afford to keep doing that.

I [waited] about a week [after the flooding stopped], because I started hearing about [the damage in] Jamestown and everything else. I was like, well, let's give them a week and see what they've gotten done, then we'll go up there and look. That didn't work. Then it got to the point where, "well I need my truck," so I was going up there like every four days or three days to check. And that's four bucks a pop. So it was like, eight bucks every trip. There's got to be a better way to do that.

Joe lost his camping spot during the floods, laughing at that the fact that, “*there is a tent in the creek now.*” In the days during and immediately following the floods, transportation became a major issue for him:

Well, the buses stopped running. That was a concern. We couldn't get anywhere. Just getting around is really tough. Getting around town and getting from here to there, because I always took the bus or rode my bicycle. I was also concerned about the damage, not just to people's homes, but to the bike trails and to the Fourmile Canyon.

Losing access to transportation and the trails he typically used made it difficult for Joe to acquire supplies and the necessary items to establish a new campsite. George, a young man I met while interviewing homeless flood survivors at a resource center in Boulder, expressed how his inability to get around town affected his daily routines. “*You can't go anywhere,*” he said, “*there was damage, dead animals, and the roads were closed.*” To provide another example, Wyatt, who normally camped in the western, mountainous region of Boulder County near Nederland shared:

We ended up staying [in Boulder], because when we got our supplies and started to go back up [the canyon], the military wasn't going to let us go up. First off, they wouldn't

let us go up there period. And then after a few days then you could go up there but you had to have a Nederland address to be able to go up.

These stories demonstrate the difficulties many members of the homeless community experienced during the floods and immediately after the waters subsided. While these impediments, such as limited public transportation and lost cars and bicycles, would be difficult or aggravating for housed and homeless individuals alike, they were particularly challenging for members of the population who rely on these methods of transportation in order to acquire safe shelter and/or resources on a daily basis. Further, during and after the floods, there were concerns throughout the homeless community about being ticketed for camping in “illegal spaces,” such as parking garages and non-designated camping areas. Steve, who was experiencing homelessness during the flood while working at Boulder Emergency Refuge, was directed by his supervisor to send homeless people to a parking garage, because they would not be ticketed; however, as he and Jeff, another homeless interviewee, maintained, this leniency was short lived:

Steve: [My boss] says, “just send them to a parking garage. It’s a state of emergency. They’re not going to do anything.” I said, “good.”

Jeff: The police actually were helpful about that.

Steve: But immediately after they got the streets open, they started giving tickets for being in there. They didn’t give them a chance to start going anywhere else. They just started giving them—

Jeff: —any homeless person a ticket that was in a parking garage... [This was as] the water was starting to recede. I mean, the water was starting to recede and as soon as it was to where they could actually be on the street again, without getting all soaked, they immediately started ticketing them.

Steve: Not even telling them, “Okay, you guys gotta move on.” They were like, “here’s a camping ticket for you. And a camping ticket for you.”

Even after the waters subsided and people were able to get around town, the ground was extremely saturated—making it difficult to set up campsites without getting wet or muddy. Further, as I mentioned previously, several campsites were completely washed away by floodwaters. Another interviewee, Eric, had been camping in Lyons during the floods. I met with

him at the Longmont Assistance Group before an appointment with his case manager. He mentioned that many people were ticketed after the floods for sleeping and residing in areas not designated for camping. This was despite the fact that many of them had lost their usual campsites. Eric later described a story in which one night while he was staying in a makeshift campsite near Nederland soon after the floods, he and a few of his friends were approached by a police officer who told them that they had to leave. Although he explained that the officer was kind and “pragmatic” in his approach, it was still a very upsetting experience for him—so much so that he returned to his tent and sobbed. Without many places to return to, especially for those who are not comfortable residing in an emergency shelter setting with other homeless people, the loss of campsites and threats of camping citations were an everyday concern.

A majority of homeless interviewees (n=19) reported discrimination that they or others in the homeless community faced during the floods, especially surrounding the Red Cross shelter episode in which shelter volunteers initially turned away homeless individuals. This incident left many interviewees feeling angered and saddened by the unequal treatment they and others received. For some interviewees, even for those not directly affected, it was a very emotionally and mentally damaging experience. While waiting for a meeting with his case manager, Eric explained that the floods have made it difficult for him to overcome homelessness or even return to a degree of normalcy, as many campsites he was familiar with in Lyons were destroyed. He now resides in Longmont, but hopes to return to Lyons one day. Although Eric was eager to tell me about his flood experiences, he had to stop several times to compose himself when discussing the physical devastation and discrimination that the homeless community faced. In reflecting upon homeless persons being turned away from disaster shelters, he contended, “*but we are refugees of a flood.*”

Other interviewees expressed similar frustrations, questioning why predisaster homeless people were treated differently from those who had homes. George, a young man experiencing homelessness while trying to get a degree from a nearby university, explained that, although the incident was disheartening, he was not surprised by the treatment toward the homeless community:

It didn't surprise me... But I think [people] were shocked at the gross number of homeless in the city, because they like to sweep it under the carpet. [They] like to keep up a Boulder facade where it's like a miniature Beverley Hills where everything is nice and blah blah blah. I mean there's a dark side that was brought to the light, you could say... There's actually a silver lining in a lot of ways, because it addressed a serious and grave situation that's in Boulder that, on the surface, the city doesn't want to deal with. It almost, you could say, literally forced [them] to recognize it and address it.

As I explained in Chapter 4, homelessness has long been identified as a social issue in the region. There is no evidence that the flood have had a positive effect on efforts to remediate homelessness. Fortunately, George was able to stay at a mentor's house during the floods, so he did not experience being turned away from shelters. However, I asked him if he could provide any insights about what he had heard from other members of the homeless community regarding this episode. He explained that:

I mean, people were angry... They were seriously pissed off and disgruntled people... You know, when you're in a situation where you're constantly fitting a stereotype or a status quo.. it's not fun. And the more you run into it, the more disheartening it is to even be a human. You know, what's the point of me being alive? So you would think that [long pause].. It's, you know, .. you would think—humanly speaking—all of that would go [away] in order to help people no matter what demographic they are. And I can back that up by saying, if it were regular Boulderites or whatever going in there, they wouldn't have said anything. But because we got the packs and the dogs.. you know, whatever condition they were going in, [they were] .. constantly stereotyped.

Even when authorities began to allow homeless individuals into disaster shelters, they were still treated differently. Recalling insights from HSO staff who managed the shelters, some noted that homeless individuals were segregated from the housed community. This was the case with Kenneth, a homeless man who was pushed out of his original dwelling because of

floodwaters. He explained that based on guidance from police officers, he began walking toward the Red Cross shelter. This was during the initial timeframe when Red Cross volunteers had been turning homeless people away because they could not provide a home address:

So I go to the Red Cross and all I had with me when I got in was a sleeping bag that I found across the street. When I told them that I found a sleeping bag across the street, they tried to take the sleeping bag away from me. I go, 'wait a minute.. I found it.' And then they had this weird thing like they wanted me to sleep in a particular place... It seemed like they weren't very happy to have me there. They were kind of like, I don't know, treating me like some kind of outcast or pariah.

Relegating Kenneth to a separate space was hurtful to him, as he tearfully described his experience in the shelter. He later expanded on this experience and clarified how he was able to enter the Red Cross during a time when homeless people were being turned away:

I was told by a couple people, 'you should present yourself as not homeless. That way you'll make it in there. You know, so just tell them that you're visiting Boulder and that you reside in Colorado Springs.'

Importantly, although this practice of exclusion was not supported or encouraged by the Red Cross and was quickly remedied after homeless advocates pushed back, such experiences highlight the types of actions and behaviors that have the effect of further marginalizing an already marginalized population.

Moving beyond the Red Cross shelter turning away homeless persons, others contended that the homeless community was overlooked and pushed out of sight yet again following the disaster. Mel, a veteran who has been in and out of homelessness for the past several years, lamented:

People lost everything. And at first I noticed that the community came together as one.. [but] now the community has broken us away. Like they knew we were struggling and now it's like we're still struggling... [People] didn't know how to react [to] being a "little homeless," so we had to show them.. like what kind of gear they needed, but now since we're still homeless, they don't want to have nothing to do with us.

She also commented on the lack of gratitude that the homeless community received, adding that they felt ostracized and overlooked in the recovery process:

R: There's a lot of vets out here [in the homeless community] and us vets don't keep people away. We don't turn people away. We help them out... We're here. There's a lot of veterans out here that really helped against the flood, too. But we feel like we were left out after they said thank you, it was like.. [we were] supposed to return [back to where we were].

I: Would you mind expanding a bit more on that?

R: [The homeless community] felt like.. after all the things that they'd done for the [Boulder] community.. it's like the community had forgotten them. No thank you's.. no more appreciation. [They sent] us right back to the wolves. Understand?... Brothers and sisters don't leave a man to die. You don't let them die.

Perceptions from many homeless flood survivors included many believing that the housed community did not care about them or their wellbeing. During a focus group interview at House of Hope, for instance, participants noted feelings of exclusion and discrimination:

Marianne: It was almost like they didn't care, you know? I was also really concerned about the people that I knew up here in Boulder, Lyons, and surrounding areas and how they fared through. And then when I heard that the shelter was turning away people, my heart really went out to them because it's a very scary thing.. to not have any place safe to go. Not [having] any information makes it even scarier.

I asked members of the group if they would like to expand upon this incident, to which they replied:

Eliza: Well [it was] discrimination because they were homeless. And so now there was this flood that was making some other people homeless that normally wouldn't have been, so that should [have been] like a great equalizer, but instead of equalizing the people.. they weren't letting [predisaster] homeless in.

Marianne: I don't understand how, like, Eliza said.. so many people were homeless because of the flood. I don't understand why the people that were homeless before the flood got discriminated against, because they're people too. And.. I know that when I first saw that posting on Facebook from somebody here—who works at [House of Hope]—I came undone. I about broke the computer I was so pissed off just reading about that. And I just.. I don't understand who these people think they are. You know? Give them the [House of Hope] address [at the Red Cross]! I use it all the time.

Tom: A lot of people thought because they didn't have an address that's why they were being discriminated against. And that's a possibility.. I'm not saying it's not--

Eliza: Well and really the people who were sleeping outside.. they were having problems before the actual flood because they were already rained out so much. And you can't go under the overpasses and stuff—or the underpasses—because they're flooded... When we had the recent rains this last week and it just kept raining, I was thinking about it all over again.

Marianne and Eliza further claimed that:

Marianne: That's what it boils down to. If nobody gives a crap, we could sit here and talk until we are chartreuse with orange polka dots and it's not gonna do a damn good.

Eliza: Well and if you're going [to shelter people] in an emergency, then why wouldn't you do it day-to-day for people who don't have a place to live? I mean.. If a dog doesn't have a place to live, they go to the Humane Society, you know? They [sleep] indoors.

Marianne: And Jesus was homeless, damnit! [laughter]

Elaine—a woman I met who had become homeless as a result of a medical condition—pointed out, however, that the discrimination many homeless people experienced during the floods was not all that surprising to her. She maintained that this kind of treatment is common for them:

I mean, [now] there's actually a warming shelter downtown. They used to throw us on the edge of town, I think, because everyone.. nobody wanted to see us. They always made [Boulder Emergency Refuge] people go in the back door. One night we were at this church and there was an event going on at the church and they made us go through the back door so that no one could see us. I mean, yeah.. that's how we become invisible. Every store we go through, we're profiled.. security follows us around. All homeless people have stories like that.

HSO staff echoed this finding, arguing that the homeless community in Boulder County experience discrimination on a daily basis. As Kelly of House of Hope expressed:

I also think that homeless people in Boulder don't expect a lot. Like I don't think people were that surprised when they were turned away from the shelter or treated badly. So they kind of rolled with it. Which is really kind of sad to say, but I think that people who were homeless at the time of the flood just kind of handled it very much in stride. I think there is anger towards the community in general because there is such a disparity. I mean, obviously Boulder is a very wealthy place, we shouldn't have the homeless problem that we do. So I think that the anger is kind of there, but I also don't think people were that surprised. So it wasn't like a shock, you know.

She expanded on the disparity many homeless flood survivors witness or experienced, stating:

As things were supposed to be getting back to normal, I think people felt really shut out by the system. People would go to the FEMA offices or the disaster assistance centers and be told to go away with no acknowledgement that they lost something too. So that's where we kind of stepped in and tried to be the disaster assistance center for the homeless. And [we] got some financial support from the United Way through their flood relief fund for some practical assistance with like, replacing toiletries and things like that. But [there] was definitely a separation of services. That was pretty striking I think to a lot of homeless people.

Leah, a case manager at House of Hope, reiterated these arguments and explained that what happened during the flood was indicative of how the larger Boulder community treats homeless individuals on a daily basis:

The Boulder community treats the homeless like crap. They don't treat them as people. There's some people that have changed their perception of the homeless.. if they come here. If they actually do a volunteer hour in the kitchen, then it changes. Cause you get to know the people. Like my daughter. She works [here]. She'd never been around homeless people. She said, "mom," she came in here one day before she started working for the program and she's like, "how do you do this?" I said "girl.. I've been homeless, I know what it's like."

These actions demonstrate how disasters can be used to further marginalize certain groups and become a part of broader efforts to push undesirable populations out of communities altogether. During Hurricane Katrina, for example, over 5,000 public housing units were destroyed and never rebuilt, leaving predominantly low-income and minority neighborhoods without homes to return to following the disaster (Elliot and Pais 2010; Pais and Elliot 2008; Saulny 2006). Important to note, however, is that although several interviewees expressed anger and sadness at their treatment during the flood, others reported positive experiences. Some even found that they were treated more humanely and received additional resources following the disaster, as I demonstrate in the next section.

Opportunities and Positive Experiences

Not all experiences during the floods were negative for the homeless community. For some, the disaster provided new employment opportunities, increased levels of aid and

resources, and resulted in more kindness and empathy from the housed community. Roughly a third of homeless persons in the sample shared either positive outcomes or stories from their experiences. I present these accounts below.

As part of the emergency shelter program at one Boulder HSO, homeless individuals could sleep at local religious congregations on a rotating schedule throughout the year. This included a summer sleep program for a limited number of homeless individuals, in which people were able to camp out on the lawn of a participating congregation without fear of receiving a citation. The Congregation Har HaShem, a Jewish synagogue in the City of Boulder, works closely with the homeless community and had provided shelter services the summer leading up to the floods. Unfortunately, Har HaShem experienced major damage to the basement of its facility, resulting in over \$200,000 in repair costs (Bryen 2013). Pam, a board member for Boulder Emergency Refuge, mentioned that there were about four homeless individuals who consistently worked alongside the flood recovery team at Har HaShem. According to interviewees who participated with the cleanup and remodeling, this not only provided an economic opportunity, but also allowed them to “give back” to a community that provides them with essential sheltering services.

I spoke with a few homeless flood survivors who worked on the basement cleanup or were familiar with the cleanup operations. For instance, during the focus group held at House of Hope, one homeless flood survivor and part-time Boulder Emergency Refuge employee, shared that:

[Har HaShem flooding] was a concern because these were people who had helped us out over the years, and all of a sudden they're all flooded. And not only does that mean they can't help us out the way they want to, but it also means THEY need help so we gotta pitch in and do what we can to keep them afloat. So yeah, Har HaShem and the synagogue itself—it was actually the basement and they had probably eight classrooms down there. We had to cut the dry wall up to about five foot [sic]. So we hauled all that

stuff up the stairs. They didn't even have an elevator, so it was quite a cleanup process on that one.

Steve, a homeless flood survivor who also worked part-time for Boulder Emergency Refuge, had been heavily involved in the cleanup and recovery operations at Har HaShem:

R: A very interesting thing is, the reason Har HaShem came to us and asked us if [Boulder Emergency Refuge] had some people willing to help them, is because they couldn't get anybody else to help them. They were turned down by so many other people.. And they'd been so helpful with the homeless—having the warming center there on Tuesday nights and everything. We had no problem [helping them]. We [conducted] over 600 hours.. of going in and doing construction and rebuilding walls and mucking things out... [This created] an opportunity for the homeless. When we started, they were like, "well let's pay you guys." And so they were giving us ten dollars an hour and these guys were so happy to be getting there early in the morning. They would show up a half hour early, because they were given the opportunity to find work.

I: How many other members of the homeless community worked with you at Har HaShem?

R: I went through twenty-eight people [to find] a crew. In the end, we had nine people as a crew hanging dry wall and everything. Of course, with the homeless, you have those who just wanted the money and didn't want to do the work. And you have the ones that are willing to work but don't listen—things like that.

Steve emphasized the benefits of working on flood recovery—both from a personal standpoint and in terms of the perception of the homeless community more broadly.

It was amazing. It allowed me.. by doing that, to replace a few things that I had lost. Which was really nice. But it also gave a chance for the community to see that the homeless are not just bumming around. We do have a certain percentage of them that just don't care to do nothing but cause issues, but the better majority of them want a job. They want to have a place. They want to help out and be productive members [of society] if given the chance.

In addition to the work at Har HaShem, the disaster provided other job opportunities for homeless individuals. These jobs primarily related to flood recovery in the form of mucking out basements and hanging drywall, for example. Joe, who spent most of his time camping in the mountains, recalled how he was able to work after the floods:

The flood actually helped me get some work down there [in Boulder]. I never got any work until the flood. With the flood there was mucking out and everything else so they

wouldn't care who [was doing it], as long as you had a healthy body to be able to move stuff. [It] was tiring.

I: So did you muck out basements, hang drywall..?

R: Yeah, and tore out carpet. It was nasty work.

I: How long did that work last?

R: Two weeks at least. Two to three weeks. [My friend and I] had plenty to go back up to [Nederland], but it was already wintertime or getting close to the winter, so we decided to stay down here [in Boulder]. We didn't want to take our tents and lose all of our stuff again... When the flood came, I had three tents myself plus anything I needed for camping because the bears were running people off... And [the people] wouldn't come back, so we would have to clean up the area and we would get whatever was left there that was any good. We would either trade it to somebody who didn't have nothing or we would hang onto it. I had at least three tents myself.

In one focus group with homeless flood survivors, a participant explained that even a year later, there were still flood-related job postings on the job board at House of Hope.

In addition to newly-created job opportunities from the disaster, some interviewees reported that they had greater access to resources following the floods, including food, backpacks, camping supplies, toiletries, and clothes. Alex, a homeless camper, explained that he had received enough resources such as food and supplies to keep him stocked up until Christmastime. As another example, Joe, who had obtained temporary flood recovery work, told me that resources had also increased for him following the floods:

I: How did your resources increase?

R: After that, everybody was so kind. They were giving us all kinds of resources. You know, "Here we'll do this for you. What do you need over here?" [from] FEMA and the Red Cross. The Red Cross was really instrumental in helping a bunch of us out... They opened up the Boulder YMCA, they put all kinds of cots in there—a bunch of cots—and took pretty good care of us over there.

Dustin, the young man I met at a day warming shelter and resource center who had lost all of his possessions along Boulder Creek, also felt that he had more resources available to him after the floods, attributing this to the generosity of the larger community:

Somebody actually ended up giving me a big old snowboarding coat. And it's kept me warm so far. I got some hoodies. I got this hoodie. (Gesturing.) I got new shoes, which is nice. And it seemed to me like people were nicer during that time... The police officers and community people were letting all of us homeless people stay on the upper levels of the parking garages so that we weren't down in the water and uh.. yeah. It was nice. It was nice. Because most of the time, I feel like they don't pay very much attention to us, you know? They have up blinders, but it seemed like they were genuinely trying to help. There were people bringing us hot food. It was nice.

In the focus group at Homeless Women's Outreach, one woman recalled a personal story in which she was waiting at a bus stop near the Target store in Boulder after having a fight with her boyfriend. She had been waiting at the stop for a while when a Regional Transportation District (RTD) bus driver pulled over:

The supervisor at RTD came by and told me that there were no busses running—she took me to Denny's, and that's where I spent the night. [They] brought coffee, even though I didn't buy anything. The waitress kept bringing us coffee.

During the peak of the flooding, the restaurant let her stay all night and fed her a hot meal. This was an incredibly moving experience for her, as she knew that these actions by the bus driver and Denny's waitress were technically “against the rules.”

One interviewee, Steve, argued that the disaster, while devastating, was also positive because it highlighted the criticality of homelessness in the region. He hoped that it would result in positive changes for the homeless community.

One of the most positive things is that it's brought to light that.. you can't hide homeless when they have no place to go. It's allowed people to see that there is an issue. Um, which, I mean for me that's gotta be a positive thing... People are like, “I see that we have a problem now.” And they can't hide it or anything, so hopefully in the future it brings more out into the open.

After a short break in the conversation, he continued:

I'm hoping that rather than trying to shove it back under the carpet, that it brings more resources, more volunteers, more people willing to try to bring these people up rather than get rid of them... It's also helped out to where the community is really opening up to giving people a chance to get out of their situation. And I see it more and more every week. And if it keeps up like this, we are going to have such a good connection with the

community and that the homeless should start not disappearing, but integrating back into society and being seen exactly as they are—as people that just.. something happened to them, and now they're getting back on their feet.

Some staff members echoed these sentiments. For instance, Courtney, a case manager at House of Hope, commented on the amount of donations her organization initially received during the floods:

I've never seen donations come in the way they did, I mean.. we put out a call I think on Monday [after the floods] for sleeping bags and that kind of stuff—the stuff that got washed away or just totally soaked [and] mud damaged. We had so much stuff. We wound up taking a lot of it to Deacon's Closet, which is where most of our folks go on Thursday anyways. We literally had so much stuff that we could not hold it.

She provided additional examples of other positive experiences she witnessed or heard about through clients during the flood, stating:

Well one thing I would say [was] positive—even during the flood—is that I think Boulder PD did an amazing job and they did an amazing job of keeping people—my people—safe. They went through the parks and cleared them right before the waters really hit. They cleared the Bandshell [in Central Park]. They cleared.. [crying] and [the police] didn't do it in a way that was... they didn't arrest people. They didn't do anything. They just said, "you need to clear out, and you need to clear out now." And they cleared people out. I mean, .. we had a couple people get hurt, but we didn't have a single homeless life lost.

After a short break in the conversation, Courtney added:

A couple of the guys who got hurt were actually out further I think, because they weren't expecting, you know, the waters to be as bad as they were. The camp that's was on Baseline [Road] got hit really hard. And the person who had the most injuries that I know was actually at that camp that's on Baseline and Foothills-that exit. That's a big camp. That's a big camp of guys that don't normally come in for resources here—partly because it's so far out... But I've also heard stories of people being brought in, just random citizens of Boulder finding a homeless person and taking them home [happy laughter]. I unfortunately don't remember who the client was anymore, [but] he said that he was part of the group that tried to go to [Boulder Helping Boulder]. They got to there and [they] didn't let them in. So these couple of guys said that some college girl who lives up there took them in. [She] saw them out in the rain and could tell they were homeless, but took them in.

These stories serve to demonstrate that although homeless flood survivors did face challenges and discrimination during and after the floods, these experiences are not applicable to

all interviewees and do not necessarily represent the behavior of all Boulder County housed residents or volunteers. However, this is also not intended to minimize the very real and painful encounters homeless flood survivors faced during the floods.

Experiences with FEMA

Roughly a third (n=10) of homeless flood survivors referenced FEMA in their interviews, either by explaining how the agency had been useful for them in acquiring funds for lost items and/or their frustrations with individuals who “cheated the system” to receive money. Although these findings could fit into sections that describe positive or negative disaster experiences among homeless flood survivors, I find it necessary to treat this as a separate theme given how often interviewees shared insights about people working with the agency. In many cases, homeless individuals were told to apply for FEMA funding from case managers. For some interviewees, like Joe, FEMA provided aid for him to recover lost items:

That [FEMA] just swooped right in, man. They just came in flying through the sky with the big S on their chest, and, "Here we are. We're here to help you and what do you need?" They were right here on time... They went above and beyond, I believe. I've never seen a federal agency at work. It's the first time. I was really impressed with it. I really was.

Tom, who had difficulty accessing his truck after the floods, explained that FEMA was the most helpful organization during this time by connecting him to people who could provide bus passes. Others, such as Amanda, also maintained that FEMA was the most useful organization after the floods, as she was able to acquire resources without facing any barriers. Another homeless interviewee, Elaine, commented on the positive outcomes from FEMA aid within the homeless community:

Well, resources.. for people who are homeless actually got better because FEMA came to town and started doing what this town should have been all along—helping people get housing loans or something like that.

During my time volunteering at House of Hope, I met a homeless camper, Wyatt, who later shared with me in an interview that he had applied for FEMA funds to cover the expense of items lost during the floods.

I: And so you were able to get money for the items that you lost?

R: Yes. Hell, it was really weird. I lost a tent, a bike, and all of my personal possessions. And they gave me \$2,200. \$300 was for my personal possessions.. [the] bike and tent. The rest of it was for rent. They paid for rent for two months. So it's like \$900 a month for one person to rent a place around here. I was freaking out. I didn't know it cost that much. That's what they gave me \$1800 just for rent.

I: Would you mind telling me about the process you went through to get FEMA aid?

R: Mine was real easy I think because of my mental [illness]. I have PTSD. When I told them where I was staying.. and they asked why I couldn't stay in the shelter, I told them because of the PTSD [in reference to his fear and anxiety with sleeping next to other people]. From the time that I applied to the time I got the money was less than a week. It was like 5 days. I think it was on fast track because of my mental [illness].

Wyatt recalled this process in more detail, explaining that he had to illegally navigate the system in order to cover lost items:

I went down to the FEMA place down here [DAC] and went and got on the phone [with FEMA]. They ask you all these questions and you have somebody who comes and meets with you. And they'll want to go see the place [where you lived]. They want to go see the place where I was [camping]. I told them I was down here [gesturing], but I was actually up there [gesturing], right? So I told them I was on 30th and Arapahoe. They asked, "Where at?" I said, "The river there." And so they go, "well, can we go see it?" I was like, "well yes ma'am you can go out there, but [my campsite is] probably in Kansas by now because it washed everything out." They tried to stop me. They asked me, "well why wasn't you using [sic] your bike when you left that morning?" I said, well, because I said I was going to look for jobs. When I go to look for jobs, I ride the bus. She said, "oh so you have a bus pass?" Trying to see if I had money or whatever I guess. And I said "no, ma'am. I stand there and wait until somebody gets off the bus and I ask if they have change that I could use." She's said, "Oh, okay." All she would have had done was ask me what time of day I came through.. I wouldn't have known...Doing it illegally made it work for me.

He added that he was successful because he had learned from the experiences of other homeless persons who had tried to acquire aid:

I watched them go through with other people... that's how I actually was able to do it, because I'd seen other guys getting their money... But it was kind of the same way with

everyone else. It seemed like it went pretty fast for them. They would contact somebody then they would come and talk to them. They would meet 'em up at—that place I was telling you about, where they give you the food. Well, they would come up and meet you there and that's where they met me at. And I signed a deal after I had answered all the questions. Then it was just like a few days later, I was getting my check.

I: So how many people do you know personally or through stories, that tried to access FEMA—whether or not they actually got aid?

R: I know at least.. oh gosh.. twenty to twenty-five people that actually got the FEMA [aid] and everything. They went through the process. Some of them didn't have IDs and stuff.

Wyatt added that he was not sure how many ultimately received funding, however.

Once I began to hear stories about FEMA from members of the homeless community, both through interviews and during my time as a volunteer at HSOs, I then asked interviewees directly about whether they had tried to apply for aid through FEMA or if they knew people who had. Many of their responses centered on frustrations associated with either perceptions of or known examples of fraud. For instance, another flood survivor, Joe, recalled instances where people were successful in illegally navigating the FEMA aid process:

R: I've been seeing a lot of fraud [with] the FEMA people...People I knew talking [to FEMA] even though they weren't affected physically by the flood. They were going, "I lost this" because you can't prove it. You can't prove if they had or didn't have it, and FEMA is not going to make you prove it. They have to take you at your word because they can't discriminate. So I did see a few people here and there take advantage of the situation....Some folks to the tune of \$3,000.

I: How common, would you say, was fraud?

R: Fairly common.. Everybody steals. If they can get it. If FEMA is willing to give it without too much investigation, I can understand their side...But if you don't really deserve it, and you didn't really do all that stuff you told [them], then you don't deserve it, so it's kind of a moral issue right there.

Other interviewees expressed frustration with people trying to “cheat the system” to receive money for items they had not lost—especially considering the people who had actually lost items but were unable to obtain funding. In the first focus group I arranged at House of Hope,

interviewees were in agreement about their frustration with FEMA and the lack of consistency for how some people received money and others did not.

Tom: Some of these people had no receipts and got \$1,800. I know somebody who had \$1,200 in receipts and only got around \$172. And she had receipts. But she only got \$172. Then people had no receipts and got \$1,800.

Marianne: Well FEMA's a joke anyway. You can't depend on them for anything except entertainment.

Tom: What I saw were people seeing a way to get free money.

Peter: Yeah

Tom: ..Saying that they had lost all of their camping gear—which they got for free or never had anyway, and so then a lot of those people did get a check and then they just bought drugs with it. That's what I saw.

Eliza: But you know, FEMA did put up a lot of homeowners in hotels.

Tom: No I'm not saying anything against that—what I'm saying is, what I saw with a small group of people was that they took advantage of the situation. And saw it as a way to get free money that they used to feed their drug habit. That was the side of it that I saw.

Eliza: I only saw people doing it for hotel rooms.

Peter: Now that's understandable.

Tom: Motel rooms I can deal with.

Marianne: That's understandable. When you're saying, "I had all this REI equipment and all this mountain gear" .. that they either got at Deacon's Closet or got here at [House of Hope]—somebody gave it to them or they never had it in the first damn place. And [now they're] getting money for it. And then turning around and sticking it in their arm or up their nose. That's what bothered me. Because so many people were affected and didn't get help. You know, there were people that had receipts for \$1200 and only got a hundred and something, you know? Because you got this other small group of people that see it as a way to get free money.

I then asked the group if they had any knowledge of how others had acquired aid or if they knew how FEMA determined who would receive money to cover lost items:

Tom: I don't know how they decided.. well, basically all of us on Arapahoe—which is one of the camp out addresses, we go to that one. I've been there before. When I got my ticket, that's the only address that popped into the cop's [system]. But, that was right along the creek. And a lot of people was washed out, but as far as proof that you got—there was no proof. And like she said, a lot of them got it free... And I don't [want to] sound like I'm not a homeless advocate. I am, but you know, we need to make it fairer all

the way across. I mean, there were people that were totally taking advantage of the system. There were people who weren't taking advantage who got screwed anyhow.

Eliza and others contended, however, that fraud was not limited to the homeless community:

Eliza: Homeowners might have lied about some of their stuff too.

Marianne: Well that's true. I'm not arguing that, but I didn't know about it.. I'm sure [it happened]

Tom: I don't care. If you're a homeowner or not a homeowner, there's just.. it seems like there's always somebody taking advantage of the situation and then they screw it up for people that legitimately need the help. And then they can't get it because they ran out of money or whatever because of this small group that did take advantage.

HSO staff members commented on their roles, however limited, in working with FEMA to help their clients get reimbursement for lost items. Notably, as I referenced in the previous chapter, some organizations, such as House of Hope, worked more closely with their clients through the FEMA aid process compared to other organizations. Courtney, a case manager at House of Hope, explained that she worked with homeless flood survivors in their efforts to acquire aid. This work continued into January 2014—roughly four to five months after the floods.

So once [clients] started filing their claims, we had a meeting with one of the gentleman from FEMA after we had some clients put in claims on how we were to handle it. But I will say that working with FEMA was .. nightmare is an overstatement, but I hope to god I never have to work with them again. I got threatening phone calls about "how do you know exactly where someone's camp spot is?" and, "you know you could be committing perjury and.." because what they wanted was.. they asked us for proof that someone was homeless.

There [was] one case [where] we literally had to send a letter [to FEMA] ten times,.. because they wanted this tweak, or that tweak, or, you know, well [the person's] car was also damaged. Well their car was in the parking lot at the library, but they were down further towards [this area] ... Oh my god.. [throwing hands up in frustration].

I helped people with FEMA appeals. That's part of the reason it went until January, because some people got denied. Then we helped them write their appeal letter. And that isn't as much FEMA's fault, or even the client's fault.. It's more of a lot of our clients paperwork is not necessarily a strong suit. And helping them to [understand] what FEMA's telling them. FEMA would send papers, and I'd have people come in with these packets that were like a quarter of an inch thick. And they can't make heads or tails of it, you know? So some of that's why [my work concerning FEMA] went until January.

I asked Courtney if she had any knowledge of how FEMA determined funding for homeless flood survivors who applied for aid.

I'd be interested in knowing what their official procedures were too, because it never made any sense to me. I could get money for some people. Some people I couldn't. Some people got hotel vouchers, some people didn't... And there were people who, like the couple I worked with whose car was at the library.. their car wasn't replaced. But someone else's car [that] was at the library—but they were actually staying in the car at the time, and maybe that's the difference—got money. So the couple who lost all their belongings in the car, but they weren't [living in the car at the time] didn't get anything.

During my time volunteering at Boulder HSOs, I noticed how at two of these organizations there would be several FEMA letters pinned to the message board for mail pick up.

This indicated to me that there were a number of clients who tried to obtain federal aid.

Regardless of the truthfulness of the claims submitted by homeless individuals, it is evident that these methods, for some, were necessary for them to acquire resources. Homeless flood survivors also reported that they were able to access resources such as gift cards, food, and backpacks through HSOs in Boulder County, such as House of Hope and Boulder Emergency Refuge. For many, the organizations that serve them on a regular basis proved to be the most helpful during and after the floods.

Vulnerability and Resiliency within the Homeless Community

In an effort to move beyond homogenization of homeless individuals and communities as vulnerable, it is essential to recognize how characteristics and identities of homeless persons intersect in ways that increase not only their vulnerability but also shape their capacity to respond to disaster. Acknowledging agency and capabilities results in a deeper understanding of their experiences and leaves room for analyses of characteristics that may be attributed to resiliency. The individuals represented in this study varied in age, physical aptitude, time spent in a state of homelessness, and gender. Some also self-reported substance abuse and mental

health issues. Indeed, characteristics such as older age and poor mental and physical health are factors that undoubtedly increase vulnerability and susceptibility to loss during disaster, as individuals may be unable to quickly or effectively move out of harm's way or access necessary resources.

While scholars have identified a number of characteristics that inform our understanding of homeless persons' vulnerability to disaster (Cutter, Boruff, and Shirley 2003; Enarson 2007; Thomas et al. 2013), disaster vulnerability research often fails to account for agency and capacity present within groups commonly identified as vulnerable or as persons with "access and functional needs" (Campbell 2016; Donaldson et al. 2005; Gilbert 2013; Settembrino 2017). I address this gap in the literature by showing how interviewees demonstrate resiliency within the Boulder homeless community. However, this is not intended to imply that all homeless individuals are equipped to "bounce back" from disaster.

As summarized in Chapter 3, I began my fieldwork for this study by first conducting participant observation and informal interviews with HSO staff. From these meetings and subsequent formal interviews, I gathered insights from staff that informed the types of prompts I included in my unstructured interview guide for homeless participants. One theme that arose from the data with HSO staff was the concept of resiliency within the homeless community. For example, as Juanita at Boulder Emergency Refuge reflected:

The stories that I hear from homeless people are stories that I view as incredibly resilient. I think about the lives that some people have led of pure pain and suffering and trauma. They would bring an average person to their knees. This person has survived. They may not have survived in a way that looks good to society, but to hell with that. It truly can happen to anyone, and I've seen it happen to all kinds of people. Every little stereotype that people hang onto is complete bullshit based on fear—out of the concept that they really don't want it to happen to them.

In referencing the homeless people she has worked with over the years, she later observed, “*Every day is a disaster. And every day is about survival.*” The previous quote speaks to a thread present throughout this dissertation, which notes the adeptness of many HSOs and members of the homeless community in overcoming everyday obstacles and emergencies.

I noted many instances of resilience throughout interviews with homeless flood survivors, both through the stories they shared and from direct statements about their resilience and resourcefulness. In one such story, Carl, an older man who has been managing Parkinson’s disease while experiencing homelessness, shared with me that he had become close to two deaf members of the homeless community before the floods. I had seen him signing with them multiple times while I was volunteering. When I asked him about his fluency in American Sign Language (ASL), Carl explained that those two had taught him and that he subsequently became a kind of liaison and interpreter for them in an almost daily capacity. During the floods, Carl’s role as an interpreter became all the more critical for his friends, as he had to continually sign to them about where they were being directed to shelter (since locations changed due to flooding) while also keeping them abreast of changing weather conditions. He later described his experience at the Red Cross shelter after they allowed homeless people to enter. By the Sunday after the peak of the flooding, people were coming from the mountains after being evacuated and/or rescued from areas that had become isolated by floodwaters:

I do remember the director [of the Red Cross shelter]—or the person I assume who was the director—was going through, and a lot of homeless were in [there] at that point, but [she] was going through and was like, “just want to let everybody know—there is a warming center. We have a lot of people coming in from the mountains. Helicopters were starting to come in. We need some space.” She was careful not to say we’re kicking [homeless] people out...I went to the person at the counter [and asked], “can I get a shower if I go to that warming center?” They said, “absolutely, take your time.”

It became clear that these mountain towns had been isolated for days and people were needing to come out of the mountains. They were flying helicopters out of the mountains.

I'm like, "I got 18 hours of sleep, two showers.. all the food I wanted. You know, why don't I get out of the way?"

Although Carl had become exhausted, soaked, and cold while out in the elements trying to find shelter, he justified to himself that other people now needed the shelter and accompanying resources more than him. Fortunately, he was able to catch up on much-needed sleep and receive food before returning to life-as-usual.

In speaking of the homeless community's resilience to disaster, one focus group participant at House of Hope humorously contended that:

This is the first experience that most homed people had with not being able to keep their stuff dry.. which we go through all the time.

This again exemplifies the notion that every day is a crisis that homeless individuals must manage. Jacob, a young homeless man, echoed this sentiment, explaining that the homeless community's ability to bounce back from the floods was indicative of how they live their daily lives:

I think that it's a different culture definitely that we live in. And so [the floods] didn't really shock us like it would.. it was still shocking, but ...it didn't really affect us on a personal level really.

Another homeless flood survivor, Kathryn, argued that the homeless community essentially has no choice but to be resilient:

Yes, [the homeless community is] very resilient.. they got over the flood quickly, because they had to. They have to be resilient. They must live in the now.

As the above findings demonstrate, some homeless individuals, while not without vulnerabilities, display resiliency in their ability to manage the threat of disaster. Much of this is attributed to the daily conditions in which they live their lives.

Chapter Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this chapter was to give primacy to the experiences of homeless individuals during disaster. During the floods, homeless flood survivors expressed concerns about their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of other members of the homeless community. They experienced a number of physical losses, including paperwork, identification cards, tents, sleeping bags, and clothes, with some losing their entire campsites. While their losses economically may have been miniscule in comparison to the losses of housed flood survivors, they were nonetheless devastating. In addition to these losses, many interviewees reported both direct acts and perceptions of discrimination in their attempts to seek shelter and aid during the floods. The discrimination and barriers many members of the homeless community reported during the floods inhibited their ability to effectively protect themselves and their belongings. These negative incidents, however, existed alongside positive experiences, as some homeless participants reported increased access to resources, job opportunities, and kinder treatment from the community. The findings above also show how homeless flood survivors perceived themselves as resilient, which challenges notions that conceive certain populations as homogenously vulnerable and without agency. The Access Model was a useful frame by which to examine the experiences of homeless persons, as it allows for recognition of agency and decision-making in the context of broader social relations and structures of domination, such as those described in Chapter 4 (Wisner et al. 2003).

The narratives presented in this chapter highlight exclusionary actions, or dynamic pressures, that attempt to push people out of communities and make them invisible. Homeless individuals in Boulder County faced unsafe conditions before the floods in the form of camping bans that criminalize sleeping in public spaces, which has the effect of pushing people into more

remote areas to camp and adding an additional financial burden that contributes to barriers out of homelessness. During the floods, discourses of deservingness were used to initially exclude homeless persons from accessing safe shelter. For example, as Courtney of House of Hope recalled, *“And you know, one of the comments that was made by a Red Cross worker to [a homeless person] was that, “you didn’t have anything before the flood, so why are you so upset now?”* In speaking of the invisibility that homeless persons experience, a homeless flood survivor named Elaine described actions that attempt to keep homeless persons hidden, such as sheltering them away from the larger community and requiring them to enter the back door for shelter so they remain out of sight. Henry Giroux (2006:28) asserts that neoliberal discourses concerning character and personal responsibility, for example, support behaviors that result in social and physical invisibility:

Defined primarily through the combined discourses of character, personal responsibility, and cultural homogeneity, entire populations expelled from the benefits of the marketplace are reified as products without any value, to be disposed of as ‘leftovers in the most radical and effective way: we make them invisible by not looking and unthinkable by not thinking’ (Bauman 2004).

People who cannot participate in the market economy are viewed as “not deserving” of social support (Giroux 2006; Reid 2013). Relatedly, homeless individuals are often “othered” through discourses that label them as criminal or less than human (Farrugia and Gerrard 2015). Those who do not fit into models of citizenship based on consumerism are viewed as “disposable” and pushed into marginal, invisible spaces. Neoliberal ideology perpetuates these discourses and justifies efforts to move “disposable” groups such as homeless communities to undesirable areas and places where they are out of sight (Giroux 2006; Peck and Tickell 2002).

Underlying themes of deservingness also arose from the data in homeless flood survivors’ attempts to obtain federal aid following the 2013 floods. While some homeless

persons were able to receive FEMA aid, much of this would have been impossible without the support of HSO staff that served as mediators between homeless individuals and FEMA officials. As case managers that I spoke with explained, some clients are unable to fill out the large amounts of paperwork required for the FEMA aid process—either because they do not have the mental capacity to do so or are unable to read the documents. Even for those who were capable, the advocacy that HSO staff provided was invaluable, as they vouched for their clients to FEMA employees regarding their living situations and campsite locations. Further, it is well documented that the FEMA funding structure prioritizes nuclear family living situations where individuals own property, presenting barriers to renters, multi-family households, people experiencing homelessness, immigrants, and minority groups in their efforts to obtain financial assistance (Tierney 2006). Outside of the FEMA aid process, homeless flood survivors noted blatant discrepancies in the treatment they received as compared to the “housed” flood survivors. These incidents mirror the everyday practices that produce unsafe conditions and relegate homeless persons to unsafe spaces, and demonstrate the necessity to understand larger processes that result in marginalization and increased vulnerability of homeless populations.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Using the Pressure and Release (PAR) model introduced by Blaikie and co-authors (1994; Wisner et al. 2003), I organized this dissertation by describing neoliberalization as a root cause of social disaster vulnerability. The PAR and Access models, introduced in Chapter 2, are particularly useful for explaining vulnerability in that they connect historically and spatially distant social, economic, and political root causes to dynamic pressures that create unsafe conditions. I argued that in the U.S., neoliberalization, as a root cause, contributes to dynamic pressures such as homeless criminalization, decreased availability of affordable housing, and the rollback of the welfare state, which have led to unsafe conditions for homeless-serving organizations (HSOs) and homeless individuals. Increased privatization of social services and a decline of the welfare state, for example, have contributed to a growing reliance on CBOs as the U.S. social “safety net” (Kneebone 2014; Kneebone and Holmes 2016; Lurie and Schuster 2015; Tierney 2013; Williams 2010). However, as identified in this study and other research examining organizational preparedness, these organizations are increasingly constrained in their ability to meet the demands of a growing population in need of their services (Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010; Salamon 2012; Tierney 2013). This creates barriers to organizational preparedness and community resilience to disaster, which has serious implications for individuals who rely on CBOs’ services beyond a disaster context. Other dynamic pressures, including homeless criminalization and decreased rates of affordable housing, produce unsafe conditions for homeless persons who effectively are forced to reside in unstable and/or hazard-prone areas (Boulder County Trends Report 2015-2016; Evans 2016; Fryar 2016; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty 2014).

The Access Model is complementary to the PAR model and focuses on micro-level processes of vulnerability at individual and household levels of analysis. I used the Access Model as a guiding framework to situate the experiences of homeless flood survivors and HSOs within political, social, and economic contexts and processes such as criminalization and decreased access to affordable housing. Although the Access Model is frequently used for quantitative analyses of vulnerability and decision-making at the household-level, it is analytically useful as it provides a framework for understanding qualitative, individual-level experiences and decision-making within larger socio-political and economic contexts. It also allows for recognition of agency in understanding disaster outcomes, which was of particular relevance to this study.

In previous chapters, I have delved into the experiences of HSOs and homeless flood survivors in Boulder County during the 2013 Colorado floods. Through analysis of qualitative data from one-on-one and focus group interviews with fifty-five participants, 100 hours of participant observation, and documentary analysis of roughly 100 documents, this research sought to understand the experiences of a population that is poorly understood with respect to disasters. In Chapter 4, I described examples of processes that produce homeless persons' vulnerability, while noting specific examples of practices and ordinances in Boulder County that have the effect of criminalizing, dehumanizing, and attempting to drive away the homeless community. This chapter included an exploration of community contention associated with homelessness and how to address it, as well as concerns surrounding wildfire risk and homeless encampments. Drawing upon data obtained from eleven interviews with public officials and community stakeholders, I presented findings pertaining to evacuation and sheltering issues with homeless campers during the floods, while also discussing disaster planning for homeless

communities at both a national and local level. In Chapter 5, I explored the daily concerns of HSOs, disaster experiences of HSOs during the floods, and the disaster preparedness of these organizations in Boulder County. Here, I argued that HSOs' experience compounded vulnerability in that they function within a demanding context with limited resources while also serving a population with unique needs. In Chapter 6, I focused on the narratives of homeless persons during the 2013 floods by noting their disaster losses, barriers they faced, incidents of discrimination, and positive experiences they reported. In so doing, I emphasized how cultural notions of deservingness and disposability result in exclusionary behaviors and outcomes for homeless populations. Specifically, I argue that discriminatory incidents reflect everyday practices and processes that place homeless individuals in unsafe spaces. In this final chapter, I present empirical contributions, theoretical implications, and practical recommendations from this research. I conclude by outlining future research directions.

Empirical Contributions

Homeless Persons' Disaster Experiences

Using narratives from homeless flood survivors, this research contributes to the state of knowledge about homeless persons' vulnerability to, capacity to address, and experiences with disaster. While their vulnerabilities have been identified in previous research (Elvrum and Wong 2012; Erikson 1995; Walters and Gaillard 2014; Wisner 1998), predisaster homeless persons have received relatively little attention regarding the unique experiences and challenges they face during a disaster event, as well as inattention to factors that enhance their resilience to disaster (Settembrino 2017). In Chapter 6, I identified a number of concerns, losses, discrimination, and positive experiences homeless flood survivors reported, noting common themes throughout. Perhaps most notable were homeless persons' experiences with discrimination and their self-identified resilience to disaster.

In Chapter 2, I described literature pertaining to homelessness and disaster vulnerability, including discussions of the effect of stigma on the ability of homeless persons to respond to and recover from disaster (Erikson 1995; Snow and Mulcahy 2001). Stigma associated with homelessness undoubtedly contributed to the discrimination many perceived and experienced in their attempts to acquire shelter and aid during the floods, especially as they were initially turned away from a public disaster shelter. Many homeless interviewees reported discrimination outside of this event, noting the perceived separation of services they received compared to housed flood survivors and the treatment they received even after they were able to enter the Red Cross shelter. This mirrors findings from Brenda Phillips (1996) and Sondra Fogel (2017) who note that the stigma and exclusion homeless individuals experience during disaster not only affects their ability to acquire and/or return to established residences but also challenges their existing coping mechanisms, exacerbating their stress.

Further, some homeless interviewees reported their ability “bounce back” during the floods, which was in large part related to their livelihoods before the disaster. Indeed, interviewees noted that they possessed adaptive capacity, arguing that they must be resilient to navigate the challenges and barriers they face on a daily basis. This echoes findings from Marc Settembrino’s (2017) study of homeless men in Florida, which found that homeless individuals exercise agency in the face of extreme weather conditions by utilizing human, social, and cultural capital. He argues that through their use of these forms of capital, “people experiencing homelessness appear to be adept at mitigating their hazards risk” (7). However, he later cautions that while one might infer from this study that homeless individuals are resilient, scholars should not overlook the root causes of homelessness that perpetuate their vulnerability to disaster. Such findings challenge notions of homeless individuals as a homogenous, vulnerable group without

agency and encourage future research to consider capacity and resiliency alongside vulnerability. Importantly, as I mentioned in Chapter 6, these findings are not meant to suggest that all homeless individuals are capable of adapting to the threats and challenges of disaster, but they point to the nuances of experience within the homeless population.

Homeless-Serving Organizations' Disaster Experiences

Scholars have noted challenges that CBOs face in preparing for disaster (Gin et al. 2016; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010). However, few studies have examined the disaster experiences of CBOs that serve at-risk communities. This dissertation contributes to the state of knowledge on social service CBOs in a disaster context by highlighting Boulder County HSOs' disaster preparedness and the challenges these organizations faced during the 2013 floods. The findings presented in Chapter 5 are especially noteworthy as they provide a localized case study by which to understand the constraints that HSOs experience in their ability to adequately prepare for and respond to disaster. Preexisting concerns, such as funding and staffing constraints, inhibited these HSOs from preparing for disaster or treating disasters as a top concern. Previous studies also identify these and other constraints as barriers to disaster planning among CBOs and FBOs (Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010; Gin et al. 2017). These organizations' inability to prepare is noteworthy, especially given the increased emphasis on CBOs to participate in community resilience-building efforts (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2017). It is also important to mention client-based considerations that HSOs must take into account when planning for disaster in ensuring that clients' needs are met. Moreover, HSOs need further guidance with respect to the position they are expected to hold in evacuating and/or sheltering homeless communities.

During the 2013 floods, HSOs experienced a number of issues, many of which were connected to a lack of disaster preparedness within and among organizations. Staffing and communication proved difficult as all organizations included in this study had staffing shortages since many employees were either not working during the non-emergency sheltering season or were themselves affected by the flooding in some capacity. Relatedly, communication within organizations was an issue as some employees were stranded and unable to meet at their respective organizations or manage staff and organizational activities in person. This was the case, for example, with an executive-level employee at House of Hope who was stranded at home during the peak of the flooding. Inter-organizational communication was an additional issue highlighted by some HSO staff, as preexisting communication plans were not solidified before the floods.

Organizations also found it difficult to communicate to clients and members of the homeless community more generally about resources and sheltering options. I present recommendations pertaining to communication later in this chapter. Finally, some HSOs in Boulder County contended that heightened advocacy roles were a major issue during the floods, as they were not prepared to take on this type of responsibility during the disaster. These findings, while specific to HSOs in Boulder County, may be useful in understanding constraints that CBOs face during disaster—especially those working with underserved and marginalized communities.

Evacuation and Sheltering the Homeless Community during Disaster

Evacuation and sheltering, as identified in Chapter 4, were recognized by public officials and community stakeholders as two predominant concerns with the homeless community during the floods. Public officials and community stakeholders noted the issues they experienced in

evacuating homeless persons residing along waterways and in remote areas, especially in balancing the safety of these hard-to-reach individuals with the safety of first responders. They also reported difficulty in addressing concerns and complaints by members of the housed community who did not want to shelter next to homeless individuals. This presented problems for first responders and HSO staff alike, as they attempted to mediate concerns and act as managers and advocates for the homeless community utilizing public shelters. When it was time for these disaster shelters to close, the homeless community presented additional issues as shelter staff were unable to close up until everyone had a safe place to go. This resulted in one HSO starting the emergency shelter season early to accommodate for the homeless persons still using the Red Cross facility.

Theoretical Implications

Neoliberal Citizenship, Deservingness, and Disposability

Throughout this dissertation, I have shown how processes of neoliberalization have resulted in unequal urban design and policy, effectively curtailing uses of public space for certain groups and criminalizing individuals for seeking shelter in unconventional dwellings. These outcomes effectively relegate populations that are already marginalized to unsafe settings that not only increase their susceptibility to weather-related risks and other hazards, but also socially isolate them from the larger community. As a political, economic, social, and cultural regime, neoliberalism justifies this type of exclusion and criminalization through its promotion of values such as individualism, self-reliance, and personal responsibility (Giroux 2006; Reid 2013; Somers and Block 2005).

Simultaneously, processes of neoliberalization have shifted the responsibility of social service provision from the state to non-state actors, such as nonprofit CBOs and private industry.

This reflects neoliberal strategies of devolution and privatization, which increase local responsibility for social welfare while delocalizing the power of local and state actors' ability to do so (Adams 2012, 2013; Gotham 2012; Peck and Tickell 2002). Consequently, CBOs that are already resource strained must be entrepreneurial in efforts to acquire funding and build cross-sector partnerships. For instance, according to a 2015 survey and report produced by the Nonprofit Finance Fund, roughly seventy-five percent of representatives from U.S. nonprofit reported increased demand for services, but slightly over half explained that they were unable to meet this demand largely due to funding and a lack of long-term financial stability (Nonprofit Finance Fund 2015).⁴⁴ At the same time they are experiencing these constraints, however, nonprofit CBOs are called upon to step up as critical community actors in disaster resilience building and recovery efforts (David 2010; Tierney 2015). As Emmanuel David (2010:405-06) argues in his study of the Katrina Krewe, a women-led recovery group following Katrina, increased emphasis on volunteer work and heightened responsibility for non-state actors and civil society groups “simultaneously masks and obscures the structural displacement of responsibility for larger public goods onto the activities of civil society groups, corporations, non-profit organizations, and women.” The onus of responsibility for becoming resilient and recovering from disaster, therefore, is on the individual and local communities, not the state (Tierney 2015).

Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002) analyze the historical transformations of neoliberalism, noting that it originated as abstract intellectual thought and then became aggressively implemented during the Reagan and Thatcher eras, or what they described as “roll-back neoliberalism.” This first shift of neoliberalism from intellectual thought into a political

⁴⁴ This report draws upon findings from surveys collected from 5,451 respondents.

project resulted in state-initiated restructuring of programs, increased privatization of formerly state-held responsibilities, and deregulation, which I described in Chapter 2. Peck and Tickell (2002) contend that the most recent shift of Western-centric neoliberalism occurred under the Clinton and Blair Administrations. They define this shift as “roll-out neoliberalism,” which represents an extension from earlier neoliberal processes that sought to minimize or eliminate government intervention in the markets to processes of institution building. Peck and Tickell (2002:389) elaborate on this transition, explaining that:

This most recent phase might be portrayed as one of “roll-out” neoliberalism, underlining the sense in which new forms of institution-building and governmental intervention have been licensed within the (broadly defined) neoliberal project. No longer concerned narrowly with the mobilization and extension of markets (and market logics), neoliberalism is increasingly associated with the political foregrounding of new modes of “social” and penal policymaking, concerned specifically with the aggressive reregulation, disciplining, and containment of those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of the 1980s.

Neoliberalization in the U.S., in its current form, was spawned out of a self-imposed crisis, as the failings of the original “roll-back” neoliberal project required new responses to accommodate for its negative outcomes that left substantial gaps in social service provision and to “secure its ongoing legitimacy” (Peck and Tickell 2002:396; Tierney 2015).

Indeed, neoliberal ideology and market fundamentalist thought have become pervasive in the U.S. and have come to dominate aspects of life that were once managed by the federal government, particularly regarding social welfare and corporate regulation. This has resulted in a conception of citizenship that is rooted in consumerism and participation in the economy (Giroux 2006; Gotham 2012; Peck 2013). Consequently, individuals who are unable to participate in the market are deemed as “disposable” and pushed to spaces of invisibility (Giroux 2006, 2012). Such is the case with homeless and low-income populations that are pushed out of communities through processes of criminalization and practices that give primacy to privileged residents and

business interests. People who are welfare-dependent or who do not conform to neoliberal values of individualism and self-reliance, for example, are then penalized, which Peck and Tickell (2002:391-92) characterize as the “(re)criminalization of poverty.” They later explain that:

[W]hile zones of deeply impacted poverty and social exclusion may have been no-go areas for neoliberals during the 1980s, in its roll-out guise neoliberalism is increasingly penetrating these very places, animated by a set of concerns related to crime, worklessness, welfare dependency, and social breakdown (Peck and Tickell 2002: 395).

This is certainly the case for many homeless individuals who receive camping and loitering citations for sheltering in public spaces. These trends in recriminalization are also evident in the increased size of the Boulder County jail population, as a representative at the sheriff’s office maintained. Just as neoliberalism contributed to homelessness by devolutionizing and privatizing social welfare, recent processes of neoliberalization further contribute to homeless persons’ vulnerability by essentially criminalizing their existence.

In Chapter 4, I provided examples of these distancing processes in Boulder County that highlight the types of reasoning housed and more well-off residents employ when preventing (or attempting to prevent) the development of homeless-serving facilities and affordable housing. The concept of disposability also explains the justification of measures that effectively criminalize homelessness, as homeless persons are often viewed as unsightly, a public nuisance, lazy, dangerous, and harmful to community image (Del Casino Jr. and Jocoy 2008; Farrugia and Gerrard 2015). Even in a progressive community such as Boulder, White and class privilege asserts itself in measures and practices that exclude groups such as the homeless community and those in need of affordable housing. Residents in Boulder County have the power to prioritize environmental amenities and NIMBYism over the needs of low-income residents while at the same time acknowledging the necessity for affordable housing—a need that nonetheless goes unmet in most cases. Importantly, Boulder County government is constrained not only by the

pushback it receives from residents, but also by state law that prohibits rent controls. This type of legislation is indicative of profit-seeking prioritization over the needs of low-income residents.

The case of a proposed affordable housing development in Gunbarrel is one example of some residents' attempts to prevent low-income individuals from entering their community. Although the development would allow roughly 240 affordable homes to be built in the county, some county residents cite environmental and wildlife concerns as justifications for why the development should not move forward, effectively prioritizing environmental concerns over the needs of residents who are unable to afford the rising costs of living in Boulder (Twin Lakes Action Group, Inc. 2016). This discourse also was present in the town of Lyons following the floods, as residents voted against development in parkland and open space that would have allowed low-income residents displaced by the floods to return to the area (Burness 2015, 2016b; Burness and Byars 2015; Illescas 2015). These examples demonstrate the primacy that groups with privilege are given in determining who deserves to be a part of a community and who does not. Such exclusion, as shown in this dissertation, extends into the disaster setting for some homeless individuals and demonstrates the effects of neoliberal discourse and dynamic processes of neoliberalization that result in heightened social vulnerability before and during disaster. Disaster scholars have found that processes of neoliberalization produce negative outcomes for communities during disaster recovery (Adams 2012, 2013; Gotham 2012; Perrow 2007; Tierney 2014), but this is the first study, to my knowledge, that examines how neoliberalization produces vulnerability leading up to and during a disaster.

HSOs' Compounded Vulnerability

Social service CBOs, as I described above and throughout the dissertation, are increasingly constrained in their ability to serve growing numbers of clients. This is largely due

to persistent rates of poverty, growing income inequality, and decreased federal support for social programs. For some CBOs, such as those that serve homeless populations, client-based characteristics create additional considerations and concerns, which are critical to understanding HSOs' vulnerability (Gin et al. 2016). As I elaborated in Chapter 5, the stigmatized status of HSOs' client base presents additional challenges in these organizations' ability to prepare and respond to disaster. For example, during the floods when HSOs had to advocate on behalf of their clients, this required additional time, staff, and resources that were not anticipated. I argue that these structural and client-based considerations constitute compounded vulnerability among HSOs, similar to how individuals and communities can experience compounded vulnerability by race, class, and gender, for example (Morrow 1999). Despite the findings presented here and elsewhere (Gin et al. 2016; Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010), CBOs and FBOs are called upon to serve as key actors in building community resilience (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2017; Tierney 2015). These social service organizations uphold a critical role in the U.S. social safety net, which is largely attributable to the contemporary U.S. neoliberal governance regime that has decreased federal support for social services and outsourced social service functions that used to be housed in the federal government. However, HSOs' and other CBOs' inability to provide sufficient resources to the clients they serve make it difficult for them to adequately prepare for disaster, thus hindering efforts toward community resilience. Efforts to prioritize community-level resilience building through nonprofit and civil society groups reflect processes that actively minimize the role of the state in caring for people and property (Tierney 2015:1336).

Defining Disaster for Homeless Communities

Findings throughout this dissertation challenge conceptions of what constitutes a disaster and how disaster definitions may vary across populations. “Every day is a disaster” was a common thread present throughout the data, both from organizational and homeless perspectives. This statement characterizes the preexisting conditions and contexts in which HSOs and homeless individuals operate in on a daily basis. For HSOs, funding limitations and staffing constraints present obstacles for them in carrying out routine operations, let alone in maintaining organizational functions during disaster. For a homeless person, an ozone action day, high wind advisory, smoke from wildfires, or a cold snap may constitute a disaster, as these individuals are often exposed to the elements—especially during times when emergency shelters are unavailable. I argue further that most conceptions of disaster tend to leave out individuals who experience crises every day, such as homeless communities that must be cognizant of environmental conditions and weather that the housed population can avoid (Settembrino 2017). Such considerations around definitions of disaster may also be extended into definitional issues regarding conceptions of chronic or slow-onset disasters such as drought (Oliver-Smith 1999).

Practical Recommendations

A number of considerations regarding communication, evacuation and sheltering of predisaster homeless persons, and inter-organizational communication should be taken into account when incorporating homeless communities into disaster plans.⁴⁵ First, having preexisting relationships and established familiarity among first responders, such as law enforcement, HSOs, and members of the homeless community are critical in identifying and engaging with homeless

⁴⁵ I have remained in communication with homeless advocates, HSO staff, and community stakeholders with the intention of co-crafting recommendations from this research. The practical recommendations mentioned here either have been discussed with these individuals or reflect common themes in the data.

persons before and during disaster (Centers for Disease Control 2015; National Health Care for the Homeless Council 2014). Pre-established relationships with homeless gatekeepers and facilitators, in particular, may enhance communication with the homeless community during a disaster event, as these individuals likely have access to those living in isolated or hidden areas who are more difficult for staff or first responders to reach. In Chapter 6, I presented a story from a homeless flood survivor who assisted first responders in identifying and communicating with homeless campers about the need to evacuate and where to find shelter. This demonstrates the importance of facilitators and highlights the need for engaging members of the homeless community before a disaster occurs.

I asked interviewees about what should be taken into consideration in the future when planning for the homeless community during disaster. HSOs typically post announcements at organizational facilities and key areas where homeless individuals tend to meet, such as public libraries. These locations were identified by interviewees as areas where announcements should be kept up-to-date during a disaster event to remedy any confusion that might arise from word-of-mouth communication or at times when information is rapidly changing. Participants in the women's focus group recommended posting and maintaining information throughout the Pearl Street Mall on the announcement kiosks. One interviewee explained that people could then be directed to *“go to a Pearl Street mall kiosk.”* She later contended, *“we really don't have a hotline to call. Ninety-nine percent of us don't have phones that work.”*

However, reverse 9-1-1 notifications via telephone was one approach taken to notify homeless individuals in Longmont about the flooding, as one public official explained. Months before the floods, homeless and housed residents in Longmont were encouraged to register through an Everbridge notification system that would then alert them about a weather event or

emergency. While this is one example of an approach that can be taken to notify homeless individuals about impending weather concerns, it should be coupled with other strategies such as posted flyers and outreach to areas where homeless individuals frequent.

Some suggestions and recommendations from homeless flood survivors identified issues and ideas that were not recognized in interviews with HSO staff and public officials. This speaks to the importance of including homeless persons' perspectives in community disaster planning. For example, homeless flood survivors recommended that law enforcement should be lenient in enforcing camping bans and loitering citations during and following a disaster event by letting homeless individuals temporarily camp in illegal areas. This would be helpful for many homeless individuals, as many of them may lose campsites and belongings during an extreme event, as they did in the floods. When it is time to move people out of areas such as parking garages, homeless interviewees suggested that first responders and public officials give them plenty of time to move out instead of immediately ticketing them. This can be done through written notices posted in areas where homeless individuals are seeking temporary shelter, as well as through verbal announcements.

Emergency planners must also plan for and mitigate any potential issues that may arise when attempting to transition homeless persons out of public disaster shelters (Jones 2016; Koh 2016; WAFB 2016; Wise 2008; Yuen 2011). As an example of how these problems might be addressed, one HSO that offered mass emergency sheltering was given funds from the county to open its facility early to accommodate the sheltering needs of people still using shelters long after the predisaster housed population had been relocated. However, all HSOs in this study noted staffing constraints during the floods, as many employees were unable to make it to work. One way of possibly mitigating this issue would be to maintain an emergency volunteer roster,

which would include contact information for trained volunteers that may be able to assist during staffing shortages.

Lastly, disaster planning for the homeless community, as well as for other underserved or at-risk groups, necessitates inter-organizational collaboration and communication. Inter-organizational communication was a reported issue during the floods among HSO staff, who recognized the need for having established communication plans in place before an event. Although the service provision landscape in Boulder, along with existing communication plans, are changing, findings from this research demonstrate the necessity for HSOs to be integrated into city and countywide emergency plans. This follows findings from other scholars that have shown that in order for organizations to effectively prepare for disaster, cross-sector collaboration is essential (Gin et al. 2016; Ritchie and Tierney 2008; Ritchie, Tierney, and Gilbert 2010; Simo and Bies 2007). This includes operating agreements within and among organizations, which could be formalized through memoranda of understanding. Connections and collaborations among organizations enhance the capacity of these entities to serve clients and continue operations during a crisis. HSOs should have a clear understanding of the roles and services they are expected to take on during disaster and should establish lines of communication with other HSOs and relevant CBOs, emergency managers, first responders, and government departments, such as Housing and Human Services.

Future Research Directions

Increasing Sample Diversity and Employing Intersectionality

A noted limitation of this study is the lack of diversity in my sample of homeless interviewees, although I made concerted efforts to incorporate more diverse perspectives from within the homeless population. Future research should not only incorporate more diverse

homeless perspectives through recruitment of racially and ethnically diverse individuals, immigrants, homeless youth, and families, for example, but it should also examine the ways in which characteristics intersect to produce uneven disaster outcomes among homeless persons.

An intersectional analytical approach serves as a useful tool for understanding multiple sources of vulnerability and resilience within populations, especially those such as the homeless community that are frequently homogenized in terms of their identity and vulnerability (Ryder 2017; Settembrino 2017). Settembrino (2017:8) contends that: “[a]n intersectional understanding of homelessness, hazards, and disasters will provide practitioners greater guidance as to how to provide support for the homeless in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.” I currently have a manuscript under review that explores the utility of intersectionality as an analytical approach for understanding homeless individuals’ vulnerability and capacity to disaster, where I discuss the implications of intersecting identities and characteristics such as gender, age, and physical and mental capabilities with homelessness. For example, those with mental illness or cognitive disabilities typically are reliant upon social service organizations that provide therapy, medication, and assistance. When these organizations are disrupted, such was the case with Boulder Professionals during the floods, individuals are left with limited to no options for acquiring necessary resources. Findings from this manuscript point to the variation in experiences that come from overlapping identities and how they produce unique outcomes for individuals before, during, and after disaster.

Further Examining the Role of CBOs during Disaster

Future studies should include perspectives from CBO staff that specialize in services for other groups, such as immigrant, non-English speaking, and at-risk youth populations.

Additional research on other types of CBOs and these organizations’ roles in disaster response

and recovery is critical to our understanding of the challenges that CBOs face in their attempts to serve clients during disaster. Future research should also compare disaster preparedness and experiences among CBOs by accounting for differences in community context, including hazard exposure, geography, population size and characteristics, and the funding landscape, to name but a few examples. Such work is critical to understanding CBOs' vulnerability and capacity to respond during disaster, especially given the emphasis for these organizations to participate in community resilience-building efforts. It is worth noting that some of the findings presented here from the perspectives of HSO staff are likely to be somewhat representative of disaster experiences among other CBOs, particularly along the lines of funding constraints and a lack of disaster preparedness.

Concluding Remarks

This research highlights the need to understand social processes that create risk and vulnerability while simultaneously hindering efforts to enhance community resilience. Neoliberal ideology and economic and political practices produce dynamic pressures and promote discourses that sustain social inequalities and unsafe conditions. It is essential to critically examine the ways in which we define citizenship and deservingness and how these conceptions reproduce existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. The findings presented throughout this dissertation also point to the need for a greater understanding of homeless individuals' disaster experiences and the ways in which historically identified vulnerable populations possess agency in their ability to respond to and recover from disaster.

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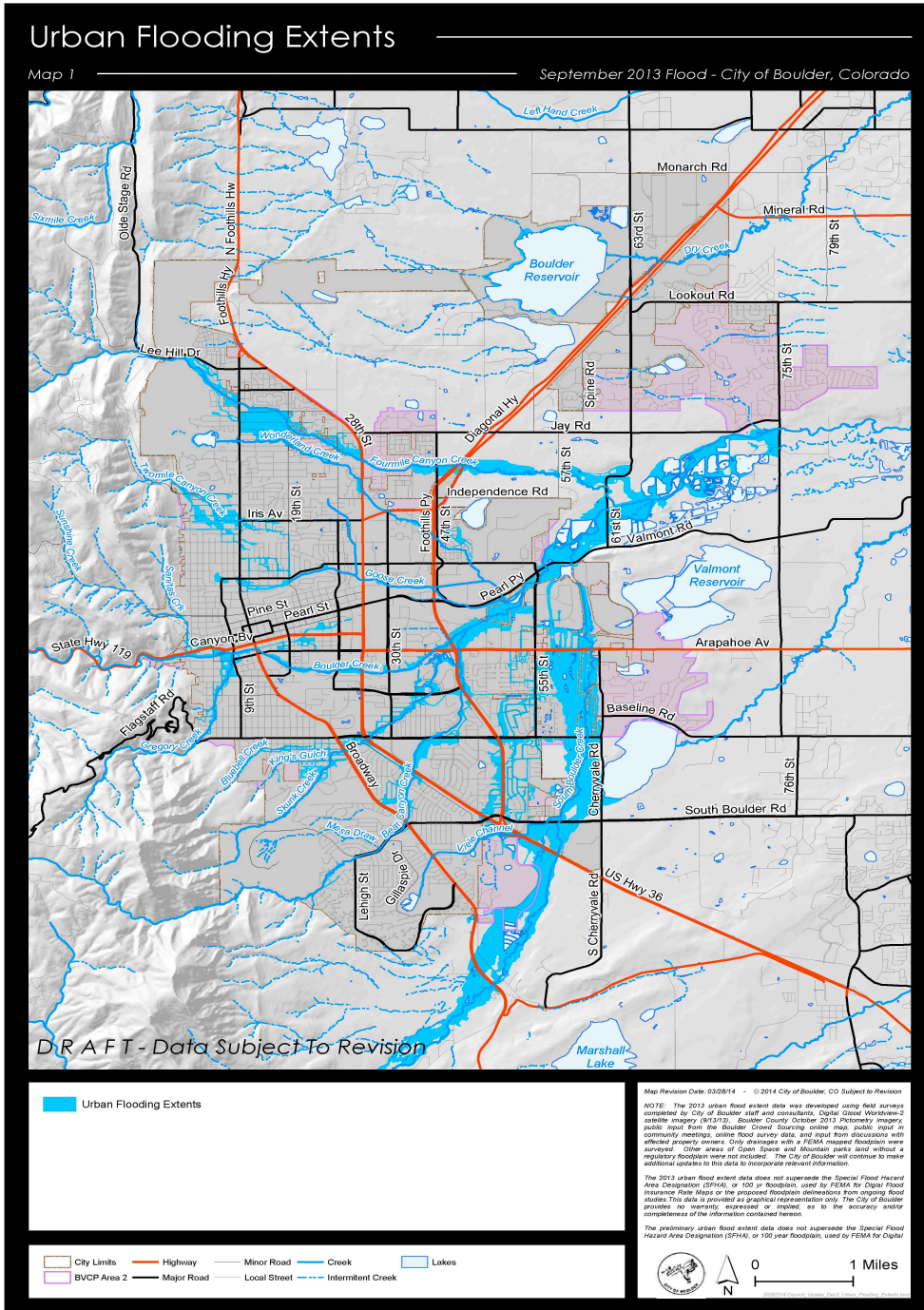
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APPENDIX A

Urban Flooding Extents during the September 2013 Flood—City of Boulder



APPENDIX B

Homeless Participants' Flood Experiences

Unstructured Interview Guide

I'd like to begin by asking you some basic questions about your life here in Boulder County before the floods. Could you tell me about your life and routines prior to the flood? Where did/do you typically reside?

Next, I'd like to ask you about your experience during and immediately after the flood.

- 1) Where were you when you first heard about the flooding?
- 2) How did you find out about it?
- 3) What were your initial thoughts? What ran through your mind?
- 4) What did you do? Were you alone at the time, or with others? If you were with other people, can you talk about who they were and what happened? What did you have with you?
- 5) What were your greatest concerns during this period?

I'm interested to learn about your experiences following the flood.

- 1) Are there other impacts of the floods to your or other people you know who are homeless that would be helpful for me to know about?
- 2) Did the flood affect your ability to go about your usual daily routines? Your ability to receive the services and help you usually receive?
- 3) Did you attempt to find assistance or resources after the flood? If so, where? What were the outcomes of those attempts?
- 4) Do you feel that there were sufficient resources to address the needs of people, particularly homeless that were affected by the floods?
 - a. Did you face any barriers in trying to obtain resources?
 - b. Do you know others who had trouble getting assistance after the flood?
 - c. In terms of your own needs, were there things that were better after the flood? For example, were there more resources available for you and others who are homeless?
 - d. Who/what organizations do you feel have been most helpful to you in dealing with the aftermath of the floods?
 - e. Are there organizations or people that you feel could have done a better job of addressing people's needs? If so, how could they have done better?

- 5) In general, how would you describe your experiences after the flood? What has changed—if anything?
- 6) Lastly, would you speculate/look ahead a bit and tell me what you see as the potential long-term impacts for you, your friends, and family as well as other homeless individuals?

End of Interview Guide

APPENDIX C

Homeless Participants' Flood Experiences

Focus Group Interview Guide

I'd like to begin by asking you some basic questions about your life here in Boulder before the floods. Could you tell me about your life and routines prior to the flood? Where do you typically reside?

Next, I'd like to ask you all about your experiences during and immediately after the flood.

1. Where were you when you first heard about the flooding?
2. How did you find out about it?
3. What were your initial thoughts? What ran through your mind?
4. What did you do? Were you alone at the time, or with others? If you were with other people, can you talk about who they were and what happened? What did you have with you?
5. What were your greatest concerns during this period?

I'm interested to learn about your experiences following the flood.

6. Are there other impacts of the floods to your or other people you know who are homeless that would be helpful for me to know about?
7. Did the flood affect your abilities to go about your usual daily routines? Your abilities to receive the services and help you usually receive?
8. Did you attempt to find assistance or resources after the flood? If so, where? What were the outcomes of those attempts?
9. Do you feel that there were sufficient resources to address the needs of people, particularly homeless that were affected by the floods?
 - a. Did you face any barriers in trying to obtain resources?
 - b. Do you know others who had trouble getting assistance after the flood?
 - c. In terms of your own needs, were there things that were better after the flood? For example, were there more resources available for you and others who are homeless?
 - d. Who/what organizations do you feel have been most helpful to you in dealing with the aftermath of the floods?
 - e. Are there organizations or people that you feel could have done a better job of addressing people's needs? If so, how could they have done better?

10. In general, how would you describe your experiences after the flood? What has changed—if anything?
11. Lastly, would you speculate/look ahead a bit and tell me what you see as the potential long-term impacts for you, your friends, and family as well as other homeless individuals?

End of Interview Guide

APPENDIX D

**Organizations that Serve the Homeless in Boulder County
Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

This interview is designed to obtain information about your organization, its experiences during and immediately after the Boulder Flood, as well as its efforts to prepare for future disasters. I will be asking questions on four topics: your organization’s activities and services; your organization’s experiences during and after the Boulder Flood; the disaster planning activities in which your organization has been involved; and finally, the clients that you serve and their experiences during and after the flood.

The first set of questions concerns your organization.

1. First, tell me about your role in the organization. What are your duties and how long have you been involved at _____?
2. What are the most important services your organization/program provides? For each service, how many clients does your organization serve, on average, each year?

<i>Most important services</i>	<i>Number of Clients/Year</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

3. How would you describe the demographics of your client pool?

Probe for: Male vs. female clients; individuals vs. families; Age ranges: Youth, adults, elderly persons; Racial and ethnic makeup of clientele; Any specific populations: veterans, persons with substance abuse issues; LGBT groups; Seasonal changes in clients served (e.g., summer vs. other times of the year); persons affected by the ongoing economic crisis.

Ask for any statistics organization can make available, reports on client base.

4. What times of the year does your organization operate?

- a. Are there any instances where you would operate during off times? [Outside seasonal operations or daily hours of operation]
- b. (If yes) Do you have any examples?

5. How would you describe your relationships with other organizations that serve homeless populations, low income groups, or others with special needs? Is there a degree of collaboration or do you function more or less independently?

Probe for membership in interagency groups, coalitions, and other organized networks.

6. Who are your major financial contributors? Where do your funds come from?

This would be a good time to ask for recent annual reports and other reports on organizational funding and activities.

7. How many people work for the organization?

- a. Total paid staff? _____
- b. Volunteers? _____
- c. Out of your total number of employees and volunteers, how many of them live in Boulder County? _____

8. I would like to know a little more about the facility/ies that your organization maintains.

- a. Under which/what establishment(s) do you operate out of?
- b. If it operates as a shelter, how many individuals are served on a typical day?
Probe for seasonal variation, other variation (e.g., very cold or very hot weather)

- c. If it serves food, approximately how many individuals does it serve at each meal?
9. Organizations have many things to be concerned about besides disasters.
- a. Can you describe some of your organization's major concerns and challenges, other than disasters? *Probe for: financial and fundraising concerns; needs that are difficult to meet; relationships with other agencies (e.g., law enforcement, courts)*
 - b. Where do disasters fall in that list of concerns?
10. Is there anything else about your organization that you would like for me to know before I ask more specifically about your organization's experiences with the flood?

Next, I would like to ask about your organization's experiences during and after the flood.

11. Where were you when you first heard about the flooding?
- a. How did you find out about it?
 - b. What did you do?
 - c. What were your greatest concerns during this period?
 - d. Please describe your organization's experiences during the flood. What were the most important issues you were experiencing at that time?
 - e. Did your organization continue to operate during the Boulder Flood, or was there a period of interruption? *(If there was an interruption in service provision, probe for duration and reason(s) for interruption.)*
12. Did the flood affect your organization's normal activities, and if so, how were activities affected, for how long, and why?
- a. (If operations were affected): When would you say your organization was able to resume normal operations? How long did it take?
 - b. (If operations not affected): How did your organization manage to cope and provide services during this disaster?
13. What types of organizational relationships were most important both prior to and during the Boulder flood?

- a. Could you further describe some of the relationships and collaborations you had with other agencies?
 - b. What about after the flood? Were your organization's relationships with other agencies about the same as before, or did they change? And if they changed, can you describe those changes? (*Probe about new relationships/collaborations.*)
14. As a result of the flood, did your organization need resources above and beyond what you had on hand?
- a. If yes, what kinds of resources were needed, and how did the organization go about seeking those resources?
 - b. Did your organization provide resources to other organizations during and after the flood? If so, what types?

Now I'd like to talk about disaster planning at your organization.

15. Prior to the flood, did your organization have a written disaster plan?

If yes:

- a. Ask for a copy of the plan.
- b. Can you tell me in general what sorts of things the plan covers—that is, what parts of the organization's response are spelled out in the plan? (*Probe for mutual aid agreements, types of mutual aid that will be exchanged.*)
- c. Did you find that the plan was useful in the flood? If it was useful, in what areas or with what types of problems? If it was not useful or of limited use, in what areas was the plan not helpful, and why?
- d. Can you tell me about when and why the plan was developed? How long has the organization had a written plan, and what were the reasons for having a plan? (*Probe for: how long the plan has existed; reasons why plan was developed, including prior disaster experience, requirements from funders, planning initiatives with other community organizations, leadership interest, etc.*)
- e. Are there discussions in the organization about changes that may need to be made as a result of the flood?

If no:

- a. Were there other procedures in place that would help the organization prepare/respond to a disaster like the flood? (*Probe for other emergency procedures that were used in the flood.*)

- b. There can be many reasons why organizations don't develop plans for disasters. I'm going to read a short list of possible reasons and ask you to tell me whether the reasons apply to your organization. Is there no written plan because (*check all that apply*):

_____ It's not necessary to have a written plan to know what to do during a disaster

_____ The organization doesn't have other resources that are needed in order to develop a plan, such as money and special knowledge about what to do

_____ Other reasons (please explain)

- c. Since the flood occurred, have there been discussions in the organization about the need for a disaster plan? (*Probe for details of those discussions.*)

16. Is there information on disaster issues that you would like to have, but do not have at this time? If yes, what kind of information, and in what form?
17. Within your organization, is there a particular person who is responsible for disaster or emergency planning?

If yes:

- a. What is this person's name and title?
- b. Is (name of person) a full-time or part-time employee?
- c. What percentage of (name of person's) job is dedicated to disaster planning?
- d. What kinds of things does (this person) do as part of her/his/your job? (*Probe for: writing plans, organizing drills, training, exercises, attending meetings with other disaster planners and organizations*)

Now, in this last part of the interview, I would like to ask you to tell me about how the flood affected the clients of your organization.

18. You've talked about how the Boulder Flood affected your organization; now let's talk about how it affected the people whom you serve.
- a. How do you think the Boulder Flood has affected your clients?
- b. What were the biggest challenges for your clients during the flood?
- c. Do you know if any of your clients were/are involved in response and recovery efforts, and if they were, what kinds of help did they provide?

19. The flood displaced large numbers of people from their homes. Did your organization provide any services to people who were not homeless before but who were made homeless by the flood?

If yes:

- a. Can you give me a general idea of what this client group was like?
- b. What kinds of help did your organization provide?

Probe for whether services were the same or different from those provided to pre-disaster clientele; probe for services that may have been new, such as referrals to disaster assistance agencies.

20. Did you communicate with your clients about where to obtain resources and/or shelter during and after the flood?
- a. If **yes**, how did you communicate with your clients about resources and where did you refer them?
 - b. If **no**, what impeded communication?
21. In talking with clients, have you heard about their experiences with agencies, organizations, and groups that were providing assistance to disaster survivors?
- a. *If yes, refer to the following probes: Can you describe these contacts? Were there experiences that were positive? Negative? How were your clients treated by disaster assistance agencies? Did they feel that their needs were met?*
22. Can you speak to the recovery process and if/how members of this population have recovered from the floods? (*Probe: What has impeded or promoted recovery? E.g., services or organizations that have assisted members of this population or gaps in services that have impeded the recovery process*)
23. Is there anything else you would like to share about your clients and their experiences during and after the flood?
24. Is there anything else you wish to share about your organization, your clients, and/or your experiences during and after the Boulder Flood?

End of Interview Guide

APPENDIX E
Public Officials and Community Stakeholders⁴⁶
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Language for public officials:

This interview is designed to obtain information about your department, how you and your department were involved in the flood and your experiences, its experiences during and immediately after the Boulder Flood, as well as its efforts to prepare for future disasters. I will be asking questions on four topics: your department's functions; your department's experiences during and after the Boulder Flood; the disaster planning activities in which your department has been involved; and finally, the homeless population's experiences during and after the flood, as well as their recovery.

Language for community stakeholders:

This interview is designed to obtain information about your organization/group, its experiences during and immediately after the Boulder Flood, as well as its efforts to prepare for future disasters. I will be asking questions on four topics: your organization's experiences during and after the Boulder Flood; the disaster planning activities in which your organization has been involved; and finally, the clients that you serve and their experiences during and after the flood.

The first set of questions concerns your department.

4. First, what are the primary functions of your department? What population(s) do you primarily serve?
5. Tell me about your role in the department. What are your duties and how long have you been involved at _____?
6. In what capacities do you work on projects or initiatives that relate to homelessness?
Probe for: Initiatives, laws, regulations in place that directly affect homeless individuals at various levels of governance and/or organizationally
7. In what areas does your department address issues that are unique to low-income or homeless individuals?
8. How would you describe your relationships with other organizations or agencies that serve homeless populations, low-income groups, or others with special needs? Is there a degree of collaboration or do you function more or less independently?
9. Can you describe some of your department's major concerns and challenges?

⁴⁶ The guide's language was adapted as necessary to reflect the entity that the interviewee worked for at the time. Although I include the term "department" in the interview description and refer to "department" throughout, I adapted the guide before each interview to appropriately reflect the role/entity of each interviewee.

Probe for: Financial concerns; needs that are difficult to meet; relationships with other agencies (e.g., law enforcement, courts)

- a. Where do disasters fall in that list of concerns?
10. What gaps, if any, do you believe exist at the local/state/federal levels that need to be addressed in order to more effectively serve the homeless community?
8. Is there anything else about your department that you would like for me to know before I ask more specifically about your department's experiences with the flood?

Next, I would like to ask about your organization's experiences during and after the flood.

9. Please describe your department's experiences during the flood. What were the most important issues you were facing at that time?
 - a. What were some of the difficulties that your department encountered during the Boulder flood? To what extent were you able to perform your day-to-day operations?
10. If the flood did affect your department's normal activities, how were activities affected, for how long, and why?
 - a. **(If operations were affected)** How long did it take your department to resume normal operations?
 - b. **(If operations not affected)** How did your department manage to cope and provide services during this disaster?
11. What types of organizational relationships were most important both prior to and after the Boulder Flood?
 - a. Could you further describe some of the relationships and collaborations you had with other agencies or organizations?
 - b. What about after the flood? Were your department's relationships with other organizations about the same as before, or did they change? And if they changed, can you describe those changes? *Probe about possible new relationships.*
12. As a result of the flood, did your department need resources above and beyond what you had on hand?
 - a. If yes, what kinds of resources were needed, and how did your department go about seeking those resources?
 - b. Did your department provide resources to other organizations during and after the flood? If so, what types?
13. What events related to the flood surprised you? What were you perhaps not as prepared for as you would have liked to be?

Now I'd like to talk about disaster planning at your department

14. Prior to the flood, did your department have a written disaster plan? OR Were you in charge of a particular aspect of a city/county/organizational plan?

Probe for: role in county/city plan, types of procedures they had in place for emergencies

If yes:

- a. Ask for a copy of the plan.
- b. Can you tell me in general what sorts of things the plan covers—that is, what parts of the organization's response are spelled out in the plan? (*Probe for mutual aid agreements, types of mutual aid that will be exchanged.*)
- c. Did you find that the plan was useful in the flood? If it was useful, in what areas or with what types of problems? If it was not useful or of limited use, in what areas was the plan not helpful, and why?
- d. Can you tell me about when and why the plan was developed? How long has the organization had a written plan, and what were the reasons for having a plan? (*Probe for: how long the plan has existed; reasons why plan was developed, including prior disaster experience, requirements from funders, planning initiatives with other community organizations, leadership interest, etc.*)
- e. Are there discussions in the department or at the city/county level about changes that may need to be made as a result of the flood experience?

If no:

- a. Were there other procedures in place that would help your department prepare for a disaster like the flood? (*Probe for other emergency procedures that were used in the flood.*)
- b. There can be many reasons organizations don't develop plans for disasters. I'm going to read a short list of possible reasons and ask you to tell me whether the reasons apply to your organization. Is there no written plan because (*check all that apply*):
 - _____ It's not necessary to have a written plan to know what to do during a disaster?
 - _____ The organization doesn't have other resources that are needed in order to develop a plan, such as money and special knowledge about what to do?
 - _____ Are there other reasons for not having a plan that I have not mentioned?
- c. Since the flood occurred, have there been discussions in the organization about the need for a disaster plan in the future? (*Probe for details of those discussions.*)

15. Within your organization, is there a particular person who is responsible for disaster or emergency planning? If yes, what kind of information, and in what form?

If yes:

- a. What is this person's name and title?
- b. Is (name of person/are you) _____ a full-time or part-time employee?
- c. What percentage of (name of person/your) _____ job is dedicated to disaster planning?
- d. What kinds of things (does name of person/do you) _____ do as part of (her/his/your) job? (*Probe for: writing plans; organizing drills, training, exercises; attending meetings with other disaster planners and organizations*)

Now, in this last part of the interview, I would like to ask you to tell me about how the flood affected the populations that you serve.

16. How do you think the Boulder Flood has affected those that you serve? How has recovery differentially affected those you serve who are not housed versus those who are housed?
- a. What were their (not housed) biggest challenges they faced during the flood?
17. The flood displaced large numbers of people from their homes. Did your department provide any services to people who were not homeless before but who were made homeless by the flood?
- a. (If **yes**) Can you give me a general idea of what this client group was like?
 - b. (If **yes**) What kinds of help did your department provide?

Probe for whether services were the same or different from those provided to pre-disaster clientele; probe for services that may have been new, such as referrals to disaster assistance agencies, etc.

18. Was it part of your responsibility to communicate with members of the public about where to obtain resources and/or shelter during and after the flood?
- a. If **yes**, how did you communicate about resources? And where did you refer them?
--How, if at all, did you communicate with members of the population who were pre-disaster homeless?
 - b. If **no**, did someone else have this responsibility?

19. In talking with members of the public, have you heard about their experiences with agencies, organizations, and groups that were providing assistance of different kinds to disaster victims?
 - a. *If yes, refer to the following probes: Can you describe these experiences as told to you? Were these experiences positive? Negative? How were predisaster homeless individuals treated by disaster assistance agencies? Did they feel that their needs were met?*
20. Is there anything else you wish to share about your department's experiences during and after the Boulder Flood, and/or experiences of those individuals that you primarily serve?

End of Interview Guide