



Youth Perspectives on Homelessness Prevention

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF HOMELESS YOUTH TRANSITIONS TO INDEPENDENT HOUSING

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YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: CANADA AND TORONTO

**35,000 –
40,000**

Canadian youth

(aged 13 – 24) homeless at
some point during the year

6,000

**Canadian youth
on any given night**

**1,000 –
2,000**

Toronto on any given night

KNOWLEDGE GAP

Margins

↓ Education

↓ Health

↓ Employment

↑ Trauma

↑ Child Welfare

↑ Racialized

↑ Poverty

↑ LGBTQ2S

Mainstream

Street Families → Acquaintances

Youth → Adulthood

“FALSE PROMISES”

(Kidd et al., 2016)



ADDRESSING THE GAP

Produce an **insider** perspective on the experiences of formerly homeless youth as they transitioned into **independent** housing and attempted to achieve meaningful **social integration**.



SOCIAL INTEGRATION



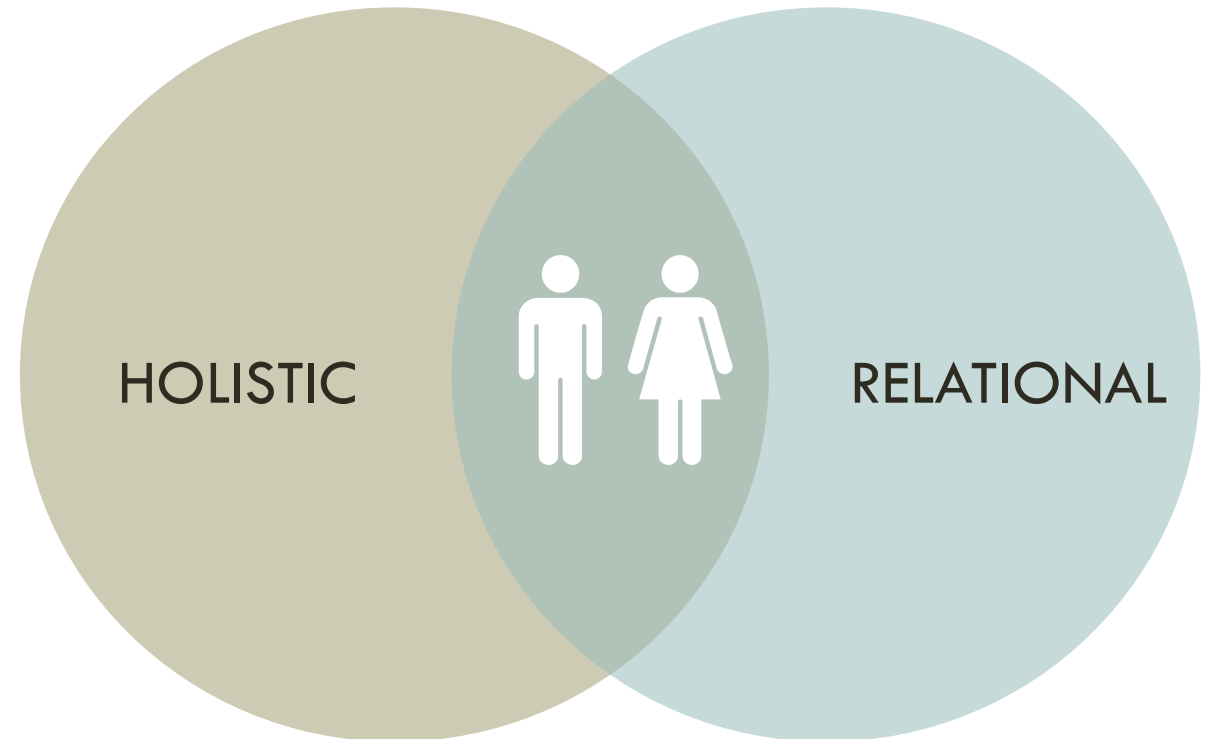
SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Holistic Concept

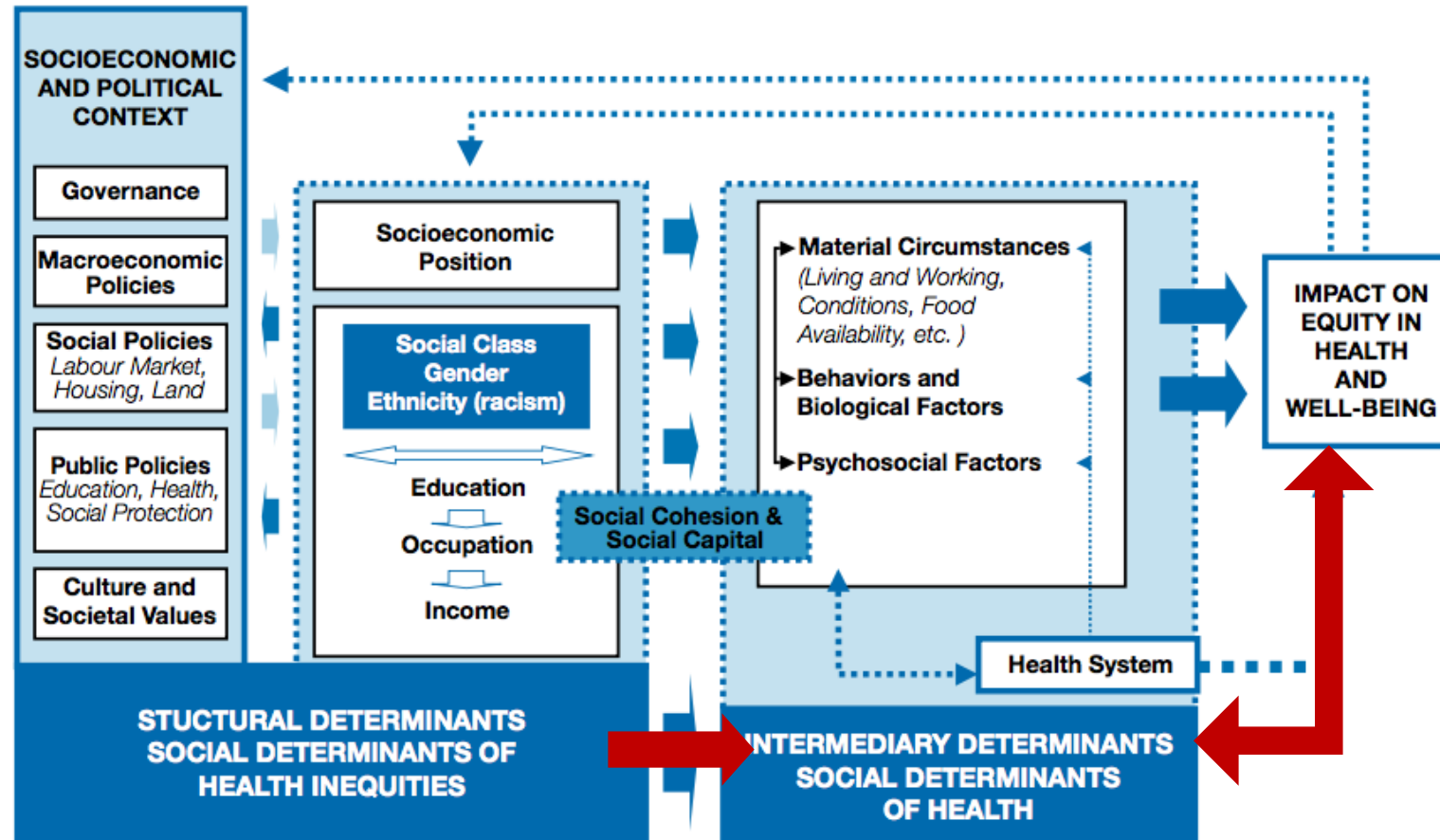
The ability for **full** societal **participation** across economic, political, cultural, and social domains

Relational Concept

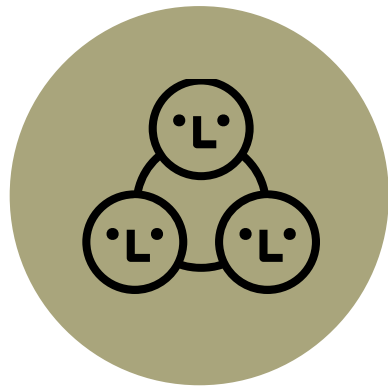
Equal **power** relationships



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

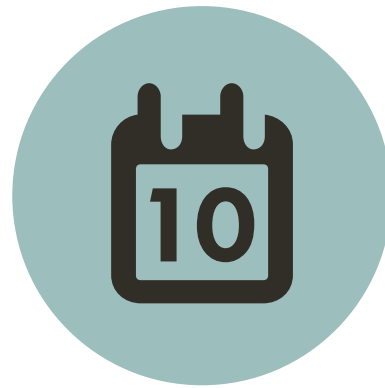


METHODOLOGY AND METHODS



Critical Ethnography

- Understand “choices” given socioeconomic context



Ten Months

- Nine participants



Biweekly Informal Interviews

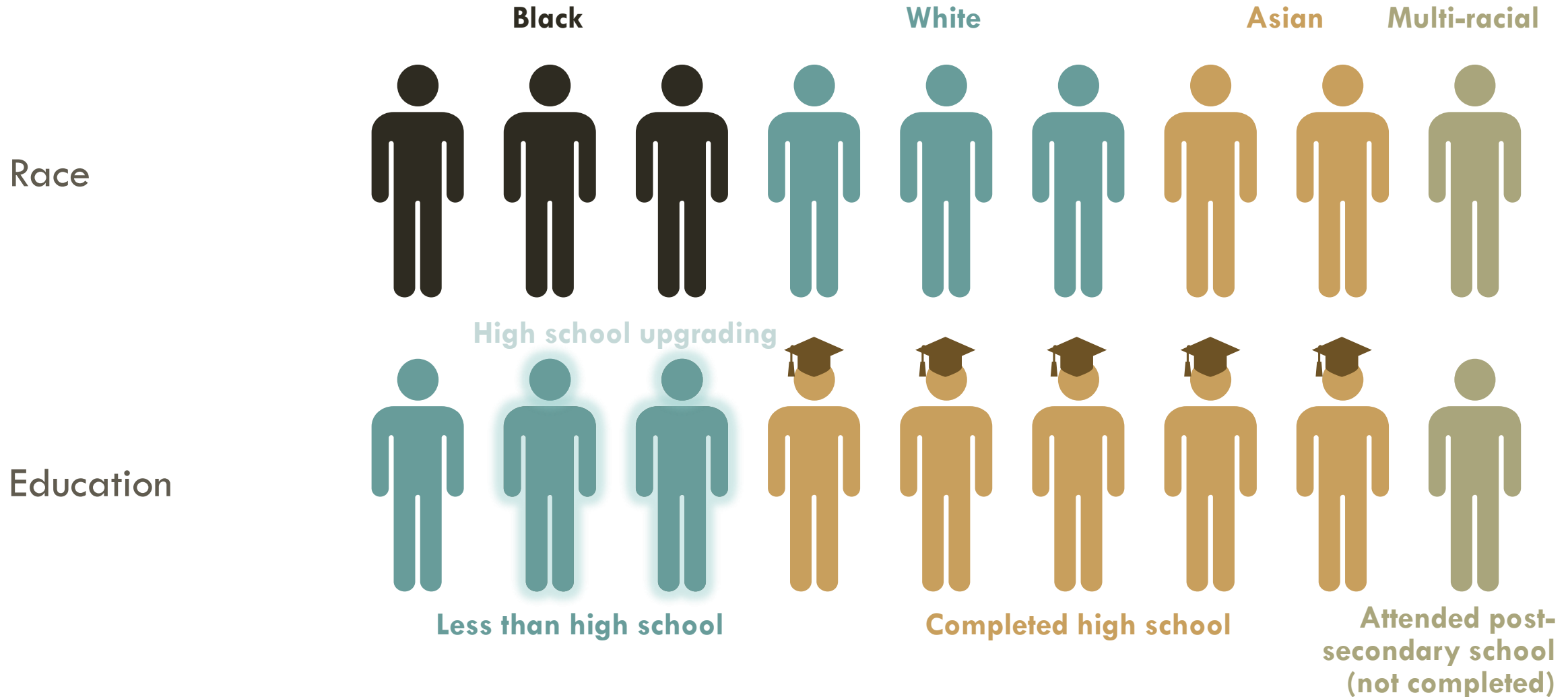
- Location chosen by participants
- No car
- 119 interviews

BASELINE DEMOGRAPHICS

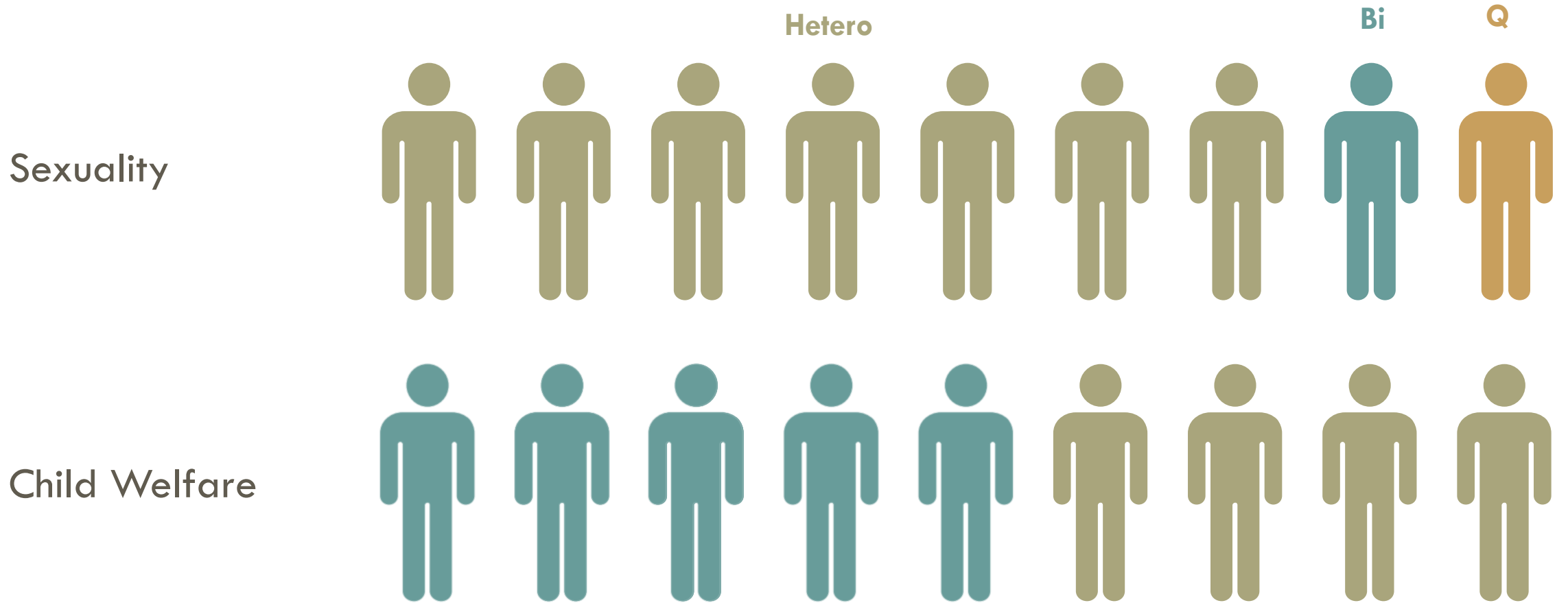


* In this study, participant's sex matched their gender

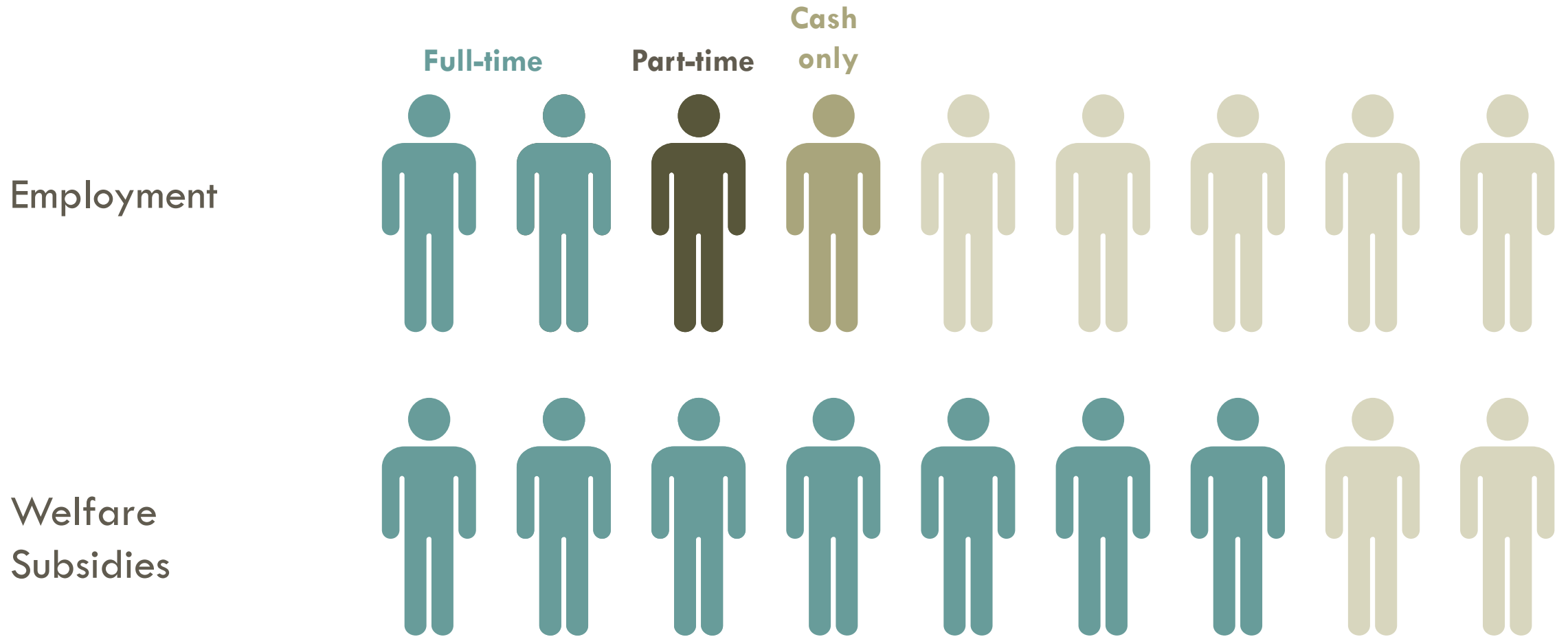
BASELINE DEMOGRAPHICS



BASELINE DEMOGRAPHICS



BASELINE DEMOGRAPHICS



KEY FINDINGS



Precarity

Identity

Mastery and Control

CHRONIC PRECARITY

I'm tired of the struggle...the struggle. I'm looking at my paycheck...this lady is telling me I'm only going to get \$8.00 from welfare [because of claw backs related to employment income] and that stresses you out. I'm only getting \$8.00 from welfare so now I'm already worrying about January and December. It's just a stressful thing to wake up every day and you know...It blocks off me wanting to go to work, it blocks off me wanting to hang out with people. It's not really a depression state...I just get very introverted. And it sucks because you can't be like that. You have to be professional and go to work. It's easier said than done.

~ Phoenix (Month Nine)



CHRONIC PRECARITY

Financial Inequities

- Most had income of \$7,872.00/year (LICO \$20,160)
- Dead end jobs
- Welfare claw backs

Social Inequities

- Inadequate mainstream connections (**social capital**)
- Limited knowledge re: “getting by” vs. “getting ahead”

Age-based Inequities

- 63% of Canadian youth (20 – 24 years) live at home



IDENTITY EVOLUTION

The thing is, adversity and poverty breed tremendous inner strength and maturity, and also a lot of creativity. But the outside world, they don't understand what comes out of hardship. They don't understand it's surviving through hardship and developing resiliency, that's really the part of it that's interesting... that's something that you should try to revive in your own life.

~ Phillip (Month Nine)



IDENTITY EVOLUTION

Shift in Place = Shift in Identity

- Home a marker of success
- Aware of societal discourse re: homeless people
- Supports embedded in homeless sector (old identities)

Emerging Adulthood

- Wanted to be seen as independent, responsible and competent young adults
- Working through other identity-related issues (e.g., sexual orientation and race)



IDENTITY EVOLUTION

Fragile Identities

- Linked to tangibles (e.g., housing)
 - could lose at any time
- Limited intangible assets (e.g., sense of purpose and control, self-efficacy and self-esteem)
 - eroded over time
- Not confident in education (streamlined and poor grades)



MASTERY AND CONTROL UNDERMINED

I just live day to day. Now I live day to day. My situation doesn't make it possible to think far ahead...it doesn't work now...something always comes up that I need to pay for.

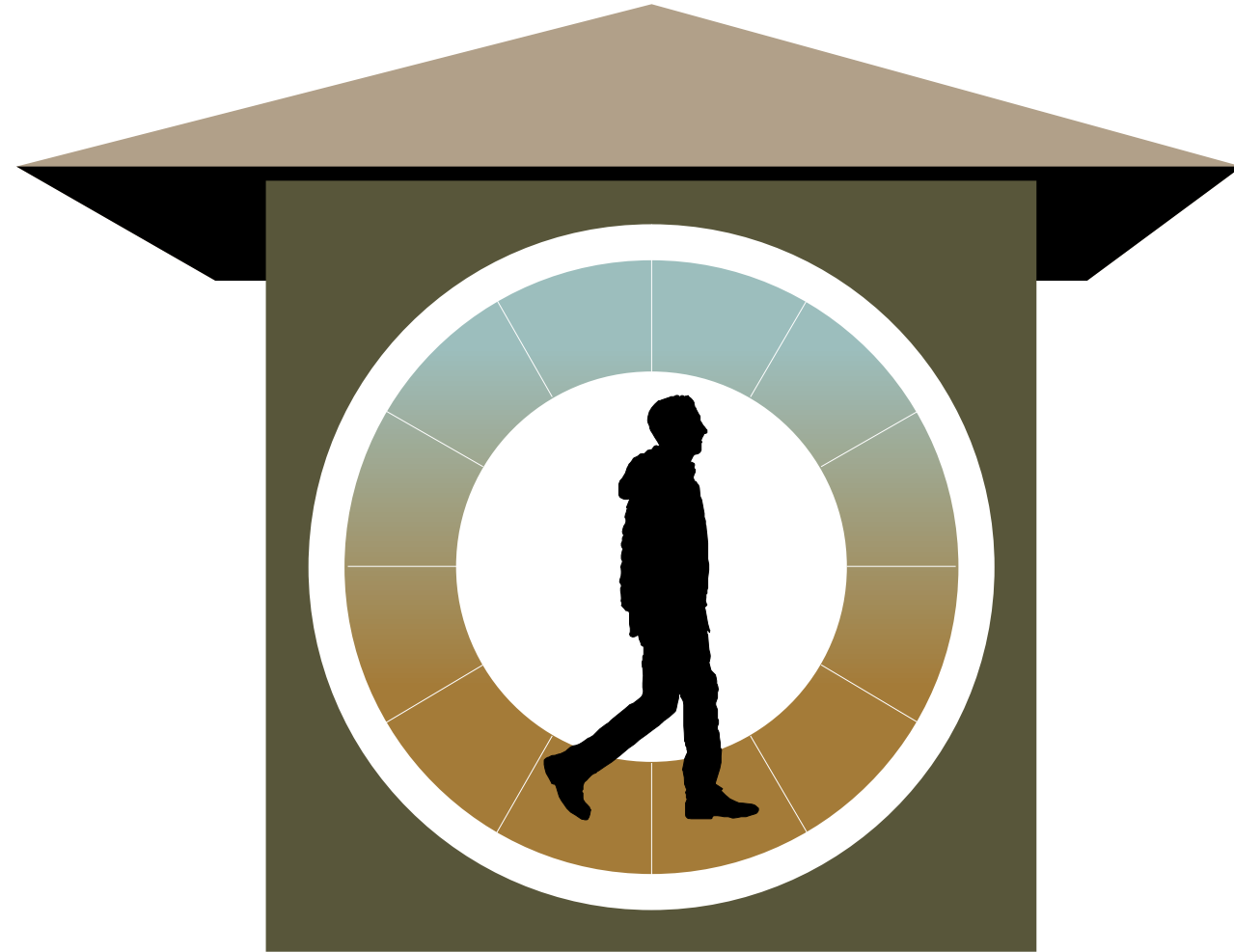
~ Ashley (Month Seven)



MASTERY AND CONTROL UNDERMINED

Determination Not Enough

- Stuck/spinning – lack of purpose
- Chronic precarity exhausting
- Limited **identity capital**
(self-concept as currency)



MASTERY AND CONTROL UNDERMINED

Poverty as Identity

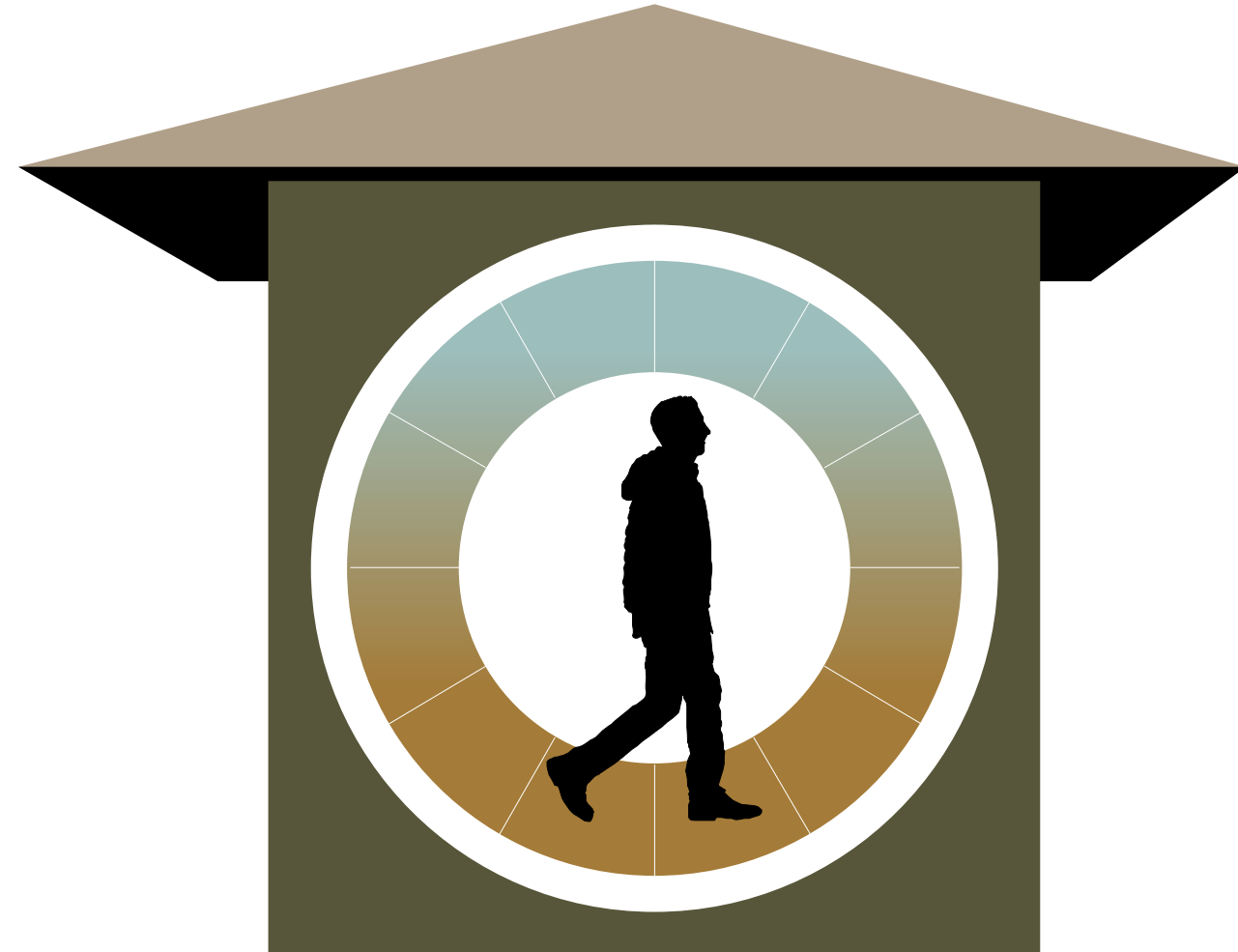
- Inadequate consumers

Still the “Other”

- Inequitable life chances magnified

Life as a “Game of Chance”

- Focus on short-term survival
- Less sense of control over long-term outcomes

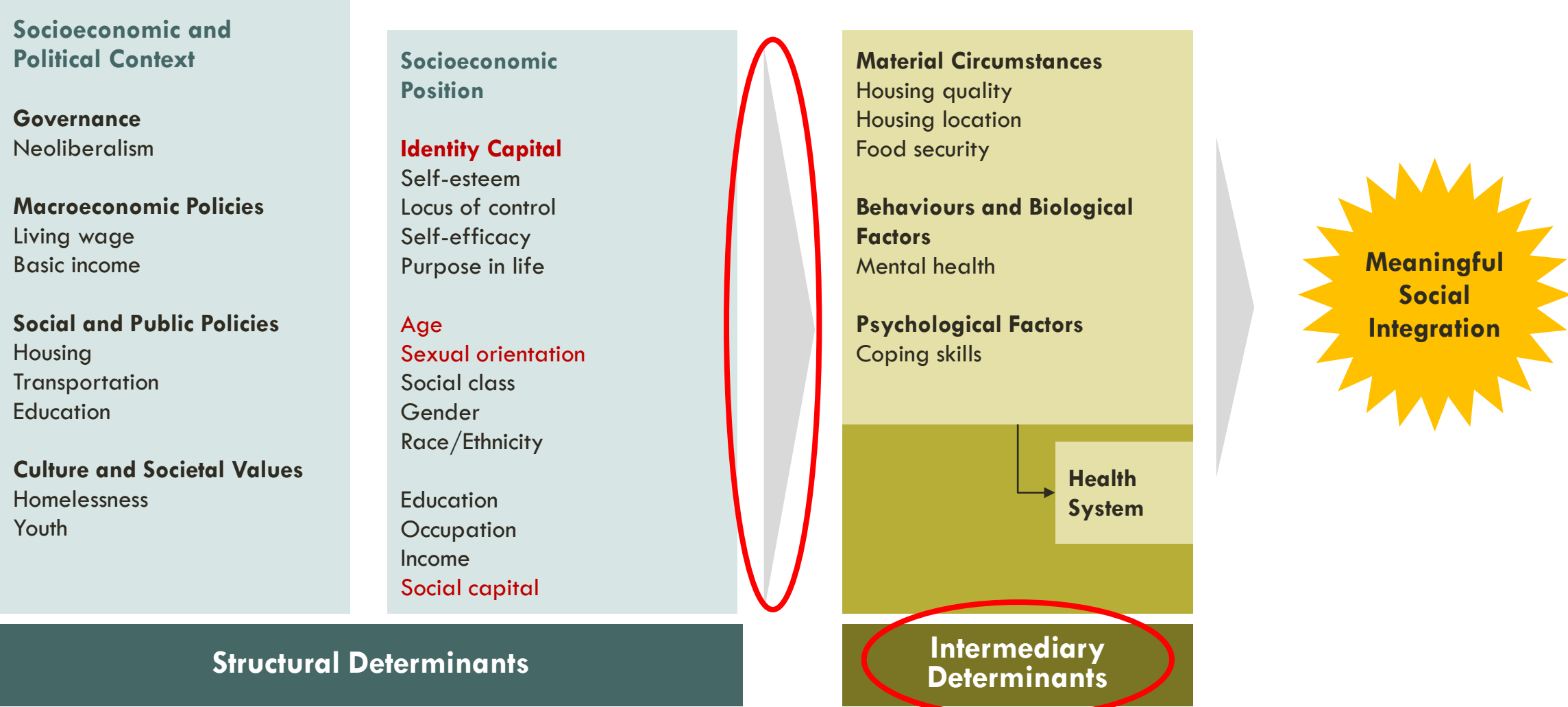


CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPLICATIONS

New Framework

Implications: Practice-Policy-Research

SOCIAL INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



Modified from Solar & Irwin, 2010

IMPLICATIONS: PRACTICE

- Incorporate teaching re: **identity capital** into staff training
- Decentralize outreach services to **less stigmatizing** locations
- Develop programs that foster **social capital**
- **Re-define success** – much more than “no longer homeless”
- Be **transparent** with youth about likelihood of escaping poverty with limited education and/or skills training



IMPLICATIONS: POLICY

- More affordable and better quality **housing**
- Consider providing a **basic income** for low-income youth living independently
- Provide **free tuition** plus living expenses for post-secondary education and training with no welfare “claw backs”
- Adopt a **broader perspective** to ending homelessness – the provision of a home alone will not end homelessness



IMPLICATIONS: RESEARCH

- Define and measure social integration **holistically** – include economic participation
- Implement more **longitudinal studies** – highlights “real world” challenges to social integration
- Conduct more **qualitative studies** so we can design youth-informed interventions and have youth-informed public policies
- Consider **integration as a primary outcome** measure in intervention studies with homeless youth (none to date)





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