Everywhere but Nowhere: the lives of homeless youth in Canberra.

By

Justin David Barker

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of the Australian National University.**

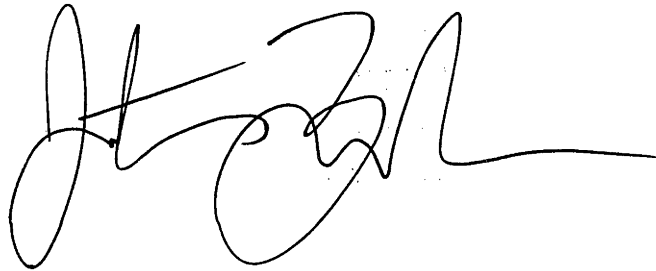THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
RESEARCH SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND THE ARTS
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
CANBERRA, JANUARY 2010**

Declaration

I, Justin David Barker, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Archaeology and Anthropology, College of Arts and Social Sciences, the Australian National University, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institutions.

Acknowledgements

Cathy Day has been a fantastic person with whom to share an office and deserves special mention. We developed an effective working relationship and also came to rely on each other as a checking point for the rest of lives. She put up with my talking, mess, smell and obsession with non-academic pursuits.

Throughout the PhD, my training has been an important part of staying sane and productive. Dane Richmond, Masafumi Matsumoto, and Christian Barry have been excellent training partners and friends. I would also like to thank the guys from Roots BJJ and those who came to the ANU Open Mat.

It is with a strange kind of sadness that I write these acknowledgements. The act of writing this reminds me of the amount of support I have in my life. At this point the most evident acknowledgement is for my parents. They have provided a huge amount of support, including moving to Canberra to assist my young family, making it possible to finish this thesis. However, the profound thanks is for what they have done throughout my life, made most apparent in the pursuit of completing this thesis – they have instilled in me an unwavering knowledge that they love me and that they will support me, and am worthy of support and love. This is not a debt that I owe them but something to emulate and the foundations of a way of treating other people.

Finally I would like to thank my partner Jacqui and my children Olivia and Matilda, the three most important people in my life. My admiration and respect for Jacqui is matched only by the amount I enjoy her company. I am in awe of Jacqui's strength, thankful for her support across every day of my PhD, and delighted that I live with her and our two children. Olivia and Matilda are the most wonderful and fantastic children. Thankyou for providing me with great fun and helping me keep everything in perspective.

Abstract

This thesis examines the lives of homeless youth in Canberra, Australia, through the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu. It argues that the lives of homeless youth are structured by instability. This instability is seen not only in their living conditions and arrangements but also in the ways they perceive, act in and react to the world. In short, homeless youth have a habitus of instability.

Homeless youth create a diverse range of practices that help them cope with their lives. However, their habitus generates practices that are structured by instability. The organising themes and dispositions of their lives are both structured by instability, and recreate this instability. By focusing on the habitus of instability I show that behaviours and practices that may seem counterproductive to outsiders, and that may seem to collude in reinforcing their marginalisation are, in fact, part of a struggle for dignity, respect and a sense of control in their lives that often feel out of control.

This thesis investigates the range of accommodation options experienced by homeless youth. I demonstrate that instability marks their lives across all accommodation options, and even in what seems like the end of homelessness. By examining the conditions of youth homelessness I demonstrate how a lack of social capital, of people as a reliable means of support, forms the foundations of this instability. From the instability of the lives of homeless youth emerge two contrasting strategies; those of autonomy and relatedness. The investment in one of these strategies leads to the other in a complex interaction that shapes the social lives of homeless youth.

Ultimately, in this thesis I present a picture of youth homelessness that avoids the simplistic conceptual divides of structure and agency, resistance and submission, cause and effect. The conceptual tools used throughout create a way of discussing homelessness that

acknowledges the complexity of this issue without censoring or romanticising the factors that shape the lives of homeless youth.

Abbreviations and Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics.
ACT	Australian Capital Territory.
ACT Housing	Colloquial term referring to Housing and Community Services ACT, a Division of the ACT Government Department of Disability, Housing, and Community Services. ACT Housing is the main provider of community housing in the ACT to people who are disadvantaged or experiencing a crisis
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
Care and Protection	The ACT Government service responsible for facilitating coordination across government for the care and protection of children and young people.
Centrelink	The government agency that provides social security benefits (including welfare payments) to people in need.
Civic	The central business district of Canberra
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NHS	National Housing Strategy
NYC	National Youth Commission.
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.
SAAP NDCA	SAAP National Data Collection Agency.
YSAAP	Youth Support Accommodation Assistance Program

Table of Contents

Introduction

The title of this thesis comes from the response to a question in a semi-structured interview. I asked Kelly what life was like before she settled into independent living, and she replied: "Really crap. I was moving refuge to refuge, I was on the street, I was in a foster home, and friend's houses, just everywhere, I had nowhere to go." She was everywhere but nowhere – a turn of phrase that neatly sums up the transience, instability and alienation of this young person's life, and that is echoed in her physical/material conditions of existence. Everywhere but nowhere: a sense of not belonging.

Youth homelessness is a potent and evocative issue that has become emblematic of social inequality and injustice in otherwise affluent societies. In Australia, youth homelessness recently saw a momentary rise in prominence as a social concern and political tool when it was mobilised by the current Federal Government as an issue that continues to plague Australia despite consistent economic growth and prosperity. Whilst youth homelessness has been a significant social issue in the public sphere, it has continued to be framed and addressed in terms informed primarily by quantitative data and assumptions not based on qualitative research. The qualitative research pivotal to anthropological methods of investigation provide new and rich insights into youth homelessness.

This thesis examines the central factors that shape the lives of homeless youth in Canberra, Australia. This project provides ethnographic, qualitative research insights into the lives of

homeless youth. Accounts of youth homelessness often simplify this social issue by overemphasising either structural or individual aspects, blaming external circumstances and conditions, or pathologising individuals. My research problematises such explanations of homelessness and demonstrates that the lifestyle and practices of homeless youth and their external conditions of existence are mutually supportive, as homeless youth adapt and adjust to the demands of homelessness. This thesis aims to avoid simplistically relegating the issues of youth homelessness to the dualisms of structure/agency, cause/effect and internal/external. Instead, I present a complex interaction between these processes and factors that shape the lives of homeless youth. In this thesis, I argue that the lives of homeless youth are shaped by not only the external pressures of the conditions of their lives, but by the internalised 'habitus of instability'.

In this Introduction, I will firstly situate this research project within the field of anthropology and address the idea of doing anthropology 'at home.' Next, I will address how the theoretical framework is informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and provide a brief explanation of the key concept of habitus that is mobilised in this thesis. Following this, I outline the scope and context of this project, providing the working definition of 'youth homelessness' (which is extensively explicated in Chapter One) and a brief description of the context of Canberra, Australia. Next, I describe the methodological tools used in my research and discuss my fieldwork experience. I then address how the clarity and sense that I aim to bring to the issue of youth homelessness through heuristically demarcated conceptual categories, can obscure the inherent confusion, and lack of clarity

that underscores the lived experience of homeless young people. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

Anthropology 'At Home' and the Unfamiliar Other

Within anthropology there is little work done on youth homelessness 'at home,'[1] with research projects abroad prioritised. There is an ironic aspect to the notion of doing field-work 'at home' on 'homelessness.' This contradictory task problematises the notion of anthropology 'at home' and what constitutes sufficient distance and difference for a topic to qualify as worthy of anthropological investigation. Anthropology, though not always 'at home,' has often taken 'the other within,' the 'intra-cultural' as its subject – ethnographic explorations of the "other side of the tracks, not the other side of the world" (Hall 2003:6). Spradley's *You Owe Yourself a Drunk* (Spradley 1970), Liebow's *Tally's Corner* (Liebow 1967), Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (Whyte 1943), Oscar Lewis' work on the culture of poverty and the ensuing debates (Leacock 1971; Lewis 1959; Lewis 1966; Steinberg 1981; Valentine 1968; Valentine et al. 1969), and more recently Phillipe Bourgouis (Bourgois 1995), Robert Desjarlais (Desjarlais 1994; Desjarlais 1996a; Desjarlais 1996b; Desjarlais 1996c; Desjarlais 1999), Tom Hall (Hall 2003), Irene Glasser (Glasser 1988) and Nancy Scheper-Hughes (Scheper-Hughes 1992) form the foundation of ethnographic (whether in sociology or anthropology) explorations into poverty, homelessness and the margins of modern society. Similarly, sociologists like Paul Willis (Willis 1977; Willis 1984), Stuart Hall and company (Hall & Jefferson 1975), Howard Becker (Becker 1963), and Elijah

---

[1] Double inverted commas indicate a quote. I use single inverted commas to indicate a figurative term or phrase, or to signal a quote within a quote.

Introduction

Anderson (Anderson 1976; Anderson 1999) amongst a host of others, have contributed significantly to exploring youth subcultures, deviants and deviance. These endeavours share many of the strengths and frailties of research abroad – still beginning with the unfamiliar other.

Some researchers have stressed the native, emic, or subjectivist side of these social phenomena whilst others the objectivist, etic, or structuralist stance. These analytical perspectives have become embedded within the practical administration of people and have seeped into or reflected in explanations of these social issues/groups in the public domain. For example, the analytical category of *culture* – e.g. classroom culture, class culture, culture of poverty, culture of homelessness – has become part of political and administrative vernacular that impacts on how these 'kinds' of people are treated, insidiously informing or feeding into extra-theoretical or political agendas.

Exploring the 'unfamiliar other' on the margins of one's own society is beset with the danger of marginalising the marginalised in order to make sufficiently 'other' and exotic 'the other within.' What qualifies a subject as sufficiently different and distant can easily be over-represented in order to justify one's research 'at home' and make the reader sit up and take notice of this foreign way of life – exotic and titillating stories that set *them* apart from *us*, making a sense of otherwise nonsensical practices and behaviours. The position from which I start is that homeless young people are sufficiently different. Yet, I am simultaneously acutely aware of the similarities between myself and the research participants.

Researchers examining the margins of modern society – the poor, the mentally ill, the criminal etc – are often uncovering the unseen and overlooked inequalities and uncomfortable *home* truths of the diverse conditions and circumstances in our own backyard – the significant differences that can highlight our apparent indifference to those "set apart yet too close to home" (Hall 2003:8). Philippe Bourgois notes that "any detailed examination of social marginalisation encounters serious problems with political representation" (Bourgois 1995:11) which is significantly demonstrated by debates over the 'culture of poverty' and its political and social policy implications (Leacock 1971; Lewis 1959; Lewis 1966; Steinberg 1981; Valentine 1968; Valentine et al. 1969). Such work tends to polarise around blaming the victim or the system and can reinforce negative stereotypes. However, censoring the suffering, destruction and violence in order to not portray a bad image of a social issue or group equally does injustice to the conditions of existence of those who live these lives. Loïc Wacquant criticised three contemporary American ethnographers, Anderson (Anderson 1999), Dunier (Duneier 1999), and Newmann (Newman 1999), whose studies of urban street cultures presented "truncated and distorted accounts of their object due to the abiding wish to articulate and even celebrate the fundamental goodness – honesty, decency, frugality – of America's urban poor" (Wacquant 2002:1469).[2] Wacquant suggested that this cultural bias and moralism that imbues research handicaps meaningful social investigation. Thus, as with any social research, reflexivity to the conditions of the construction or representation that one presents is important for both the quality of the research and the politics of representation. I am

---

[2] The ensuing debate (Anderson 2002; Duneier 2002; Newman 2002) highlighted the seemingly perennial structure versus agency polemic that still pervades social inquiry (Sandberg 2008:154).

contributing to the body of work that constitutes and shapes this discourse, the classification and representation of youth homelessness.

Theoretical Framework and Influences

This research is framed using numerous theoretical and anthropological projects that I see as interwoven. Although the central theoretical influence is Pierre Bourdieu, Paul Willis' "Learning to Labour" (1977) and Bourgois' (1995) "In Search of Respect" act as the ethnographic exemplars of aspects of this project. These works and their authors are not Bourdeuian as such; however, Bourgois (Bourgois 1995) like Willis (Willis 1977) "describes ethnographically the interpretation of 'habitus' and 'action' that Bourdieu outlines so persuasively in theoretical terms" (Berger 1989: 180; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 80). These researchers highlight the interrelationship between economic conditions/social structures on the one hand and cognitive structures/habitus on the other, but not in a direct and unproblematic way. The agents or actors in these works create cultural forms through a dialectical process that helps them to cope with their circumstances and conditions. However, these practices also bind them to those very conditions. Here we come across what can be termed the 'paradox of the marginalised,'[3] where the dignity marginalised people find in their marginalisation or economic/class oppression through acts of resistance and agency are the same practices that reproduce their position; where the organising themes and dispositions of people's lives are both structured by conditions of existence and structure their conditions of existence. Lurking in the

---

[3] 'The paradox of the dominated' is a term used by Bourdieu (Wacquant 1992: 24) that I refer to as the 'paradox of the marginalised'.

background is the spectre of 'the culture of poverty' and the ghost of Oscar Lewis, whose

work (and surrounding debates) is very influential in this research (Leacock 1971; Lewis

1959; Lewis 1966; Steinberg 1981; Valentine 1968; Valentine et al. 1969).

This contradiction or paradox of the marginalised, which smells so strongly of

determinism, is the terrain and incarnation of the structure/agency dichotomy. More to the

point, it is the grounds upon which such theoretical divisions and demarcations become

blurry, where the divides between choice and constraint, structure and agency, resistance

and submission are problematised through the weight of ethnographic data. The divide

between structure and agency presents itself not only in theoretical accounts of

homelessness, but pervades work on this topic more generally (as outlined in Chapter One).

Bourdieu's theoretical framework works to bridge the dualisms that, implicitly or

explicitly, underscore much social theory.

Influence of Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework was forged as a corrective to the opposing modes

of thought that he hoped to transcend (Swartz 1997:5). The antagonisms of subjectivism

and objectivism that pervade sociological and anthropological theory were jettisoned by

Bourdieu who simultaneously aimed to bridge other homologous and related dichotomies

such as materiality / symbolic representations, and structure / agency. The conceptual and

methodological devices and tools that Bourdieu created are central to his endeavour to

transcend these oppositions and to emphasise the dialectical interplay between their

constituent parts.

This thesis is not a faithful reproduction of Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Bourdieu's work provides the theoretical foundation upon which this thesis is built and his influence can be seen throughout this research. However, the theoretical framework is secondary to the weight of ethnographic data as the phenomenon of youth homelessness in Canberra does not seamlessly fit into Bourdieu's framework. This thesis reinforces, critiques and contributes to some of the concepts championed by Bourdieu.

Throughout the thesis I will provide an explication of specific aspects of Bourdieu's theoretical framework pertinent to accounting for aspects of youth homelessness. Most notably, 'social capital' is central to Chapter Two, the notion of 'strategy' to Chapter Four, and 'cultural capital,' 'field' and 'field of power' to Chapter Five. However, below I outline the pivotal concept of habitus. The habitus of homelessness, outlined in Chapter Two, is built on instability and uncertainty and is the homologous organising, generative schemata that unifies homeless young people as a sociological group 'in itself.' All of the other dispositions and practices that are addressed in the ensuing chapters stem from this central underlying 'way of being'.

Habitus

Bourdieu defines habitus as a "system of durable, transposable dispositions, structur*ed* structures predisposed to function as structur*ing* structures" (Bourdieu 1990b:53, emphasis added). In other words, the dispositions of habitus generate structured representations,

reactions and actions, by structuring them in accordance with its own structure. The regularities and constraints of external social reality are instilled into an individual's habitus. Structured by the conditions of existence from which it has emerged, habitus mediates between the past and present, addressing new situations in habituated ways.

The generative schemata of habitus are produced and structured by conditions of existence. The structures of a particular type of environment, relations of economic and social necessity, and material conditions of existence, as they impact on the practical experiences of social agents, are characteristic conditions of existence which produce habitus (Bourdieu 1990b:54). The patterned regularities and constraints of external social reality are durably instilled in individuals, forming the pattern making and sense making tools that constitute a habitus: "habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with schemes generated by history" (Bourdieu 1990b: 54).

Habitus is defined as a "system of dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977: 214 fn. 16). The language of 'disposition' aims to express the bodily and practical understanding of human practice Bourdieu captures in the notion of habitus (Swartz 1997:012-103). Bourdieu notes that the notion of disposition:

> "expresses first the *result of an organising action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being, a habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*" (Bourdieu 1977: 214 fn. 16 emphasis added)

Introduction

Bourdieu's ambiguous explanation of the notion of disposition has been seen by some as problematic (Jenkins 1992:76). Dispositions can include attitudes or attributes, cognitive and affect factors, felt or seen as emotional responses, and in Bourdieu's own use, classificatory categories such as the Kabyle's 'sense of honour' (Jenkins 1992:76). However, it is the ambiguity and breadth of categories that can be included under the term 'disposition' which makes this somewhat 'fuzzy' notion so useful to anthropologists. Bourdieu's 'dispositions' encapsulates the practical logic that he attributes to human practice. The term 'disposition' best describes the affective responses that shape the perceptions and practices of homeless youth.

The dispositions of habitus represent an informal and practical, rather than a discursive and conscious, form of knowledge. Representation and practices produced by habitus are created without conscious calculation, done habitually and pre-reflexively, underlying and outrunning conscious intention (Jenkins 1992:79). Bourdieu distances himself from the false dualism of rational voluntaristic choices of actors, on the one hand, and strict structuralist forms of determination of rules that produce conduct, on the other. He replaces the notion of rules that govern behaviour with a conception of practice in which people pursue strategies (Jenkins 1992:39).

Habitus, the strategy-generating principle, enables agents to confront unforeseen and ever changing situations neither wholly consciously nor unconsciously (Miller & Branson 1987: 217). Bourdieu's use of the concept of strategy (outlined in Chapter Four) conveys the idea

that human practice is interested – attempting to derive advantage from situations within the constraints and regularities ingrained in a habitus (Calhoun 1995:142; Swartz 1997:67).

Generalised through analogical transfer, habitus is able to apply its 'generative schemata' to all areas of life, encompassing diverse experiences to conform to its organising principles (Bourdieu 1990b:94). Through 'creative reinvention' the habitus responds to the discrepancies between the demands of new conditions of existence and customary habits. Habitus can produce an infinite number of practices that are relatively unpredictable but within the limits of what seems 'reasonable' and consistent with the logic of the conditions from which it has emerged (Bourdieu 1990b:55-56). Thus, habitus is as far from creating something new as it is from mechanistic reproduction (Bourdieu 1990b:55).

Group Habitus

Individual agents occupying common relations to conditions of existence, share internalised dispositions associated with these conditions (Swartz 1997:105). In short they share the same habitus. Bourdieu notes:

> Though it is impossible for all (or even two) members of the same class to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with situations most frequent for members of that class (Bourdieu 1990b:60).

This statement allows room for Bourdieu to account for divergent practices that emerge from the same 'class' or group without recourse to a transcendental inventive subject who can create new practices in no way constrained by socialisation.

The individual habitus of members of the same class of conditions of existence are united in a relationship of homology; of "diversity within homogeneity" characteristic of their socialisation (Bourdieu 1990b: 60). The observable homogenising of group habitus – that is the product of similar conditions of existence – is what enables practices to be harmonised, patterned and regular amongst groups of people without any conscious reference to a shared norm and without explicit co-ordination (Bourdieu 1990b:58-59). It is at this collective level that habitus acquires a political significance as it encompasses not only the individual but the collective future of a social category or group.

Scope and Context: "There are homeless young people in Canberra?"

This thesis examines the lives of homeless young people in Canberra, Australia. When I mention the topic of my research I am often greeted with surprise and versions of the question "are there homeless young people in Canberra?" This question is founded on two factors: popular visions of Canberra, and a simplistic idea that homelessness only happens to the poor, uneducated, lower classes and only refers to people living on the streets. These two ideas do not mix well for most people. These misconceptions are what make Canberra an interesting site for this research. Despite the relative invisibility of caricatured images of homeless young people and the apparent affluence of the city, homeless young people are present there.[4]

---

[4] For statistics see Chapter One.

Definitions of homeless youth are numerous and contentious and are addressed extensively in Chapter One. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the term 'homeless young people' refers to 15 – 25 year olds who do not have secure, stable or safe accommodation.[5] Homeless young people often trial many different ways of coping with their homelessness, experiencing a wide range of living conditions and accommodation options. This thesis investigates the whole spectrum of accommodation options and strategies used by homeless young people in Canberra.

Many of the accommodation options and strategies employed by homeless young people do not fit the limited conception of the 'literally homeless' which refers to young people living on the streets. This is the most highly visible brand of homelessness. This vision of homelessness fits the agenda of the media which reinforces stereotypical images of homelessness (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:13). Moreover, this image is prevalent amongst the general population due to its visibility in public space and in the media. However, the majority of homeless young people live in conditions that are often overlooked as they are hidden from the general population.

Canberra is the capital city of Australia, situated inland between Australia's largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne. In 1908 Canberra was selected as the location for the nation's capital city and the site of the government of Australia. Canberra is located in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Aside from Canberra, there are only two small villages

---

[5] This scope of this research does not include young people who are homeless with their parents.

or hamlets in the ACT. As at June 2008 the population of the ACT was 345,551(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009b). Of this population, only 494 people lived outside of Canberra.

Because of its inland location and altitude, Canberra has warm to hot summers and cold winters. The daily and annual temperature ranges are more extreme than in any other Australian capital. Average temperature ranges in summer are 13°C to 28°C and in winter 1°C to 11°C. There is regular fog and frost in Canberra winters and infrequent snowfall. Rainfall in Canberra is reasonably evenly distributed throughout the year, ranging from an average of 40mm in June to 65mm in October.

Canberra is a purpose built, planned city designed by architect Walter Burley Griffin. Burley Griffin's plan situated the city within the topography of the location and the vision of the city as the 'bush capital' shapes the aesthetic of Canberra, aiming to maintain a sense of a city immersed within its natural surroundings. The layout of the city and its planned nature, alongside the city's role as the locus of governance of the nation, has created a popular vision of Canberra as a highly organised, sanitised, and a somewhat boring city. The spaciousness of the 'bush capital' and the decentralised suburban precincts increase a sense of a somewhat sleepy town compared to the other capital cities of Australia. This is compounded by the unusual demographics of the city that contribute to Canberra's reputation as somewhat emblematic of middle-class, well educated, overpaid bureaucrats.

The demographics present a vision of Canberrans as relatively young, well educated, affluent and employed. In 2007, the median age of the population in Canberra was 34.5

years compared to the national median age of 36.8 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007a).

In 2003-04 Canberrans had the highest average gross incomes[6] in Australia, with household

incomes of around $1,400 per week compared to the national average of $1,128 (Australian

Bureau of Statistics 2005c). Furthermore, the highest equivalised disposable income[7] of any

capital city is that of ACT households at $670 per week compared to the national average

of $508 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005c). As of 2004, the national average of people

aged 15-64 that had a level of education attainment equal to at least a bachelors degree was

19%, where as in the ACT it was significantly higher at 30% (Australian Bureau of

Statistics 2005a). Furthermore, the ACT led the nation in regards to non-school

qualifications of people aged 15-64 as at May 2004: 58% in the ACT compared to the

national figure of 51% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005b). Moreover, in Canberra the

unemployment rate in June 2009 was 3.6%, which is below the national unemployment rate

of 5.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009a).

Within Canberra there are two primary tertiary institutions, the Australian National

University (ANU) and the University of Canberra. Canberra is also the home of the

Australian Defence Force Academy and the Royal Military College. The Australian

Institute of Sport, Australia's premiere sports training facility is also located in Canberra.

Along with the Australian Public Service, these institutions all serve to affect the

demographics and culture of Canberra. Employment, education and training opportunities

in these institutions draw a wide range of people into Canberra and contribute to its mobile

---

[6] Gross income refers to income before tax and other deductions are taking into account.
[7] Equivalised disposable income is a the amount of disposable income of a household divided by its size.

population. For instance, between 1996 and 2001 there was a 61.9% population turnover rate (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002).

For many, the idea of homelessness in Canberra runs against the prevailing visions of the city and simplistic ideas of homelessness. However, those people at the bottom end of the socio-economic spectrum are at increased risk of struggling to take advantage of the apparent advantages of living in Canberra. In 2006, the median weekly rent for ACT residents was the highest of the states and territories in Australia, at 37% above the median weekly rental payment for Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007b). The 'norms' represented by the statistics and the popular visions of Canberra are a contributing factor to the incidence of homelessness. The high disposable incomes, levels of education and employment create a housing market that is hard to enter if you fall short of these expectations or norms, and a labour market that can pick from an array of qualified young people. Reverend Ramsay of the Uniting Church Kippax in a local newspaper noted that:

> The general standard of living and the general cost of living in the city makes it even harder for people who are doing it tough...Housing is incredibly expensive here, the expectation for employment are pretty much high levels of education so I think people experience [poverty] much more severely in a place where it is not supposed to happen (Rudra 2009).

Youth homelessness in a city like Canberra acts as a reminder that this issue can happen anywhere.

Ethnography of Homeless Youth

Ethnography refers to both an investigative approach and a written monograph (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:6; Seymour-Smith 1986:98). Ethnography has become the hallmark of anthropological investigation. People engaged in ethnography can utilise a range of methodologies, tools or strategies. What unifies the diverse range of practices that are referred to as ethnography is the endeavour to provide an understanding or interpretation of the behaviours, beliefs, norms and practices of a social group by the researcher immersing him- or herself in the lives and conditions of existence of the relevant social group. Ethnography, in part, entails an exploration of the practices and meanings given to the lives of the social agents that perform them. The aim to acquire a first-hand, 'insiders' point of view of the research subjects produces qualitative insights through systematic and rigorous collection of data detailing the nuances of their existence. However, ethnography combines description and analysis, implicitly or explicitly.

The most influential feature of my research was participant observation. The interpretation and meanings that homeless young people gave to past events, current circumstances, hopes and expectations and insights into their own lives and those of their peers were all set against my observations. The normative patterns, strategies, regularities and practices that were not subjectively articulated were nonetheless observable. The subjective views and reasons homeless young people attributed to their practices were invariably related to the observable regularities. The endeavour to participate in and experience the conditions of their lives acted as a stark reminder not to impose a logic on the practices of homeless young people that is removed from the conditions under which it was formed. The

ethnographic pursuit provided qualitative insights into youth homelessness that avoid this intellectualist bias (Bourdieu 1990b:52-97; Wacquant 1992: 3)

Worker, Consultant, Anthropologist: Different Roles, Different Data

Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I had worked with homeless young people since 2000, as both a youth worker and a consultant. My numerous years of experience with these people undoubtedly informed my research and provided me with the cultural awareness and skills needed for fieldwork. Moreover, the existing rapport and networks that I had were invaluable in facilitating immersion amongst homeless young people. However, I was struck by how the differing roles of youth worker, consultant, and anthropologist affected the data that I collected.

Upon reflection, it has become apparent that as a youth worker, despite the familiarity and rapport one develops with one's 'clients,' the relationship is ultimately affected by the client-worker dynamics; I was there as a resource for them and this impacted on the kind of information that they divulged. Moreover, the time spent with the young people was focused towards a goal: it was outcome-oriented whether directed or initiated by the worker or the client, implicit or explicit. Whilst rapport and trust are pivotal to working with homeless young people this does not change the underlying dynamics of the worker-client relationship. It also became apparent that homeless young people often present a different version of their lives to workers whom they feel they need to convince that they are worthy of support and that they are not going to cause too many problems.

As a consultant, I collected a large quantity of data, with access to large numbers of homeless young people. Their living situations not being contingent on their relationship with a consultant as with their youth worker, the young people responded with a vulnerable honesty. However, the data collected in this role was ultimately restricted to the subjective views of the participants. The time spent with these young people was more or less restricted to the interview or focus group.

As an anthropologist doing ethnography, the dynamics of the relationship with the research participants were markedly different from that I had experienced as worker or consultant. This was linked to the exposure, the length of time spent with these research participants. I was not directing the activity; I did not have an agenda for them to achieve particular outcomes. Whilst I did support the research participants and was still a resource to a certain extent, this was not the expressed purpose of my involvement with them. Furthermore, the subjective views homeless young people gave to their lives – their stories and representations of past events, their expressed hopes and expectations for the future – were set against my observations.

Methodology and Fieldwork Experience

The instability, mobility, and the defiant independence from, and distrust of, other people that shape the lives of homeless young people influenced the approach that I took to fieldwork. Furthermore, many of these people have no particular 'site,' 'location' or 'place'

that they are tied to – their lives are structured by quite the opposite situation: having no tangible 'place' or 'home.' To address these factors I initially used more structured methods of research which facilitated the participant observation that was the centrepiece of my research. The research methods I employed are divided into two categories, firstly 'interviews, genealogies and life histories,' and secondly, participant observation. The interviews, genealogies and life histories were used during participant observation. Thus, a division between structured methods and participant observation does not represent a distinct division in practice.

Interviews, Genealogies, and Life Histories

The structured, more sociological, methods of research included: interviews, genealogies and life histories. These research methods span the spectrum of quantitative and qualitative methods. Both structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with more than 150 young people. With the consent of the participants the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The recording of each interview was a significant act that marked these events as structured and as a different form of interaction from daily interaction. This act did not restrict the responses by the participants; quite the opposite. The act of recording seemed to give participants permission to talk openly and extensively, an opportunity to be heard. These interviews were also marked by the use of consent forms informing the participants that what they said was confidential. With only a handful of exceptions, the interviews became a distinct space and time that permitted a trusting and open interaction. At times some of my key informants would request an interview when they had something they

wanted to get off their chests, or to talk about something that they had been thinking about. In these cases the interview was like a pseudo confessional or counselling session.

Many of these interviews were done in collaboration with organisations that work with homeless young people. Mutually beneficial research projects were created with organisations so that I could get access to young people who were currently experiencing or had experienced homelessness. This gave me access to young people in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, the juvenile detention centre (Quamby), and the clients of more than 20 different services that provide support to homeless young people. However, these services did not and could not, by virtue of being services, provide access to homeless young people who do not use services that support homeless young people. Nonetheless, the interviews made me familiar with more than 150 young people. This familiarity was invaluable whilst doing participant observation and facilitated my being introduced to other young people on the streets of Canberra. The interviews provided me with the initial rapport and contacts from which I could then network, to develop pathways into the lives of homeless young people outside of their formal relationships with organisations and institutions.

A series of structured interviews was conducted at the beginning of my fieldwork to provide a foundational set of data and guide the direction of fieldwork. More than 50 young people participated in these. The list of 56 questions was asked of each participant. The data were collated and analysed using a spreadsheet. Respondents were classified according to criteria such as age, sex, and living conditions. The interviews took 45 – 60 minutes to complete. Despite the structured nature of the interviews, research participants were

encouraged to talk freely about issues that they felt were pertinent to their lives and experiences of homelessness. Invariably, discussions continued after the interview had been completed as the young people revelled in talking to someone outside of their daily lives. However, it became apparent that structured interviews were not as productive as semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were akin to conversations that were initially guided by a particular theme. Often I would direct the conversation with open-ended questions addressing particular issues, for example: the use of alcohol and other drugs; places to sleep; crime; family, friends and enemies; and other topics that surfaced as significant throughout my fieldwork. Often these conversations were run as focus groups, as peers and friends discussed issues and topics. The dynamic of the group conversations elicited different responses as participants reminded each other of past events and also actively debated with each other, representing their perspectives on a given issue.

Although more than 150 young people participated in interviews, only a limited number of these became key informants. Eighteen key informants became the backbone of the qualitative research. Genealogies and life histories were collected from these participants. As each genealogy was drawn up with the assistance of the informant we simultaneously developed a rudimentary timeline that marked the interactions they had with their family and other events in their lives. To the genealogies and life histories were added social network diagrams that indicated the young person's involvement with services and the relationships they developed with peers and other members of the community. The social

network diagrams were particularly complex as I endeavoured to note how and when the diverse range of relationships began and finished and what kind of relationship each was: lover, co-offender, acquaintance etc. The precarious dynamics of my informants' social relationships (addressed in detail in Chapter Four) led to a series of confusing colour codes assigned to different relationships that changed week to week. Ultimately the act itself of collecting the data, and the conversation that it elicited, was more productive than the final network diagrams or map.

The practice of drawing up genealogies and timelines mapped out the lives of these young people before their eyes, presenting a synoptic vision that many of them had not constructed previously. The act of constructing these diagrams elicited insights into their lives from the participants that were often new to them. The timeline often highlighted a sequence of events that had led to family conflicts and the young person being 'kicked out' of or leaving home.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was the most intensive and extensive component of my research. Participant observation involves the researcher immersing him- or her-self in the practices and conditions of the community of people being researched, as far as is feasible. I spent as much time as I could with homeless young people in every area of their lives, and in the diverse range of conditions in which they live, over a 12 month period.

Introduction

I have known many of the people who are the centrepiece of my research for some time, in some cases as much as eight years, as they have moved in and out of homelessness and through different living conditions and circumstances. The young people who became key informants are the backbone of my participant observation. My life revolved around the lives of these 18 young people and their associates.

Tom Hall, in his ethnography on youth homelessness in Britain, highlights the dull repetition, the passing time, hanging-out, juxtaposed with explosive, often violent, ruptures in the seemingly mundane existence of this social group (Hall 2003:10). This resonates with my experience. I spent a great deal of time hanging-out in bed-sits[8] and public housing, wandering around, waiting in queues at Centrelink,[9] ACT Housing,[10] going to court, and just passing time chatting. This, however, contrasted with the often violent conflicts, frustrations and outbursts that underscore the seemingly constant upheavals that shape or frame these people's lives.

Many significant yet mundane aspects of daily life that are taken-for-granted by all social agents are hard to capture unless one is involved in these daily practices. Moreover, the subjective accounts of homeless youth, like those of all social agents, are representations of a perspective that can be set against their observed practices. The theoretical logic of the researcher removed from the felt reality of homelessness can give meaning and make sense

---

[8] Bed-sit refers to a flat with one all-purpose room with an attached bathroom and kitchen.
[9] Centrelink is the Australian Government agency that provides social security benefits (including welfare payments) to people in need.
[10] ACT Housing refers to accommodation provided by Housing and Community Services ACT, a Division of the ACT Government Department of Disability, Housing, and Community Services. ACT Housing is the main provider of community housing in the ACT to people who are disadvantaged or experiencing a crisis.

of homeless people's practices and lives, but often according to a different kind of logic. Yet when one is confronted with the same choices under similar circumstances to those of the research participants, the corporeal and practical logic they use to act makes more sense than the seemingly rational logic. After a day of boredom, poor sleep, and the amorphous fears that are projected on to other people, the decision to cope by taking drugs, self-harm, or creating an encounter with other people even if it is violent and confrontational, suddenly seems to make a kind of sense.

Participant observation obscures any clear demarcation between emic and etic. Yet the internalised and embodied habitus of homeless youth cannot be acquired through participant observation. Mimicking the material conditions of their lives and following their daily journeys helped me to understand their lives to a degree. I share so much in common with many of these young people, we apparently come from the same 'culture,' yet I could never cross the insurmountable divide that is our personal histories. At times security guards, police officers, by-passers, neighbours, youth workers, and other people we mixed with would mistake me as 'one of them.' Even the research participants had moments when they would seemingly forget who I was. Not knowing about my past, many assumed that I was once like them and had 'come good.' However, the difference between 'me' and 'them' was ultimately an asset: I was not a peer; I was not a threat; I would not use information and their moments of vulnerability against them.

My research involved young homeless people who traversed the spectrum of homelessness, from the literally homeless (the roofless) to the precariously housed (the housed but

homeless). These groups are rarely distinct but represent a range of circumstances that can change from day to day, week to week. Most of my research participants have traversed this spectrum for some years: some have never slept rough[11] and others have never paid rent; however, most of them have run the gamut. Nonetheless, most of these people are hard to find on a regular basis – their lives are profoundly affected by instability.

The more chaotic and unstable a homeless young person's life is, not only is it harder to find them from day to day, despite making arrangements, but the time spent with them is more erratic. This is of course a generalisation that has counter examples. Nonetheless, there is a strong correlation between the stability and security of one's conditions of existence – such as housing, income, relationships – and the stability of one's person. Whilst this statement is quite obvious, the causal link is not. The interrelationship between one's habitat, conditions of existence, and one's habitus is where this apparent truism becomes interesting. This complex interaction highlights how difficult it is to separate as distinct categories one's habitat and habitus. This mutually supportive link seems to be the cornerstone of the lives of homeless youth and perhaps true of all lives.

An example of the spectrum of homelessness and the logistics of research can be demonstrated by the examples of Bec and Tash. At 17 years Bec had a 15-month old son and lived with her boyfriend, Dougie, in ACT Housing. Both Bec and Dougie had experienced increasing stability in their lives, both had previously slept rough, couch

---

[11] 'Sleeping rough' refers to literal homelessness, otherwise referred to as rooflessness. For more detail see Chapter Three.

surfed,[12] and stayed in refuges. They had had the same phone numbers since I first met them, which is very unsusual. Both were on methadone, not using heroin. Moreover, they came home to the same house nearly every day. Depending on your definition, one might say they were no longer homeless. Nonetheless, at least once or twice a week something would go wrong and a drama would interrupt their relatively stable lives. These events vary from someone getting arrested, not coming home at night, a dispute with a friend that escalates into a fight or minor war.

The relative stability of Bec and Dougie allowed me to spend a great deal of time with them. They were always eager to talk about anything and everything, and happy to have me involved in their everyday activities. The distance from urgency their conditions permitted, allowed a degree of insight and reflection into their lives that was more difficult for Tash who did not have the space or time to engage with her life so explicitly.

At 17 years of age Tash did not know where she was going to sleep from night to night, where she would get food, or store her meagre possessions. Moreover, she was on constant watch for people that she wanted to "give a flogging"[13] to or who wanted to give her "a flogging." Tash was a short, slight young woman who knew how to intimidate other people who were not as well versed in the language of violence and fear. She, like others in her situation, was not so much inoculated against the fear of interpersonal conflict so much as had developed tried and true methods of coping – even if these methods did get her arrested

---

[12] 'Couch surfing' refers to sleeping at other people's accommodation. See Chapter Three for a detailed explanation.
[13] "A flogging" is a colloquial term referring to a physical assault.

and often create conflicts which could just have been an argument or merely a passing glare.

The daily schedule for Tash and her girlfriend was full: finding out how to get money, food, alcohol or their drug of choice, and finding out where they were going to sleep. Not only was it hard to reliably find Tash but the time spent with her was generally frantic and it was hard to discuss broader issues such as her history, family and hopes. Moreover, these topics are often greeted with a ponderous silence uncharacteristic of her otherwise bombastic and in-your-face style. Nonetheless, Tash and her friends have amazing insights into their own circumstances and the structures that impact on their lives. These insights are akin to Paul Willis' "partial penetrations" (Willis 1977:119). The grasp of their conditions, and others' lives, are so much more than partial in one sense, as they are concise and insightful. But they are nevertheless still partial in that they are articulated as jokes, metaphors and enacted in practice as symbolic gestures that highlight their domination, resistance, independence or dependence, strength or fragility – which are all closely interlinked and imbricated.

The dynamics of youth homelessness, whether relatively stable or chaotic, often made for unreliable research participants. Thus, just like the research participants, I was often alone, trying to find company or alternative means of passing time. The structured research methods not only introduced me to a large number of homeless young people, but also provided me with a means to collect data when I felt as if nothing was happening during my fieldwork. Sometimes I resorted to watching people at a distance who were asking for

money or begging, to see who gave them money and what they would eventually do with the money. (Doing participant observation fieldwork with someone who is begging is not a good idea for two reasons: firstly, one's presence interferes with the likelihood of them getting money, and secondly, they are often 'strung out'[14] and unwilling to talk). Nonetheless, I would invariably spend large amounts of time trying to find people, wandering the streets of Canberra. Those who had accommodation were often not home and their mobile phones were not answered. Sometimes it would take half a day to find someone. Sometimes they had been wandering around doing the same thing. Glad to find company we would then 'hang out' late into the night until we had to go our separate ways, planning to catch up the next day.

Leaving the Field

Gupta and Ferguson observe that a distinction between "the field" and "home" has been central to what it means to do anthropological fieldwork and associated ideas of distance, difference and the exotic (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:12). The spatial separation between "the field" and "home" marks distinct kinds of work that can lead to a hierarchy of what constitutes field sites (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:12-13). Stages of ethnography are tied to entry and exit from "the field" (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:12). In "the field" one collects data, fieldnotes, and raw data. Upon return "home" to the academy the anthropologist embarks on a different brand of work, the "reflective, polished, theoretical, intertextual" work of writing an ethnography (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:12). These two forms of work are

---

[14] 'Strung out' is a colloquial term that describes the state of a drug user experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Generally someone who is referred to as 'strung out' is considered volatile, irrational and unpredictable.

not only seen as distinct but sequential (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:12). These ideas are in contrast to my fieldwork experience.

I never entered or exited 'the field.' There was no spatial demarcation between 'home' and 'the field.' Due to the proximity, and blurry parameters of my field site, I have continued since the official return to spend time in 'the field.' My research problematises the notion of a fieldwork site and its boundaries – I find myself back in the field at unexpected times. Moreover, when does one really leave the field site when doing anthropology 'at home'? I still see the research participants at the shops, on the bus, even on university campus.

After a day of writing in my office at the Australian National University, when my fieldwork had officially finished, I walked to my car and started to drive out of the university. I noticed a small Postie bike, the small motorcycles used by postal workers to deliver mail to houses on the streets of Canberra, driving along a footpath and then off the curb onto the street in front of me. There was a young man with a baseball cap riding the bike with a backpack on and dressed in the fashion reminiscent of my research participants. The field had come to visit me. I wound down the window of my car and yelled "Luke!" The young man quickly looked around and turned his bike. We both stopped on the empty university street as I leant out the window.

Luke: "Hey Justin, how you going?"

Justin: "Good. What you up to?"

Luke: "Hah, up to no-good."

Justin: "I don't mean right now, I mean generally. You well?"

Luke: "Yeah pretty good…"

Suddenly a university security vehicle turned the corner behind me and drove straight

towards us.

Luke: "I better go. Give me a call"

I yelled "Yeah, good to see you" as Luke quickly mounts the curb and rode off down a

narrow footpath. The security guards were powerless to pursue him in their car. I drove off

self-consciously wondering what I was going to tell the security guards who really should

pull me over, but they do not. As a seasoned criminal who previously specialised in

breaking into cars, Luke had found an untapped resource in the university. Luckily he

knows my car – I hope that counts for something.

Although I could never leave my field site I could always 'go home.' This 'going home'

could be the simple act of changing my clothes, talking to an old friend, or being in

different company. Yet the remnants of the field were always there: I swore more than

usual; I struggled to let my guard down, viewing nearly everyone with a quiet suspicion;

and I was aware of an ever-present though often subtle, underbelly of an otherwise urbane

city. Encounters with my field site whilst 'at home', or encounters with 'home' whilst in

the field site, drew me into the strange liminal world of fieldwork 'at home.' Unable to get

both a spatial and conceptual distance from my field site, this liminality, made the writing

of the ethnography difficult. The continual stream of 'data' from 'the field' made me

second-guess anything I wrote. More significantly, everything that I wrote seemed to

obscure the reality of what I saw and experienced in 'the field.' The messiness and

confusion of youth homelessness as an experience seemed to conflict with any conceptual clarity I made in my office.

Clarity and Misrepresentation: Conceptual 'Sleight of Hand'

The clarity and sense that I aim to bring to an understanding of youth homelessness can obscure the inherent confusion, lack of clarity and messiness that underscores the lived experience of these young people. The image of the Möbius Strip (see Figure 1) is a metaphor, a visual representation, which is referred to in this thesis as an explanatory tool. This image is a reminder that intellectual speculation addresses problems not as they are presented to the individuals who engage with them in the world (Bourdieu 2000: 12-13).

Conceptual divisions such as structure/agency, cause/effect and constraint/choice can help us to provide accounts of social life but manage to hide the inescapable interrelationship of the two sides of each division. This is what I have termed the Möbius strip effect of the false antinomies that pervade social theory. The Möbius strip, or Möbius loop, acts as a visual representation or metaphor for the divisions or distinctions we make in order to provide conceptual clarity. This image acts as a reminder to the reader and the author of the 'sleight of hand' of social analysis.

The Möbius strip is a twisted loop, easily made with a strip of paper, which looks like any other loop (see Figure 1). However, due to a half-twist the Möbius strip becomes a

nonorientable one-sided surface. If one was to colour in a side of the Möbius strip one would eventual realise that they double back onto themselves, colouring the entire surface. What appears as two distinct sides are in fact one continuous side.
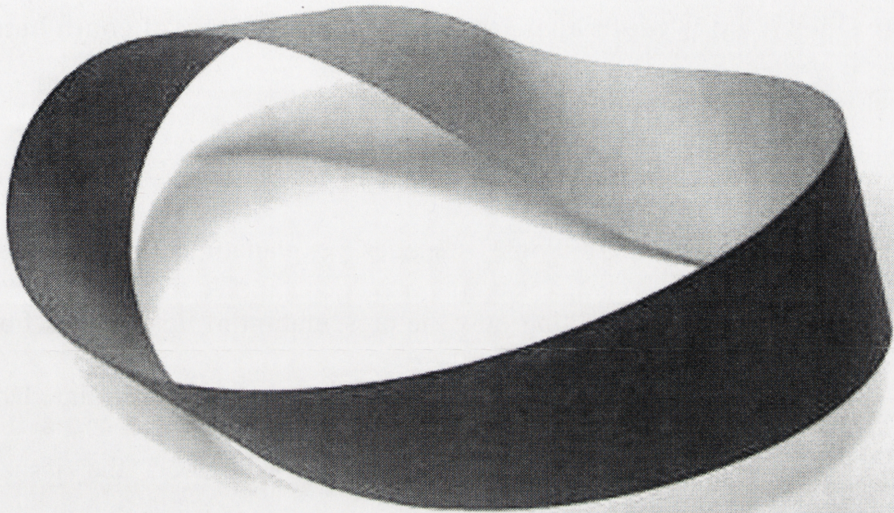
Figure 1. Möbius strip

The heuristic, analytical divisions and distinctions that social researchers use to provide clarity to a social issue can inadvertently be forgotten, obfuscating or hiding the 'twist': the fact that these concepts are far from clearly distinct in practice. Two delimited realms of social existence appear as separate distinct categories, forgetting, ignoring, or hiding the 'sleight-of-hand' of the polemical positions that are the conditions that reinforce and naturalise such dualisms. We must be constantly reminded of this 'sleight of hand' as structure/agency, objectivism/subjectivism, cause/effect, and other conceptual or theoretical demarcations are convenient divisions that are mobilised not only in the analytical and theoretical fields that account for the phenomenon of homeless young people, but inform

the matrix of institutions, advocates, legislation, services and organisations that encounter and shape the lives of very real people.

Chapter Structure

Chapter One: What is youth homelessness? An exploration of youth homelessness as presented within the public sphere

Chapter One provides an explication and overview of youth homelessness as it is presented in the public sphere. The definitions, statistics, explanations and causes of youth homelessness are outlined, highlighting how the presentation of this topic is framed by the conceptual divides of structure/agency, cause/effect, and choice/constraint. I outline how government and non-government organisations have addressed the issue of youth homelessness. In presenting the prevailing discourse of youth homelessness, this chapter sets the scene for the thesis which provides an alternative conceptual framework within which to examine this issue.

Chapter Two: Homeless Youth and the Habitus of Instability

This chapter begins by outlining the habitus of homeless youth, a habitus built on instability, uncertainty and insecurity. In order to elucidate the foundations of the habitus of instability I introduce the notion of social capital, exploring the positive and negative consequences of social capital for homeless youth. I argue that a lack of social capital provides the foundation of the habitus of homeless youth. In particular, I emphasise how the families of homeless youth do not function as social capital. Following this, I provide

an overview of the practices and responses of homeless youth to their conditions of existence.

Chapter Three: The living conditions of homeless youth in Canberra

Chapter Three describes the living conditions of homeless young people in Canberra. It aims to provide a picture of the living conditions of homeless youth, highlighting the instability of youth homelessness. This chapter is framed by the accommodation options that are axiomatic to definitions of 'types' of youth homelessness: literal homelessness; couch surfing; refuges; and independent living. The instability of youth homelessness is seen in the transition and mobility between types of accommodation and within each type of accommodation. This discussion of the conditions of youth homelessness provides insights into the interdependence between the external material conditions of homelessness and homeless young people's 'way of being in the world.'

Chapter Four: Alone Together: The Social Lives of Homeless Youth

The social lives of homeless youth are structured by the two contrasting strategies of autonomy and relatedness. These strategies emerge as responses to and ways of coping with the instability of youth homelessness. I begin this chapter by defining Bourdieu's notion of strategy and then outline the strategies of autonomy and relatedness. Following this, I examine the social lives of homeless youth, looking at the dynamics of relationships with their peers and service providers that are structured by the interaction between the strategies of autonomy and relatedness. This chapter provides an understanding of the social

instability of youth homelessness and also demonstrates how the strategies of autonomy and relatedness both structure and are structured by this instability.

Chapter Five: Dignity in Marginalisation: self-reliance and the sense of control and agency

This chapter examines how homeless young people struggle for social standing within the field of youth homelessness, highlighting the primary means at their disposal: cultural capital. Bourdieu's conceptual tools of capital, field and the field of power are used to examine the practices of homeless young people that can appear counterproductive and seemingly collude in their marginalisation. The notion of 'negative cultural capital' is introduced in order to clarify the dynamics of the 'street capital' that is at stake in the field of homeless youth. The cultural capital of youth homelessness, or 'street capital,' is a resource used within the field of homeless youth and in the broader field of power that not only affords them some recognition or status but also provides them with a sense of dignity and self-worth in the face of adversity.

Conclusion

In the conclusion I reiterate how the instability of the conditions of youth homelessness inculcates a habitus, a way of being in the world, which has adapted to these conditions, forming a habitus of instability that reinforces the conditions of its formation. The system of dispositions, practices and responses generated by the habitus of instability has been forged and reproduced by a complex interaction with the conditions of homelessness. I

finish by outlining how Bourdieu's theoretical framework accounts for social change. I conclude by addressing the issue of what becomes of homeless youth.

Prior to commencing fieldwork research ethical approval was granted by the Australian National University Human Research Ethics Committee. In the interest of respecting the confidentiality of the people that participated in this research, names and other personal details have been altered.

Chapter One

What is Youth Homelessness? An exploration of youth homelessness as presented in the public domain

Introduction

This Chapter provides an overview of the issue of youth homelessness in public discourse. Discussions of youth homelessness in the public sphere provide the prevailing understanding of this issue that sporadically emerges as an important social issue in Australia.

Explanations, descriptions, and the contested definitions of homelessness and youth homelessness are often framed by the conceptual divides of objectivist/subjectivist, structural/individual and constraint/choice. These pervasive dualisms present oversimplified characterisations of homeless youth. These common dualisms are obstacles to social investigation. Yet these divides are not just theoretical as they are echoed in the public domain and embodied in representations of youth homelessness. The extra-

theoretical function of these perspectives of youth homelessness is framed by the polemical agenda of social groups, informing where the blame should be placed, who assistance should be offered to and what that assistance should be. The characterisations framed by these antinomies are "impeccably real social fictions" (Bourdieu 1987:9) that can shape public policy and justify the exclusion of types or groups of people and can impact on the way that social agents see themselves and what is for the likes of them and their *kind*.

In this chapter I first address the definition of homelessness. Following this I look at how the age specific category *youth* homelessness is demarcated. The issue of definitions impacts on the estimations of the homeless population. The scale of the problem of homelessness and youth homelessness seems to be of great concern when evaluating the significance of this social issue. Next I discuss the problems faced in collecting the data. I will then briefly address how definitions and explanations of homelessness are affected by different perspectives. I will provide some of the statistics for Australia and the ACT.

After a brief discussion about the conceptual categories that are used to explain youth homelessness, I will explore the factors that are referred to when accounting for youth homelessness. This section outlines the common causes and explanations given for youth homelessness.

The last section provides an overview of the most significant public reports that have had an impact on how youth homelessness has been seen by the Australian public. Hand in hand with the public outcries that sporadically occur is the need for government to produce

a plan to address youth homelessness. Thus, I finish by outlining the government responses to youth homelessness since the 1970s, when homeless young people were first brought to the attention of public officials.

Defining Homelessness

Definitions, descriptions, and explanations of the causes and effects of youth homelessness are tightly interwoven. However, these issues logically start with a definition (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:26). The problems of defining any social issue are numerous and the ramifications of diverse conceptualisations can be significant. Defining homelessness is more than a theoretical issue; the pertinent characteristics that qualify one as homeless have a very real impact on the lives of those so classified and for those who fall short of the codified definitions. Moreover, the parameters of the definition impact on the scope of this social issue – the perceived size of the problem conceived by statistical measurements – which impacts on the official vision of this social problem, used to urge governments to meet the needs of homeless people.

Definitions of homelessness can vary from the simple colloquial and literal understandings to detailed definitions that are enshrined in legislation and policy. Different groups of professionals are concerned with different categories or conceptualisations of homelessness. Logically, the "wider one casts the 'homeless net' has a tremendous impact on the numbers and characteristics of the people included in the definition of homelessness" (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:3). The most obvious definition of homelessness is 'street homelessness,' otherwise referred to as 'rooflessness' or 'literal homelessness.'

This notion of homelessness dominates the public viewpoint as it is the most visible kind of homelessness that confronts people (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:27).

Another conceptualisation of homelessness that is often used was developed by Peter Rossi (Rossi et al. 1987:1336) who made the distinction between 'literal homelessness' and 'precariously' or 'marginally housed' (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:2-3). The marginally housed, or those people in inadequate accommodation, are less visible, often in overcrowded, temporary residence with unstable and insecure living situations. People in marginalised or precarious accommodation do not always seek assistance from organisations and agencies and can remain uncounted and invisible. This group is often referred to as the "hidden homeless" (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:29). Of course, the more inclusive these conditions of existence are the larger the problem appears to be. While street homelessness may be uncommon, overcrowding and poor conditions may be widespread.

There is little or no disagreement that, in the broadest sense, 'homeless' means not having a 'home.' However, this far from clarifies the situation. The dilemma remains in the lack of agreed definition of 'home' (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:4; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:29). A home refers to more than a house, which is considered synonymous with a dwelling or physical structure (Hutson & Liddiard 1994: 29). A home implies a set of social relations.

Different definitions of home also add to the difficulty in defining homelessness cross-culturally. In asking the inverse question in order to elucidate a definition, Glasser et al

suggest that "[o]ne way to confront this problem is to define homelessness as the opposite of having adequate housing" (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:4). Moreover, they go on to ask "when is 'no access to a conventional dwelling' *not* homelessness?" (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:4-5). The suggested answer is that circumstances do not equate with homelessness where the movement of transients from place to place is a part of the *culture* of the group (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:5).

In light of the diverse conceptualisations of homelessness it is instructive to consider homelessness as a continuum or spectrum of circumstances (Cordray & Pion 1997; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:27). Again, "the further the line is drawn from the 'sleeping rough' end of the continuum, the larger the problem appears to be" statistically (Watson & Austerberry 1986:13). Thus, the multitude of definitions and the pertinent conditions or circumstances that delineate the category of homeless shifts over time and across organisations and is often ill-defined or presumed self-evident. It is for this reason that homelessness has become problematic and contentious as to who counts or qualifies as homeless, let alone as homeless *youth*.

Whilst debate continues about definitions of homelessness, in Australia two definitions have emerged as dominant (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:9). One of these is the definition outlined by the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program* (SAAP) *Act, 1994*. The other is the 'cultural definition,' which is used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Definition of Homelessness

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was the primary response to homelessness by the Australian Government from 1985 to 2009. It is a support program which provides operational funds to non-government organisations to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program is jointly funded by the commonwealth and state governments. The SAAP definition is used to identify who is eligible for assistance from SAAP funded agencies whilst the cultural definition is used for enumerating the homeless population. The SAAP definition is the most well known definition as it is embodied in the legislation which mandates the funding and operation of the organisations, agencies and initiatives that it funds. The definition of homeless in the SAAP report "Young Homeless People in Australia 2001-2002" (AIHW 2003) is:

> A person who does not have access to safe, secure and adequate housing. A person is considered not to have access to safe, secure and adequate housing if the only housing to which they have access:
>
> - damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
> - threatens the person's safety; or
> - marginalises them through failing to provide access to:
>   - adequate personal amenities; or
>   - the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or
> - places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing; or
> - has no security of tenure – that is, they have no legal right to continued occupation of their home.
>
> A person is also considered homeless if he or she is living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or some other form of emergency accommodation (p. 90).

This definition is a legislative formulation which is designed to define legitimate service delivery under the SAAP Act. Service provider definitions such as the SAAP definition are often broad, including those vulnerable or at risk of homelessness, so as to assist a wide range of people and include early intervention and prevention practices. However, the lack of conceptual rigour of the SAAP definition is cited as being the reason it is not used for measurement purposes, as it does not distinguish between those at risk and those currently homeless (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003: 10).

Cultural Definition of Homelessness

Chamberlain and Mackenzie have framed a conceptualisation of homeless termed the 'cultural definition' (Mackenzie & Chamberlain 1998). This definition is used by Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in enumerating homeless people in Australia in censuses. This position contends that homelessness and inadequate housing are socially constructed concepts that are relative to particular communities at given historical periods (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992). Thus, in certain circumstances adequate housing may be considered mud huts if this is how the majority of people live (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992:290; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:10; Watson & Austerberry 1986:167). It is thereby necessary to identify community standards of adequate housing that people have the right to expect in order to live according to conventions and standards in a particular culture. From this point one can then identify whose living conditions fall below this standard. However, cultural standards are not enshrined in official documents, but

"embedded in the housing practices of a society" (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:11). These conventions come to be seen as the "cultural expectations of a community in an objective sense" (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:11).

The "minimum community standard" in Australia is considered to be a small rental flat, given the majority of living circumstances in Australia (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992:290-1; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:11) as the majority of Australians obtain this as a minimum in the rental market (90% of Australian private dwellings are houses). This minimum is below the culturally desired option but provides a benchmark for assessing 'homelessness' in the contemporary context.[15] This leads to Chamberlain and Mackenzie's identification of 'primary,' 'secondary,' and 'tertiary' homelessness:

> **Primary homelessness:** people without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks etc.)
>
> **Secondary homelessness:** people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including: friends, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses.
>
> **Tertiary homelessness:** people living in single rooms in private boarding houses – without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure.
>
> **Marginally housed:** people in housing situations close to the minimum standard. (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992:291)

---

[15] This excludes those people that do not fit these requirements and are in institutional settings: seminaries, prisons, army, and university halls (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1992:291; Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:12).

The 'marginally housed' are not considered homeless under the current definition operationalised by the ABS. However, "there is continuing argument about whether some marginal groups should be included as 'homeless'" (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2003:13). Similarly, 'at risk' populations are not considered homeless by the ABS. The notion 'at risk' refers to people who are currently living in a flat or house but at risk of losing their accommodation. Service providers often prefer to use the SAAP definition as it accords with their service provision needs and conflates homeless people (primary, secondary, tertiary, and marginalised) with those 'at risk.'

The complexities of the debates over definitions of homelessness are further exacerbated by subjective self-appellation and self-identification of young homeless people themselves (Glasser & Bridgman 1993: 3). Commentators have noted that even young people sleeping rough may not necessarily consider themselves as homeless (Brandon & Wells 1980:52-55; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:29). Moreover, young people who access specialist services for homeless young people may still resist the classification of 'homeless' (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:3; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:29; Watson & Austerberry 1986).[16] Similarly, people over the age of 18 years may not identify as a young person or 'youth' but are nonetheless included in this category. However, in enumerating the homeless population what can be characterised as an objectivist stance is taken and subjective perspectives on one's living circumstances are seen as irrelevant.

---

[16] My research confirms this. Of the 41 respondents to the question: "are you currently homeless?" only 5 replied with a 'yes' and another 5 with 'unsure/don't know.' However, 63% (27 respondents) were living in conditions consistent with SAAP definition of homeless. Of the 33% (14 people) that did not fit the SAAP criteria of homeless youth 8 were in juvenile detention. This suggests that the under-reporting of youth homelessness is problematic. Furthermore, the self-appellation or identification of homelessness can impact the services an individual calls upon in their time of need.

In this thesis I refer to four types of homelessness; literal homelessness (roughing it); living in refuges; couch surfing; and, independent living. These four terms reflect the way these accommodation options are referred to in Canberra by service providers and homeless youth. Below I provide a brief outline of what these accommodation options refer to. However, Chapter Three provides an exhaustive exploration of these accommodations options or 'modes of living.'

Firstly, 'literal homelessness,' also termed 'roughing it,' is akin to primary homelessness outlined above: people living without conventional accommodation, such as sleeping on the streets, in parks, cars or abandoned buildings. Secondly, 'refuges' designates residential accommodation services that provide support and accommodation for numerous people under the one roof or address. Thirdly, 'couch surfing' refers to a person or numerous people staying at someone else's accommodation, indicating the most frequent place to sleep, the couch. Fourth, 'independent living' is when a young person acquires conventional accommodation of their own, in a flat, unit or house.

Defining *Youth* Homelessness

'Youth' is in itself a contentious category. Like most properties attached to individuals that show continuous distribution, any discrete divisions by age can appear as a mere statistical artefact. As noted by Bourdieu, the paradox identified by Pareto is particularly apt, according to which it is no easier to draw a line between rich and poor than it is between

young and old (Bourdieu 1993:94). The professional reflex is to point out that the division between ages is arbitrary and socially constructed – entirely variable and subject to manipulation (Bourdieu 1993:94). Nonetheless, in my research in the ACT the pertinent divisions of age that constitute 'youth' are played out between institutionalised social fields. 'Arbitrary' or 'social construction' aside, the age limits that deem someone eligible for income support, or for accommodation from ACT Housing, or whether one goes to juvenile detention or prison, constitute very real categories.

From 16 years of age in the ACT people are granted incremental responsibilities.[17] This increase in "provisional responsibilities" – or relative independence – that is granted people from 16 years of age characterises the 'no man's land' that Bourdieu attributes to the category of youth: "they are adults for some things and children for others" (Bourdieu 1993:96). With the increase in responsibilities with age comes an implicit accountability – the older you are the less 'worthy' or 'deserving' of support you are. At the age of 18 years one is deemed legally responsible for one's own actions and is no longer subject to the juvenile justice system. By 25 years of age responsibilities are no longer provisional, thus you are not able to access support offered to youth – you are unequivocally an adult.

Services that work with homeless young people work with different age categories within the broader spectrum of 'young people'. The following is a list of age categories that different Youth Support Accommodation Assistance Program (YSAAP) services in Canberra work with: 12 – 25; 15 – 21; 15 – 19; 14 – 21; 15 – 20; 15 – 18; 16 – 20; 16 – 25.

---

[17] In the ACT by 16 years of age people can legally leave home of their own accord, leave school, get a Medicare card, apply for ACT Housing, sign a lease, obtain Youth Allowance, consent to a medical procedure without parental permission, and consent to sexual intercourse.

Part of what may qualify people over the age of 18 and under 25 years as 'youth' is that they can still use services for 'homeless youth.' This entitles them to support and services shared with *others* considered youth.

Definitions of youth homelessness are age specific. The differing age variations used to define youth homelessness affect the perceived size of this social issue. Despite the differing views as to the scope of age limits to be incorporated in statistical data regarding homeless youth, SAAP has a quite clear definition. Services provided by SAAP and the data collated by their services through SAAP National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) includes homeless youth as people who are homeless (consistent with the above SAAP definition of homeless) who are between 12-24 years of age. Furthermore, YSAAP services are funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 to provide accommodation and support services to young people 12-25 years of age who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. For the purposes of policy in the ACT, youth includes people who are aged 12-25 years of age. Chamberlain and Mackenzie, in the most recent presentation of youth homelessness estimates (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2002), count those as homeless who fit the 'cultural definition' and are aged 12-18 years of age.

Estimating Numbers of Homeless Youth

Estimating numbers of homeless youth is a notoriously difficult task. However, there is great demand for such quantifiable data. It has been noted that "one of the first questions raised in the public consciousness about homelessness was how many homeless there are"

(Glasser & Bridgman 1999:28). Furthermore, the measurement of a social issue is a crucial component in qualifying an issue as a social problem (Hutson & Liddiard 1994: 26). The statistics of youth homelessness are often seen as significant in the description of this social group/problem, whose scale impacts on the responses by government, media, and the correlated public consciousness.

Statistics on homelessness and youth homelessness are highly contested. There are two main reasons for the problematic estimations: lack of agreed definition and practical or methodological issues in counting the homeless (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:31). These issues are inextricably linked and are further complicated by the diverse agenda and bias of social agents involved in these disputes. Having addressed the issue of defining youth homelessness above I will now examine the methodological issues involved in counting the homeless. Following this I consider the strategic use of statistics and the interdependence of diverse agendas and the definitions, methods, and ensuing visions and presentations of youth homelessness.

Counting the Homeless – methodological issues

The methodological problems that researchers are confronted with when trying to measure homelessness have been described as trying to "count the uncountable" (Rossi 1989:47). After deciding on the terms of reference for the statistical investigation one of the most important aspects of measuring homelessness is actually finding the homeless.

Census and surveys provide most of the information available. Censuses represent the most complete attempt to count a population (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:28). Yet as they are usually based on households or domicile the homeless have previously been systematically omitted (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:28). People who do not live in conventional housing are usually missed by surveys and census (Hutson & Jenkins 1989:31). 'Couch surfing' (discussed in Chapter Three) and overcrowding are common forms of homelessness that entail a host household taking in other 'guests' (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:35). This overcrowding and unauthorised tenants are often unreported in censuses, with respondents unsure of the possible consequences of reporting the actual number of people accommodated in one residence (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:39).

Another methodological problem in counting the homeless has been the reliance on cross-sectional samples, considered to over-represent long-term homeless adolescents (Roberston et al. 1989:417). While some young people are homeless for extended periods of time, others are homeless for only a couple of days: "young people often move in and out of homelessness" (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:32). Thus, on any given night the number of homeless young people will not be representative of the number that will experience homelessness over a year (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:32; Rossi 1989:66-70).

Counting those who are literally homeless, living on the streets, is difficult as they are often hard to find (Hutson & Jenkins 1989:31; Rossi 1989:49). The 'roofless' or literal homeless can be concealed or hidden, and may not use soup kitchens and drop-in services from where they can be counted. Investigations into the accuracy of including the roofless-street

homeless in census data have been undertaken and it was noted that even the best efforts have failed to include about one third of the street homeless population (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:34).

Another methodology draws on a services-based approach to counting the homeless (from soup kitchens, refuges, shelters, etc) (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:37-38; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:37-38). One of the disadvantages of surveys of accommodation services arises from the treatment of the data (Fopp 1993a:78). Often the information obtained from such a survey that has been conducted for a month or two is extrapolated to give a yearly estimate (Fopp 1993a:78; Glasser & Bridgman 1999:38; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:32). Young people who are staying with friends (such as 'couch surfing') may not contact homeless agencies/services and may not even see themselves as homeless (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:31). The problem of double counting and multiple counting is considered to occur in surveys where homeless youth are counted at one service that has turned them away only to be counted again when seeking accommodation elsewhere (Fopp 1993a: 78; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:38). However, other aspects of this approach can understate the estimates, negating or compensating for the purported overestimations due to multiple counting (Fopp 1993a:78). Such aspects include the indeterminate number of young people who do not or cannot seek accommodation from services and the fact that not all agencies respond to surveys which are often program specific and thus do not include agencies that are funded from different sources (for example, SAAP data referring to only SAAP services) (Fopp 1993a:78; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:37-38). Furthermore, it has been noted that even getting

a list of all the services that provide support to the homeless is more complicated than one

imagines, let alone counting those who use these services (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:38).

The Use/Function of Statistics, Explanations and Descriptions of

Youth Homelessness

Homelessness research often tends to be biased towards certain interpretations of

homelessness. Concentrating on the sheltered homeless or those living on the streets often

entails omitting different forms of homelessness and misrepresenting the size and quality of

the problem. However, these biases can change according to the agenda of those presenting

the data. Hutson and Liddiard suggest that "statistics can often be seen as less a

measurement of youth homelessness and more a reflection of the agencies themselves"

(Hutson & Liddiard 1994:39). As stated above, the size of the homeless population can

vary a great deal depending on the definition used. If local authorities have a statutory

responsibility to house homeless people often official definitions will be more restrictive.

Watson and Austerberry note that "definitions obviously serve a purpose":

> Priority need households and restrictive policies are necessary because local
> authorities cannot fulfil their responsibilities to all those who apply for
> housing as homeless...local authority housing departments adopt a gate
> keeping role between the homeless and the limited stock of council houses
> (Watson & Austerberry 1986:13).

Many homelessness projects and agencies adopt a broader definition of homelessness. This

feeds into their agenda of highlighting homelessness as a social issue. Service providers

may also be more sympathetic to the impact of being precariously housed or 'at risk' of

homelessness. With a focus on early intervention and prevention the definition of

homelessness grows in order to fit an even wider spectrum of conditions into the parameters of services that address this social issue (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:40). Definitions of homelessness can vary to suit services/agencies which have different capabilities due to funding and other restrictions (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:99). Although there is little disagreement as to the street homeless or chronically homeless fitting the range of definitions, this does not necessarily equate with them being the 'deserving' or 'worthy' homeless (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:40-41; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:117). Ironically, homeless services can fall back onto pathological/individual explanations of homeless when dealing with the 'chronically' or career homeless, feeling under resourced and unable to deal with this client group that is seen as too problematic.

Australian and ACT Statistics

The available estimates of the scale of youth homelessness in Australia come from differing perspectives. As stated above, the terms of reference regarding estimated numbers of homeless young people are often diverse, as are the methodologies. The appearance of clarity and unquestioned objectivity characterises most of the data presented (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:45). It is important to realise what the research is presenting, being aware of its limitations and its contribution to our understanding of this social issue.

In Australia there are two significant sets of information providing statistics about the homeless: the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS); and, SAAP National Data Collection Agency (SAAP NDCA).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

The ABS provides statistics of the number of people experiencing homelessness every five years. The ABS endeavours to include people in their count ranging from those who are experiencing primary homelessness through to people accessing homelessness services (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:3).

Between 2001 and 2006 there was an estimated 5% increase in the number of homeless people counted in Australia: in 2001 there were 99,900; and, in 2006 there were 104,676 homeless people counted. In 2001 36,173 young people aged 12-24 years were counted as homeless, approximately 36.2% of the homeless population in Australia. In 2006 there were 32,444 young people counted as homeless on census night, approximately 30.9% of the homeless population.

In 2006 on census night there were 16, 375 people sleeping rough in Australia, which represents 16% of all homeless people at that time (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:3). On the census night in the ACT, more specifically in the city of Canberra, 78 people were counted sleeping rough (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:4).

SAAP NDCA

SAAP services are required to collect data as part of their funding agreement. The SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) released the first national report on SAAP services in 1997. The most recent publication was 2007, showing data collected from SAAP services across Australia in 2005-2006.

Despite the broad definition of homelessness, SAAP surveys are restricted in the scope of the information they provide: SAAP surveys are limited to SAAP services, excluding young people in other services; they omit the literally homeless, and, do not include people that are at risk of homelessness. With these restrictions in mind, SAAP data only provides a useful estimate of the problem of homelessness as seen by agencies – the services that they provide and the clients that access these services – giving an overview or broad profile of young homeless people that use SAAP services.

During the 2006-2007 period an estimated 1 in 110 Australians, 187,900 people, were supported by a SAAP service (AIHW 2007a:ix). 33.1% of these clients were young people aged 15-24, which was 39,300 young people (AIHW 2007a:21).

In the ACT 1,850 people were supported by a SAAP service in 2006-2007 (AIHW 2007b:9). Eight hundred of these clients were young people aged between 15-24 years; this means that 43.9% of clients that were supported by a SAAP service in the ACT were young people (AIHW 2007b:9).

This overview of some of the statistical data outlined above gives us some indication of the size of the problem. In general terms young people, aged 12-18 years, are reported to be "the largest group of people experiencing homelessness and the highest users of specialist homelessness services" (Homelessness Taskforce 2008: 4).

Causes and Explanations of Youth Homelessness

Akin to the multitude of definitions of youth homelessness, characteristics attributed to homeless youth range from the caricature images portrayed in the media that pervade public consciousness, to the wide range of circumstances of the 'precariously accommodated.' This reflects the fact that the homeless are not a homogenous group, but rather come from a multitude of backgrounds. Explanations of youth homelessness are often accounted for by appealing to the simplistic dualisms of structural/individual, cause/effect and constraint/choice. These perspectives of homeless are often presented as intertwined whilst at other times one side of these prevalent dualisms are tacitly proposed as the major if not the only pertinent factor.

Structural, or external factors are often given as the underlying systemic causes of homelessness, linking homelessness to the structures of society. The structural factors that impact on youth homelessness, often cited as a cocktail of factors that contribute rather than operate in isolation, are: the high cost of rents in the private housing market; low levels of income, including unemployment benefits for young people (especially under 18); changes in labour market; and demographic and cultural change that impact on the expectations and pressure placed on families.

Morgan and Vincent (1987) presented an outline of the causes of youth homelessness that emphasised structural issues. The authors noted that "current housing crisis experienced by youth is not a consequence of particular parents abdicating their responsibilities, of the breakdown of the family or of young people suddenly becoming rebellious" (Morgan &

Vincent 1987: 22). Rather, they suggest that it is an interaction between factors such as: the recent creation of the period of dependence on families, 'adolescence'; changing social structure which offers little support for families; an economic system which disadvantages many people and entails increasing unemployment rates; societal expectations for a standard of living that is unachievable to many people; and the impact of the international economic crisis (Morgan & Vincent 1987:22).

Often structural explanations of homelessness are countered with or used to counter pathological or deviant conceptions of the homeless. While structural explanations focus on the external structures of society many explanations for youth homelessness refer to more personal and individual terms, such as the behaviour of the young individual or their family. For example, the inability to obtain an income, find employment, and establish oneself in stable accommodation, or the choice to live a particular lifestyle are all explained with reference to deviant behaviour that portrays homeless youth as social anomalies responsible for their own circumstances. Perspectives that emphasise individual factors often highlight the dysfunctional families from which homeless youth are assumed to have emerged, without noting the structural background that frames the lives of these families. Variations of this position are criticised for blaming the victim and colluding in the view of the homeless as undeserving deviants, a model of pathological individuals. Hutson and Liddiard note that this is a vision of youth homelessness that is common among politicians (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:58).

Analogous to the structural/individual dualism we are often presented with a simplistic

divide between choice/constraint when assessing why a young person became homeless.

For example, the argument that young people make the choice to leave home implies a

responsibility of the young person for their circumstances as homeless. The suggestion that

a homeless young person has made a choice to leave home is a common colloquial

explanation that places the blame on the individual. As far back as 1979, Beresford noted

that representations of youth homelessness often reduced complex economic and social

issues around homelessness to a matter of runaway youth (Beresford 1979; Hutson &

Liddiard 1994). Supported by reports such as Burdekin,[18] Fopp notes that the majority of

young people do not choose to leave home and it is unfair and misleading to indicate

otherwise (Fopp 1993a; Fopp 2003). Some highlight that many young people have no real

choice as to whether they stay home or not. Hutson and Liddiard note that "of the young

people who do appear to have made the decision to leave, the degree of choice often

appears to be a minimal one" (Hutson & Liddiard 1994: 59).

When addressing the causes of homelessness the dualism of cause/effect can too easily be

simplistically applied (Fopp 1993a:88; Glasser & Bridgman 1999:17). Mental health issues,

alcohol and drug abuse, crime, and family conflict are often cited as explanations of youth

homelessness (Burdekin & Carter 1989; Glasser & Bridgman 1999; Homelessness

Taskforce 2008; Hutson & Liddiard 1994; National Youth Commission 2008). However,

---

[18]Aside from estimating the size of youth homelessness the Burdekin Report highlighted issues that remain relevant to popular conceptions of homelessness. The Burdekin report explained that the majority of young people who become homeless do not do it on a whim. Rather, ongoing conflict and difficulties in their home life were presented as significant factors: "It is clear from the young people's account that leaving home was not the result of a whim; rather stories are reflective of ongoing and deep-seated difficulties" (Burdekin & Carter 1989: 87).

positions that articulate these areas as causes of homelessness lack a grasp of the complex interaction between cause and effect, so complex that it may even be an unhelpful distinction. The conditions associated with being homeless are often seen to cause and/or exacerbate the prevalence of criminal activity ('survival offending'), mental health issues, and alcohol and other drug use ('self-medication'). There is a cyclical and interactive looping between these issues and homelessness. Furthermore, the apparent cyclical nature of these issues contributes to the implicit inevitability and inescapability of homelessness and its associated culture or lifestyle – once they start there is no stopping them.

Much of what is presented as explanations of homelessness can arguably be presented as structural *and* individual in nature, problematising any distinction between the two. For example, the category of 'family conflict,' which constitutes the main causal factor contributing to youth homelessness in Australia and the ACT, can be attributed to either structural or individual factors, or both. Since the 1980s, presentations of youth homelessness have resisted relegating the issue to simplistic choices between structural/individual, choice/constraint and cause/effect. However, the complexity and lack of clarity in accounting for youth homelessness is played upon in public discourse. Media presentations and political discourse in particular present visions of homelessness that are conveniently unambiguous, in part due to the difficulty in highlighting how structural factors shape the daily lives of young people who seem to embody dysfunction and deviance.

Below I outline the recurring explanations given for youth homelessness (AIHW 2008; Burdekin & Carter 1989; Fopp 1993a:86; Forsyth 2007; Homelessness Taskforce 2008:78-13; Hutson & Liddiard 1994-67; National Youth Commission 2008:6-9). These topics addressed below appear under different names and not all of them are mentioned by all reports and investigations. The two most significant reports addressing homelessness in the early part of 21st century both refer to some of the issues addressed below (Homelessness Taskforce 2008; National Youth Commission 2008).

Housing Affordability

Homelessness is often viewed as inextricably linked to the housing market (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:46). Subsequently the housing market is often cited as contributory, if not central, to this issue (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:6-7; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:46-50; National Youth Commission 2008:247-262). The lack of affordable and appropriate accommodation for young people has been an increasingly prevalent dimension in explanations of youth homelessness.

The housing affordability crisis in Australia and Canberra in 2007 received much media attention and became a central factor in the Federal election of that year. Changes in the housing market, the increase in rent prices and land value, have led to a large number of people relying on public housing. The high costs of private rental properties are seen to be unrealistic for young people. Whilst from the age of 16 years people in the ACT are eligible for Public Housing this is dependent on having an income. The problem of affordable

housing and sustainable housing for young people is linked to the economic situation of young people and the labour market.

The Labour Market

Problems with adequate housing are often considered synonymous with issues of unemployment (Burdekin & Carter 1989:121-125; Homelessness Taskforce 2008:6-7; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:50-52; National Youth Commission 2008:113-124). Australia has seen a decrease in unemployment rates in the last 20 years. In early 2009 unemployment was at record lows for young people, although the unemployment rate was still higher for young people compared to adults (National Youth Commission 2008:116). Moreover, young people receive a lower rate of pay.

Losing employment or being unable to find employment can contribute to an inability to find stable accommodation, especially for young people who are unable to return to their family home. For young people who are already experiencing homelessness the burden of their living conditions makes it very difficult to find and maintain employment (Homelessness Taskforce 2008: 8; National Youth Commission 2008:117). Furthermore, many homeless young people do not have employment as a high priority in their subjective hierarchy of needs, wanting to secure a degree of stability before addressing the issue of employment.

Income

Low income has been identified as a key issue in the circumstances that contribute to homelessness (Forsyth 2007; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:50-52; National Youth Commission 2008:103). For young people this issue is seen as even more significant. In Australia, income support from Centrelink is available to young people from 16 years of age (and younger under certain circumstance). Most homeless young people derive the majority, if not all, of their income from Government income support (National Youth Commission 2008:303). Additional support is provided to young people who meet the criteria of 'unable to live at home.' Acquiring this income support is often difficult for young people with no identification and parents who are uncooperative. Homeless young people experience problems with being 'breached,' having their payments reduced and suspended for not meeting their obligations, which can exacerbate existing problems or even contribute to becoming homeless (Forsyth 2007; National Youth Commission 2008:310-311). Nonetheless, the levels of income support that homeless young people are entitled to are inadequate for living independently (National Youth Commission 2008: 307-308).

Demographic Changes - The Australian Family

The Australian family is considered to have dramatically changed during the 1970s. The Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare listed the following changes: substantial decline in formal marriage; substantial increase in divorces; an increase in remarriages involving at least one divorced partner; a substantial increase in sole parent families as a proportion of total families; an increasing number of mothers entering the workforce; a growing tendency for young people to leave home and to establish themselves

independently prior to marriage; and, a decline in the extended family network and increased isolation of the nuclear family (Burdekin & Carter 1989:9). Furthermore, the pressure of "an overwhelmingly materialistic society" on families and young people was seen as a factor that leads to the increase in "family breakdown" and homelessness for young people (Burdekin & Carter 1989:9).

Leaving home

Explaining homelessness by reference to the behaviour of young people often highlights their choosing to leave home, as mentioned earlier (Fopp 1993a; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:58). However, the issue of young people leaving home can be explained from both structural and individual perspectives (Hall 2003:104-105). Young people *are* seen to leave home yet it is the circumstances and causal factors which lead to this homelessness that are debated, complicating how much 'choice' or agency these young people had in deciding to leave home. The explanations for the conditions into which a young person moves, after leaving the family home, are contingent on these recurring themes of individual pathology and structural considerations.

In leaving the family home young people are subject to the external factors of the housing market and labour market in a way that they are not when at home. Thus, often the individual behaviour of the young person is considered a contributing aspect when explaining homelessness, but in conjunction with structural factors. Young people have always left home but it has not and does not always result in homelessness (Fopp 1993a:89). It is therefore proposed that the simple act of choosing to leave home is not an

adequate explanation of homelessness (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:59). The majority of young people who leave home and attempt to live independently use the family as a safety net, relying on family as a means of support. The support of young person's family contributes to the success of attempts at independent living. Most young people can return to the family home if independent living proves too difficult. The lack of family as a means of support is one of the central factors that contribute to youth homelessness (see Chapter Four).

There are ambiguous categories reported in SAAP that may give an insight into less well articulated reasons for leaving the family home. 'Time out from family/other situation' is reported as being the main reason for seeking assistance by 7.9% of males and 14.9% of females under 25 years of age (AIHW 2008:18). Similarly, 'Interpersonal conflict' is reported as the main reason for 7.5% of males and 6.0% of females (AIHW 2008:18). However, these reasons for leaving home may be reported by young people whose situations may more appropriately be described as 'Relationship/family breakdown.'

Relationship/Family Breakdown

The breakdown of a relationship or family support is a central factor that contributes to youth homelessness (Forsyth 2007; Homelessness Taskforce 2008:8; National Youth Commission 2008:85-102). 'Relationship/Family breakdown' is a broad term that refers to a range of issues such as domestic violence, neglect, abuse, overcrowding, mental health issues, and generational poverty (National Youth Commission 2008: 8). Family or relationship breakdown is the most common 'main reason' young people (under age 25

years) seek assistance from SAAP services in the ACT (AIHW 2008:18). It is possible that homeless young people provide the broad and ambiguous category of 'relationship/family breakdown' instead of disclosing the more precise reasons for becoming homeless. The breadth of this category does little to tell us why the relationship or family support has ended.

Violence and Abuse

Significant numbers of young people are considered to leave the family home, or are unable to return, due to family violence and abuse (broadly understood and including sexual abuse) (Fopp 1993a:90-91; Homelessness Taskforce 2008:7; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:61). While many people would regard domestic violence and forms of abuse and conflict as structural in origin (Fopp 1993a:91), they can also be presented as the result of defective behaviour of small groups of people. The link between youth homelessness and abuse, particularly sexual abuse, is being increasingly realised (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:61). Disclosure and discovery of abuse may result in family breakdown and the young person being taken into care (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:61-62). The psychological effects of abuse are seen to have significant ongoing effects that can leave the victims prone to an array of problems (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:62). Thus, abuse and violence may be the foundation of a raft of issues that collectively contribute to homelessness, the young person thereby not identifying the initial abuse as the main reason for their homelessness. As mentioned above, not all young people will disclose to their worker that they are escaping a violent situation. For this reason violence and abuse may be under-reported areas or deflected into the broader category of 'family/relationship breakdown.' Nonetheless, for young people in the ACT,

'Sexual/physical/emotional abuse' was the main reason for seeking assistance for 2.3% of males and 3.7% of females (AIHW 2008:18). 'Domestic/family violence' was reported as the main reason for seeking assistance by 3.7% of males and 9.9% of females (AIHW 2008:18). However, the categories of 'Time out from family/other situation' and 'Interpersonal conflict' may also capture the more ambiguous and hidden incidences of violence and abuse.

Leaving Care

Children (people under the age of 16 years) who are considered unable to live with their families for reasons of abuse or neglect become the responsibility of state and territory governments (National Youth Commission 2008: 127). Children are placed in out-of-home-care in either foster homes or residential accommodation units. Young people who are leaving state care and protection or have been in care at some stage in their childhood are at a high risk of becoming homeless (National Youth Commission 2008:127). Explanations often highlight the experiences of care that make people vulnerable to homelessness. Moreover, the conditions that lead to a young person being put into care, such as a disrupted childhood and a lack of support, can contribute to becoming homeless. Often young people who have experienced the disruption that leads to being put in care as well as the experience of being in care lack any support once they are no longer a 'ward of the state' (National Youth Commission 2008:133). This lack of support by family and state increases the likelihood of homelessness.

Mental Illness

Mental health issues are seen as both a contributing factor and effect of homelessness (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:8; Hutson & Liddiard 1994:63; National Youth Commission 2008:144-145). Thus, there are two interrelated explanations for the link between homelessness and mental illness. First, explanations can focus on how young people with mental health issues are more likely to become homeless. Second, explanations can address how homelessness exacerbates mental health issues. Mental health issues are compounded by the lack of support often associated with the conditions that lead to homelessness and the conditions of homelessness. Thus, the problem may be more of a structural issue about the lack of support available to young people experiencing mental health issues than about the mental health issue in isolation (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:63). Mental health issues within the family, such as parents and siblings, can also contribute to a young person becoming homeless.

Mental health issues do not loom large as a main reason why young people seek assistance from SAAP services in the ACT – only 2.6% of males and 1.7% of females (AIHW 2008:18). This again can be due to problems with reporting mental health issues. Furthermore, this data does little to outline the effects homelessness has on mental health. Mental health issues, known or unknown, may be a more significant issue for homeless youth than some statistics imply. Homeless young people have been reported as "having extremely high rates of 'psychological distress' and 'psychiatric disorders'" (National Youth Commission 2008:142).

Mental health issues are often cited as interrelated with substance abuse issues. The significance of the relationship between mental health and substance abuse has been recognised by the community sector in ACT, made evident by the increased profile of services needing to address 'co morbidity,' previously referred to as 'dual diagnosis.'

Crime

How crime relates to homelessness is contentious. Homeless youth often resort to crime to provide an income, perhaps due to insufficient structural support. 'Survival offending' is often posited as one reason why there may be a link between homelessness and offending: lacking adequate income support young people are seen to turn to crime to support their independent living. Perceptions of homeless young people being involved in crime may be due to the visibility of some homeless young people. However, homeless youth are often the victims of crime (National Youth Commission 2008:286).

Involvement in the criminal justice system can increase the risk of homelessness (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:65). Being remanded in custody has significant implications for housing opportunities: one can lose one's accommodation whilst in custody due to an inability to continue paying rent; if a young person is homeless and released on bail into a refuge and leaves, thereby breaking their bail, they return into custody. Thus, one of the most problematic aspects of crime for homeless young people is the cycle between crime and homelessness (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:67).

Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) use

The relationship between AOD use amongst homeless youth, akin to crime and mental health issues, is complex (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:66; National Youth Commission 2008:153). AOD use by the young person can lead to or contribute to homelessness. Young people may also be leaving a home affected by another family members' AOD use (National Youth Commission 2008:156). AOD use may be more likely to become a problem for young people experiencing homelessness which returns us to questions of cause and effect and the cyclical nature of such problems (National Youth Commission 2008:156). Also, young people who use AOD can avoid accessing services and can be refused entry into supported accommodation, or asked to leave, if they have problematic AOD use or are intoxicated, as seen in Chapter Three (National Youth Commission 2008:157). Young people who use AOD may not report this to services, thereby skewing the reporting on this issue. The SAAP statistics note that in 2006-07 in the ACT 4.1% of males and 1.9% of females under 25 years had AOD issues as the main reason for seeking assistance (AIHW 2008:18). Yet again it is unclear as to who had the AOD problem: the young person, parents, siblings, or others.

Poverty and Class

Poverty and class are significant in explanations of homelessness, if sometimes by their omission. Assumptions about homeless youth as disproportionately coming from lower income and lower social classes are often made by service providers and the general public. The lack of data to support a link between class, poverty and homelessness in research or in anecdotal evidence from services/agencies may be because of the need of campaigners or

advocates to stress the universal nature of homelessness. Associating homelessness with lower classes and social economic groups can be seen to marginalise the marginalised, deferring responsibility by reference to the pathology of a 'culture of poverty.' Nonetheless, poverty is a factor that increases the pressure on families and can thereby contribute to 'family breakdown.'

The effects of poverty and class can be seen as both a structural and individual issue. Whilst it can be casually noted as a structural issue (National Youth Commission 2008:9) the legacy of 'the culture of poverty' can be used in explanations for how and why poor people stay poor. Explanations of homelessness can refer to sets of practices, values and norms passed on through families that produced and reproduce poverty. Thus, the blame for poverty can be placed on the poor.

Homeless Career and Chronic Homelessness

Many discussions of homelessness explicitly or implicitly refer to the downward spiral of homelessness. 'Career homelessness' and 'chronic homelessness' are terms used to refer to people who have become accustomed to the lifestyle or culture of homelessness, and their circumstances have become enmeshed with a number of accompanying problems such as drug use and crime (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 1994; Forsyth 2007; National Youth Commission 2008:77-78). It is often noted that the longer someone spends homeless the more chronic their situation becomes. These descriptions attribute characteristics to homeless youth and impact on how they are classified which affects what assistance and support they are entitled to. Fopp notes that this language of explaining homelessness is

often "smuggled into the analysis and practice as neutral and axiomatic" (Fopp 2003:14). While these terms started as analytical terms emerging from sociological discourse they have come to permeate the vernacular of service providers in their everyday discussions regarding homeless youth. This vision of homelessness often relegates the chronically or career homeless to a situation of having adopted a lifestyle or set of practices from which they are irretrievable, again reminiscent of debates around the 'culture of poverty.'

'Other'

Aside from 'relationship/family breakdown' the category of 'other' is the largest main reason for seeking assistance reported by SAAP for young males (under 25 years) in the ACT 2006-07 – 18.2% of male and 4.2% of females (AIHW 2008:18). This category includes 'Gay/lesbian/transgender issues,' 'Recently left institution' or 'Other.' This category, which is overwhelmingly more reported for males than females, highlights many other issues that can contribute to youth homelessness. In part this category may be a testament to the lack of ability to clearly articulate what the main reason for homelessness may be. Perhaps it is due to the fact that a large number of males who leave juvenile detention exit into homelessness. Whatever the reason for this category being so significant, it serves as a reminder of the difficulties faced in making any clearly demarcated explanation for youth homelessness.

Youth Homelessness in Australia and Canberra

Youth homelessness has most notably come to prominence in the public domain in Australia on two occasions, marked by two inquiries made independent of government. Firstly, there was the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry headed by Brian Burdekin in 1989 (referred to as the Burdekin Report or just Burdekin). This inquiry signalled youth homelessness as an issue of significance for the Australian community. Since the Burdekin Report youth homelessness has remained a policy issue, has entered into the vernacular of State and Federal Government and has spurred further initiatives addressing the issue. Secondly, twenty years after The Burdekin Report there was the National Youth Commission (NYC) Inquiry into Youth Homelessness that was released after the Labor Federal Government came to power in November 2007. The NYC Inquiry, like the Burdekin Report before it, made homelessness a priority for the Government and saw a momentary increase in media attention and public concern.

The Burdekin Report

A two-year inquiry carried out by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in Australia produced the report *Our Homeless Children* (Burdekin & Carter 1989), referred to as the Burdekin Report. The report made a sizeable impact when it was released, creating a "media frenzy" (Fopp 2003: 13). Youth homelessness became a national issue after the Burdekin Report (Burdekin & Carter 1989). The report drew attention to a social problem that to date had been relatively hidden and thereby

74

documented the inadequacy of government and community responses to this problem. The

report defined homelessness as follows:

> 'Homeless' describes a lifestyle which includes insecurity and transiency of
> shelter. It is not confined to a lack of shelter. For many children and young
> people it signifies a state of detachment from family and vulnerability to
> dangers, including exploitation and abuse broadly defined, from which the
> family normally protects a child. However, the Inquiry also found that there is
> a growing number of children who are 'homeless' because the whole family
> cannot obtain adequate shelter (Burdekin & Carter 1989:7).

The Burdekin Report focused on the rights that children have that are set out in the

Declaration of the Rights of the Child (Burdekin & Carter 1989: 7). The Report did not

qualify the age range of childhood, although concentrating on those under 18 years of age.

Yet it is stated that "[t]he problem of homelessness is, however, not susceptible to the

imposition of age limits" (Burdekin & Carter 1989:7).

Headlines varied "from 20,000 to 70,000 'children', 'kids' and 'young people', seemingly

oblivious to the obvious differences in age groups and their respective ascribed and stated

needs" (Fopp 2003: 13). Burdekin reported, qualified as a conservative estimation, that

there were "at least 20,000 to 25,000 homeless children and young people across the

country" (Burdekin & Carter 1989: 69). This estimation was controversial as some held this

figure to refer to children and young people under 18 (Fopp 1989; Fopp 1993b; Fopp

1993c) whilst others like Chamberlain and Mackenzie (Mackenzie & Chamberlain

1998:37-45) maintained that it referred to 12-24 year olds (Fopp 2003: 13). All contention

aside, the report's estimate did make an impact on public consciousness and was taken up

by the media.

The Burdekin Report presented a vision of youth homelessness that discounted simplistic ideas of young people who had run away from home. Homeless youth were not presented as a homogenous group; instead they were seen to come from a diverse range of circumstances and to be living in a diverse range of conditions. Burdekin noted that young people spend different amount of time homeless, and that the duration of their homelessness can be used to categorise them. Despite the diversity of conditions of youth homelessness the Burdekin Report highlighted the generalised trauma, exploitation and negative experiences of homeless youth, even in the hands of services that were there to assist them.

Burdekin noted that a wide range of responses was necessary to tackle the complexities of youth homelessness that the report highlighted. Early intervention and prevention were emphasised by the Burdekin Report, supplementing crisis accommodation and services. Reuniting young people with their families was also put forward as a key element, such as programs that prevent domestic violence and provide supports for families where young people are at risk of homelessness.

The National Youth Commission Inquiry

The National Youth Commission (NYC) Inquiry into Youth Homelessness was an independent inquiry into youth homelessness funded by the Caledonia Foundation, which is a private philanthropic foundation. The NYC Inquiry sought not only to examine the issue of youth homelessness, but to develop solutions and recommend actions to address the issue. A documentary, *The Oasis*, was produced alongside this inquiry which was made

with the involvement of young homeless people over a five year period. This initiative endeavoured to "shine a new light on the issue of youth homelessness in Australia" (National Youth Commission 2008:III). Indeed, akin to the Burdekin Report, the NYC Inquiry received significant media attention.

Many of the problems that were identified by the NYC Inquiry echoed those highlighted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry in 1989 (The Burdekin Report). Since the last Inquiry the Australian economy has significantly improved yet the number of homeless youth has increased (National Youth Commission 2008:III). The NYC Inquiry states that "the statistical evidence is that youth homelessness has doubled since Burdekin" despite the creation and implementation of creative and innovative models of services (National Youth Commission 2008:V).

Government Responses to Youth Homelessness in Australia

This overview of government responses to youth homelessness provides a brief outline of some of the major changes and initiatives that have shaped how the issue of homeless young people has been addressed.

Up until the mid 1970s services that worked with the homeless were provided primarily by church and charitable organisations without support from government (Burdekin & Carter 1989: 9; National Youth Commission 2008: 43). In 1974 the Commonwealth Government passed the Homeless Persons' Assistance Act. This Act was created to provide government funds for the construction and running of accommodation services and assistance for the

homeless. However, in the post-war era 'the homeless' overwhelmingly referred to homeless men.

In the late 1970s services and several reports noted an increased number of homeless young people and children. During the 1978 Conference of Welfare Ministers, State Ministers implored the Commonwealth Government to assist in meeting the increased demand for emergency accommodation for young people (Burdekin & Carter 1989:9).

A Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare published a report on youth homelessness in 1982. This report criticised the existing approach to addressing youth homelessness which focused on refuges, instead urging an increase in the medium and long-term accommodation options for young people (Burdekin & Carter 1989:11). It was suggested that improved access to public housing was needed. Furthermore, income support for homeless young people was considered inadequate and recommendations advocated that an allowance be made available for people under 18 years of age and that there be an increase in the benefit rate. This Senate Standing Committee paved the way for the consolidated federal initiative referred to as the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in 1985 (National Youth Commission 2008: 43).

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), which commenced in 1985, has, since that time, been Australia's primary response to homelessness. SAAP consolidated the funding for numerous commonwealth and state/territory programs that provided assistance to homeless people and people escaping domestic violence under one

nationally coordinated program. SAAP is jointly financed by the federal and state and territory governments. SAAP provides recurrent funding to assist with covering wages and administrative costs to organisations that are primarily community based. The Australian Government is responsible for coordinating policy leadership for SAAP. The state and territory governments are responsible for the operational management of SAAP, creating guidelines and service frameworks, and for providing the funding to community organisations that deliver the services. Each state and territory has different youth policies that are implemented in various ways.

The Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (YSAAP) is a sub-program that was designed to service young people, 12 – 25 years of age, and their dependents that are homeless. The creation of YSAAP was due to the reported increased prevalence of young people seeking shelter in refuges intended for older homeless men, based on both research and anecdotal evidence.

On a five-yearly basis the Australian, state and territory Governments renegotiate the terms and agreements of SAAP and established the strategic priorities for the next five-year period (National Youth Commission 2008:208). At the time of writing this thesis the current agreement is SAAP V, the fifth agreement which is operational from 2005 to 2010. This agreement identifies three strategic priorities: pre-crisis intervention; post-crisis transition support for clients exiting SAAP; and improving integrated support services within the community (National Youth Commission 2008: 208).

Although SAAP was created prior to the release of the Burdekin Report in 1989, the release of the report lead to an expansion of this program. Following the publicity created by the Burdekin Report youth homelessness has become an ongoing policy issue for State and Federal Government. However, in the last decade "SAAP funding has increased at less than the rise in the costs of providing support services for homeless people" (National Youth Commission 2008: 205).

In 1985 the Morris Report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs 1995) highlighted the need for a focus on 'early intervention.' Since this time early intervention has been considered an area where public policy could deliver the greatest returns by reducing family breakdown and welfare dependency.

Prime Minister John Howard in May 1996 announced the formation of the 'Taskforce on Youth Homelessness.' The Taskforce aim was to explore more effective models of addressing youth homelessness, with particular attention to early intervention. The Australian Government coordinated its response to homelessness under the *National Homelessness Strategy* (NHS). The NHS is not a written document but a "broadly based approach to dealing with homelessness" (Wood 2003:4). The Strategy aimed to provide "input to the development of new programs and influences established programs to ensure optimum outcomes are delivered for people vulnerable to homelessness" (Wood 2003: 4). The NHS was constituted by three broad approaches: initiatives that aimed to increase the knowledge pertaining to homelessness; homelessness programs that delivered services

(including SAAP); and, liaising with various Australian Government programs that provide services and support to disadvantaged people, including people at risk of homelessness.

In November 2007 the Howard Government was replaced by the Rudd Labor Government. Homelessness was one of the issues that the new Rudd Government highlighted as a priority issue. In May 2008 the Government released a Green Paper titled 'Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness.' The aim of this paper was to encourage public discussion around the issue of homelessness. Public consultations were held nationally to inform the development of the White Paper which would outline the Australian Government's approach to homelessness until 2020.

In December 2008, the Federal Government released the White Paper on homelessness which outlined a series of initiatives addressing homelessness in Australia. The framework for the new package addressing homelessness was titled 'A Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness' (Homelessness Taskforce 2008). The new approach endeavours to halve homelessness by 2020 and "offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it" (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:iii). The White Paper suggests an increase on current investment in tackling homelessness by 55%.

The Federal Government's response to homelessness is to be implemented by state and territory governments, subject to the Federal, state and territory agreement of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Major reforms are to be made to SAAP, which until this time has been the primary response to homelessness (Homelessness Taskforce 2008:16). In

its place, under the new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), are new National Partnerships on Social Housing, Remote Indigenous Housing and Homelessness. The new NAHA commenced in January of 2009.

The White Paper articulates three strategies as the responses to homelessness:

1. Turning off the Tap: focussing services attention on early intervention and prevention of homelessness
2. Improving and expanding services: connecting services to achieve sustainable housing and improve social participation to end homelessness
3. Breaking the cycle: striving to move people through the crisis system quickly and into stable accommodation with support so that homelessness does not occur (Homelessness Taskforce 2008: ix).

At the time of writing this thesis many aspects of the new approach to homelessness remain unclear. The service sector that works specifically with the homeless, including but not restricted to SAAP services, is concerned about how the new changes will affect its employees and their clients. The new response to homelessness endeavours to deliver services through a joint system between mainstream services and specialist homelessness services, referred to as a 'no wrong doors' system. Just how this will work is unclear. It is also unclear how 'specialist homelessness services' will be funded that have previously been funded under SAAP.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government Responses to Homelessness

Each State and Territory in Australia takes its own approach to dealing with homelessness and youth homelessness. The ACT Homelessness Strategy was the first coordinated approach to addressing homelessness in the ACT (Wood 2003:8). In 2002 the ACT

Government commissioned a needs analysis of homelessness in the ACT by ACTCOSS (the ACT Council of Social Services). In response to this the ACT Government developed an ACT Homelessness Strategy, titled 'Breaking the cycle' – the ACT homelessness strategy (DHCS 2003). The Strategy addressed policy and actions relating to the issue of homelessness, with particular concern for homeless youth. The ACT Homelessness Strategy was overseen by the Homelessness Advisory Group. 'Breaking the Cycle' was released in late 2003. The strategy represented a commitment to a coordinated and planned approach to homelessness in the ACT and was set to provide the direction of service provision. A Youth Homelessness Action Plan was developed under this initiative by the Youth Homelessness Working Group and Youth Policy. In December of 2007 the final evaluation of 'Breaking the cycle' was released (DHCS 2007). The evaluation considered the strategy to have had considerable benefits for homeless people in the ACT and that "the sector has reached a stage where the foundations have been laid for a mature service system to develop" (DHCS 2007:4).

In 2008 the ACT Homelesssness Charter (DHCS 2008a) was released by the Minister for Disability and Community Services. The Charter endeavoured to bolster the recognition of the rights of people experiencing homelessness in Canberra. Accompanying this was the SAAP Service Guarantee that outlined what homeless people can expect from service providers (DHCS 2008b).

Since the introduction of the new framework for addressing homelessness outlined in the Australian Government's White Paper in late 2008, state and territory approaches to

homelessness will be subject to a range of changes. At the time of writing, what these changes will entail is unclear despite recent media releases by the ACT Government. In August of 2009 Chief Minister Jon Stanhope announced "innovative new plans to address the needs of homeless Canberrans" (ACT Government 2009). These new initiatives will target groups that are at risk of homelessness including young people. The "innovative new plans" will be jointly funded by Australian and ACT Government (Government 2009).

Conclusion

This brief outline of the government responses to homelessness goes some way to illustrate the rhetoric and posturing that accompany government responses to homelessness. In researching and writing the overview of policy and approaches to homelessness it became clear that a steady stream of initiatives, consultations and evaluations come from government. However, it remains unclear as to exactly how government affects the lives of homeless youth and service providers. After making phone calls to the relevant government departments and non-government organisations it seems that the lack of clarity is widespread.

Since the Burdekin Report and the ensuing media attention devoted to youth homelessness, governments have had to address this emotive issue. Homelessness, in particular youth homelessness, has become seemingly emblematic of social inequality in the face of an otherwise prosperous nation. Thus, this issue has to be seen to be addressed by government as a symbol of dealing with social injustice, akin to the whale as an emblem for concern about the environment. Therefore there is a sporadic creation of strategies, consultations,

initiatives, evaluations, taskforces, action plans and frameworks that are accompanied by the necessary hyperbole. Within the homelessness sector there remains a generalised scepticism about how seriously the government regards this issue. During the ACT consultation addressing the Green Paper, those who attended seemed suspicious of the motives of the Federal Government's 'reforms,' believing that an increase in funding to existing structures would have perhaps been a more effective use of resources.

This chapter has provided an overview of youth homelessness as it is discussed in the public domain. The prevailing discourse on youth homelessness continues to examine the issue in terms framed by the conceptual divisions of structure/agency, cause/effect, and choice/constraint. Despite commentators acknowledging the complex nature of youth homelessness we are not provided with an alternative language or conceptual framework with which to address it. This thesis sets out to address the inadequacies of the current discourse, providing a new way to conceptualise the conditions of youth homelessness.

Chapter Two

Homeless Youth and the Habitus of Instability

Introduction

This chapter provides an explication of the habitus of homeless youth, a habitus built on instability, insecurity, uncertainty and tension. I outline the foundations of this habitus and some of the generalised practices and ways of coping with the conditions of youth homelessness that are generated by, and reinforce, the habitus of youth homelessness. I begin by introducing the habitus of homeless youth, a habitus unified by the organising principle of instability. I then provide an explication of the concept of capital and then social capital, in order to consider the role of social capital in the lives of homeless youth. I propose that the lack of social capital is the foundation of the habitus of homeless youth. To understand the dynamics of the sociality of homeless youth I outline some of negative consequences of the obligations, expectations, and sanctions of social relationships that are associated with social capital. Next, I explore the role of the family as the foundation of social capital. It is necessary to understand that the families of homeless youth do not function as social capital. Following this I address the expectations and hopes attached to notions of 'the family' that impact on the lives of homeless youth. I finish the chapter by providing an overview of the practices of homeless youth that are produced by the

interrelationship between their present conditions of living and their past experiences. These practices are produced by the instability of youth homelessness and reinforce this instability.

Habitus of instability/ Habitus of youth homelessness

> It is often noted that the children who are labelled 'unstable' by academic specialists as well as by evaluations of psychologists or physicians (who do little more than give the former a sort of 'scientific' seal of approval), bear inscribed in their habitus the instability of the living conditions of their family, that of the sub-proletariat doomed to insecurity in their conditions of employment, housing, and thereby of existence. *Habitus can, in certain instances, be built, if one may say so, upon tension, even upon instability* (Bourdieu 1987:116 emphasis added).

Individuals who share the same habitus are unified by the organising principle of their practices. Homeless youth are unified by an underlying instability, insecurity and uncertainty that frames their lives. The habitus of homeless youth is historically constituted, based on personal experiences of instability and uncertainty. Subsequent experiences are structured in terms of a logic derived from the past as homeless young people perceive and generate instability in their present conditions. This sense of insecurity is reinforced by the conditions of homelessness, as will be explored in Chapter Three.

The personal histories of homeless youth can vary dramatically – there is no homogenous experience that leads to homelessness. However, the diverse experiences are all unified by a lack of stability. This instability has many guises but is nonetheless the underlying structuring principle. I argue that the foundation of this insecurity comes from relationships with 'the family' (addressed in detail below).

88

The practices of individual agents never emerge directly from the immediate conditions under which they occur, nor from the historical conditions which produced the habitus (Bourdieu 1990b:56). In Bourdieu's approach practices can only be accounted for through the interrelationship between the past social conditions that generated the habitus, and the pertinent social conditions in which it currently operates (Bourdieu 1990b:56). Thus, the practices of homeless youth are a result of both their past experiences of instability and the pervasive uncertainties inherent in their current conditions.

The organising principle of instability can be seen as a *dis*-organising principle. The habitus of homeless youth has come to expect instability and chaos, often generating the instability that it conceives as inevitable. The habitus of instability – the fear, anxiety, and frustration it generates – and the perception of what can be done creates practices that are sensible, pragmatic and effective from within the conditions of youth homelessness and are framed by how things have turned out in the past. This habitus often generates practices that seem counter-productive to the outsider. These practices do not assist in moving homeless youth out of their conditions of existence but rather are central to reproducing these conditions.

The instability of youth homelessness is most evident in the external material instability of the accommodation options of homeless youth (see Chapter Three). They move between numerous accommodation options day to day, a week here or a month there. Even when they are in one of these options for any length of time, they live with the pervasive sense that it is not going to last, a sense of ever-present and impending instability and insecurity.

Consequently, any moment is framed by the other viable accommodation options that are available, by the memory of past conditions and the threat of possible futures. This instability is echoed in the instability of social relationships (see Chapter Four).

It is the bodily, pre-reflexive, and practice-oriented aspects of Bourdieu's notion of habitus that I am drawn to. In my experience with homeless youth it was the emotional, affective and effective, bodily acts or responses that struck me as central to the way they lived. It was not an intellectualist logic removed from the demands of practice, the urgency of practice, that helped them rationally decide, for example, to steal from their youth worker, abandon their accommodation or, when feeling threatened, to strike first and think later. Rather, it was as if the structuring sentiment of their lives 'got the better of them.' Yet it has been these very inclinations, attitudes or actions that have helped them to survive the conditions of their lives to date. Moreover, due to the very unstable external conditions linked to their habitus of instability, there is a particular demand for these young people to develop pre-reflexive, bodily, transferable dispositions that can cope with the temporal demands of their lives. Often there is little time for them to rationally calculate what is the best course of action, since they need a practical sense or feel for what to do *now*. It is the durability and transferability, the generalisable quality of habitus, which generates practices in a range of social fields and circumstances, which so often also reproduces the conditions under which those practices were formed.

Bourdieu's project can shed light on the practices and the impact of homelessness. Yet the phenomenon of homelessness does not seamlessly fit into his framework. Bourdieu

suggests that the formation of a habitus prioritises early socialisation. Whilst it is the diverse sets of conditions that contributed to *becoming* homeless that initially inculcated this habitus of instability, I am proposing, counter to Bourdieu, that the particularly pressing demands of homelessness itself either reinforce pre-existing instabilities, or create a limited set of responses and conditions that produce this habitus of homelessness. The majority of homeless youth have come from family situations that had previously been unstable. This instability is sometimes obvious – a parent who was in and out of prison, or affected by alcohol or other drugs, etc. – or is less immediately obvious – feeling unsafe at home or feeling that you cannot rely on your parent(s) for support. A young person without stable accommodation who does not come from an 'unstable background' usually has a set of dispositions (or an 'ethic' as suggested by a youth worker I know) that enables him or her to move into relatively stable conditions quite quickly. However, sometimes even these young people get caught in the external pressures of homelessness and develop a habitus of instability.

Social Capital and Homeless Youth: the foundations of the habitus of instability

Examining the role of social capital in the lives of homeless youth is central to accounting for the habitus of homeless youth. The lack of social capital, of other people as a stable resource, is one of the foundational forms of instability that underscore the habitus of homeless youth. More specifically, the lack of reliable social capital is the most significant contributing factor that structures the sociality of homeless youth. In order to explore the

role of social capital for homeless youth I first need to clarify the concept of capital and, specifically, social capital. Following this I will examine the negative consequences of social networks.

Capital

Individuals and groups draw upon a variety of cultural, social and symbolic resources to maintain or enhance their position in their social universe (Swartz 1997:73). Bourdieu uses the concept of capital to refer to the different valued resources used in the common project of achieving or reproducing hierarchical distinctions. Derived from Marx's notion, Bourdieu's conception of capital distances itself from these roots by extending to encompass a prolific range of labour seen as productive of capital (Calhoun 1995:138). Thus, capital encompasses diverse classes of resources, including both symbolic and material forms of power, which are objects of struggle and contestation (Swartz 1997:73).

According to Bourdieu capital exists in three guises: economic capital – that which is or can be converted immediately and directly into money (such as material goods and property); cultural capital – valued knowledge, attributes, cultural works or services, institutionalised in such forms as credentials (such as education credentials); and social capital – resources based on connections, group membership and various types of relations (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu 1987:3). As will be seen, the distinction between these forms of capital is blurred but is heuristically helpful.

Bourdieu argues that all of these incarnations of capital can be seen as 'symbolic capital' in that they are representations dependent on being apprehended symbolically. Symbolic capital is a form of power that is not perceived as power but recognised as a legitimate demand, or signifier, for recognition, obedience, compliance or the services of others (Bourdieu 1990b:120). Thus, symbolic capital is the form of all different forms of capital once they are perceived and recognised as legitimate.[19]

Symbolic capital can be seen as a kind of credit, the accruing of socially valued attributes or resources that can be cashed in for, or converted into, other capital (Bourdieu 1990b:120). This credit is granted to people by others, and is inherently social as it is founded on a shared set of values, stakes and interests.

Social Capital

At the most broad level social capital refers to, and signals the importance of, participation in groups, sociality, family and relationships in the analysis of culture and society. In many ways this term represents a set of ideas that have long been examined and significant within social sciences. Anthropological and sociological investigations into marginalised urban groups have emphasised the significance of social networks (Liebow 1967; McCarthy et al.

---

[19] Symbolic capital is referred to by some people as a fourth type of capital (Jenkins 1992; Swartz 1997). Bourdieu's work is unclear on this matter. Bourdieu has noted that there are three types of capital which are all seen as 'symbolic capital' in that they are representations dependent on being apprehended symbolically (Bourdieu 1986). However, elsewhere Bourdieu notes that to these three fundamental species of capital "we must add symbolic capital which is the form that one or another of these species takes when it is grasped through categories of perception that recognize its specific logic (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:119). Yet Bourdieu still notes that symbolic capital is the means by which the other types of capital are recognised. Thus, in this thesis symbolic capital is not a fourth species of capital that is distinct in its attributes from the other three types. Rather, all of these forms of capital are reliant on being apprehended symbolically as valued, and hence are forms of symbolic capital.

2002; Stack 1974). This is the case for homeless young people who seek out other people to whom they can relate, who have had similar experiences and can help them cope with the conditions of their lives. However, these same social ties can restrict their ability to improve their conditions of existence.

The representation of the significance of sociality under the concept of social capital brings the dynamics of sociality into a broader framework that includes other resources. Within a framework of other forms of capital (economic, cultural, symbolic), social capital highlights non-economic resources and the interdependence between these forms of capital. Bourdieu's analysis and definition of social capital presents the primary framework from which this analysis is developed. However, the dynamics of homeless youth require an extension and departure from Bourdieu's explanatory framework that draws on other applications and formulations of social capital.

Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – in other words, to membership in a group" (Bourdieu 1985: 248). His analysis examines the advantages derived from participation in groups and the mobilisation of social ties as a resource. Through these networks social agents can gain access to other resources, converting social capital into economic capital (e.g. through loans, employment etc) and cultural capital (e.g. access to information, education and status through association/affiliation).

The use of the concept 'social capital' can obscure and seem to overcomplicate what is being talked about which could intuitively be called 'connections' or 'relationships' (Bourdieu 1993: 32). However, while this understanding of the concept is initially helpful it underplays the role of social capital as a conceptual tool. The common-sense 'connections' and 'relationships' are a manifestation of social capital but they are not synonymous. Relationships are a prerequisite for the accumulation of social capital but are not sufficient. Rather, "social capital ...is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action" (Coleman 1990: 304). Thus, some relations become social capital and others do not.

It is important not to assume that the heuristically helpful concept of social capital implies that all connections and relationships are purely and solely invested in as a resource to improve ones social/economic standing. As will be seen, homeless youth invest in relationships at the expense of other forms of capital, seemingly for their own sake. Homeless youth, perhaps like most other humans, want companionship to enjoy or pass their time. Nonetheless, I do not want to swing too far in the opposite direction and romanticise the social bonds of homeless youth, nor claim to clearly delineate what their intentions and interests are (either consciously or unconsciously). Rather, I hope to emphasise the complex interaction between relationships being valued as a resource or as a means to another end, on the one hand, and being valued in their own right, on the other.

Bourdieu notes that a network of relationships is the product of investment strategies aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships (Bourdieu 1986: 249). This presupposes

an effort of sociability through a series of exchanges in which recognition of the relationship is reaffirmed (Bourdieu 1986: 250). This implies the expenditure of time, money and other resources including social skills and competence. However, people can also passively or unintentionally create relationships that can be transformed into social capital (McCarthy et al. 2002:834).

There are varying degrees to which social capital is institutionalised or linked to durable networks. These networks can take the form of group membership based on solidarity, represented through a name, subgroup, or collective identity (Bourdieu 1986:249). The degree of cohesion and mutual obligation within the network impacts on the ability to reliably derive advantage.

For Bourdieu the volume of social capital that a social agent possesses depends on the size of the network of connections that can be effectively mobilised and on the volume of capital (economic, cultural or social) that is possessed by each of those to whom one is connected (Bourdieu 1986: 249). Thus, social capital is never completely independent of the economic and cultural capital possessed by the agents in the network. However, as this research project highlights, social capital implies more than the number of people that a person is connected to in a network and the other forms of capital that this links one to. I argue that the quality of these relationships needs to be taken into account. A high degree of mutual trust and reciprocity are central to social relationships being utilised as capital, of being drawn upon to access other valued resources. It is therefore the dynamics and norms

of reciprocity and mutual trust that underscore the 'quality' of social ties and networks that constitute social capital.

Social capital is associated with accumulation of mutual obligations with others, central to which are norms of reciprocity (Portes 1998: 7). To derive advantage from relations with other people depends on trust, good faith and/or obligation. An explicit contract overtly accounting for the transaction of resources is more appropriately defined as market exchange and the domain of economic capital (Portes 1998:7). The denial or misrecognition of social ties as a resource is central to social capital being distinct from economic capital. Consequently, social capital is less transparent than economic capital given the relatively intangible and unaccountable character of social capital compared to other forms of capital (Portes 1998:4).

Social capital is not just connections, nor the amount of capital these connections represent, but it also includes the extent to which the norms of trust and reciprocity are shared which enable individuals to undertake particular forms of social action (Winter 2000: 9). The inculcation of norms and their shared nature are central to social capital. Winter states that "[s]ocial capital is the internalisation and transmission of particular norms" (Winter 2000:9).

For the purposes of this thesis I have identified three components to social capital:[20] (1) social networks or relationships; (2) the volume of capital (economic, cultural, social) that

---

[20] The distinction between the three components of social capital is a heuristic simplification and delineation. In practice these three components are intimately interlinked, as will become more evident.

is possessed by those to whom one is connected; and, (3) norms of trust, reciprocity and obligation.[21] If any of these three aspects is missing then the social ties do not constitute social capital. This does not detract from the significance of these relationships in and of themselves. Homeless young people do invest in social ties despite these relationships often not constituting social capital. Moreover, relationships that provide an individual with company, or that help pass the time, are still a valuable resource. These functions of relationships are significant to homeless young people; however, this kind of value is distinct from the resources derived from a relationship that is referred to as social capital.

The majority of research on social capital has focused on the benefits of relationships with family, neighbours, business associates and other group memberships (McCarthy et al. 2002:835). Applying the concept of social capital to the lives of homeless youth draws out numerous interesting issues. Homeless young people offer a site where the normative bonds to family are absent. The qualitative insights into youth homelessness highlight the significance of accounting for the dynamics of sociality (the norms, values and practices associated with social relationships), in other words the quality of relationships, in the analysis of social ties as social capital. The mobility and transience of homeless youth affects their ability to accrue social capital, to develop sustainable, reliable and trusting relationships. Moreover, their exaggerated drive towards autonomy (addressed in detail in Chapter Four) often entails exploitation of social bonds, undermining the medium and long-term benefit of relationships as social capital.

---

[21] Other theorists (Lin 2001: 12) have made similar distinctions.

The quality and quantity of social capital at the disposal of homeless youth is one of the most potent contributing factors to shaping the conditions of their lives. In other words, homeless youth have a generalised lack of reliable, stable and supportive social relationships that can be drawn upon as a resource in a general sense. This lack of social capital does not necessarily imply a lack of relationships or networks. Homeless youth go out of their way to create social relationships and connections with other people and mobilise these to their benefit. Furthermore, they do convert their social capital into other resources: for example, protection, money, accommodation, alcohol and other drugs, and also cultural capital. However, these social relationships are usually unreliable and the cause of much consternation and instability. Due to the pervasive habitus of instability, homeless youth are often unsure whether friends, associates or 'co-offenders' will be a positive resource or be detrimental to their lives. Similarly, ties to one's family do not always bring about positive outcomes (McCarthy et al. 2002: 832).

Negative Social Capital

Research addressing social capital has generally emphasised its positive effects or consequences (Portes 1998:15). However, there are also negative consequences or detrimental aspects to the obligations, expectations, and sanctions of social relationships that need to be accounted for (Portes 1998; Putzel 1997). Whilst conventional social capital is considered to have a host of positive outcomes, social networks can also be seen to create negative outcomes (McCarthy et al. 2002:834). That social capital is neither solely positive nor negative (Portes 1998:15; McCarthy et al. 2002:859) can be seen when one examines the dynamics of sociality amongst homeless young people.

The processes that facilitate the positive outcomes of social capital can have negative consequences. The social obligations, control and influence of a social network can constrain or have a detrimental affect on individuals attempting to change their living conditions and social trajectory. Portes notes that there are four identified negative consequences of social capital: "exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms" (Portes 1998). I will address all of these in relation to homeless youth in Canberra.

First, the same relations and dynamics of social cohesion that can restrict access to valued resources to a limited number of people can have detrimental effects, restricting social exchanges with other social groups. Homeless young people who only socialise with other people with a similar habitus restrict their ability to access other valued resources outside of their social group. The habitus of homeless youth entails that they are both excluded by other social groups and exclude others. This restricted access to people from other social groups (or fields in Bourdieu's terminology) limits the access to information, skills and resources that would increase the likelihood of improving the social trajectory.

Although services provide a means for homeless young people to access other valued resources, such as employment opportunities, education, and access to economic capital (including housing), these same services limit the diversity of people that homeless youth have access to by grouping them together. Services actually play a key role in providing a social network of other homeless young people. This obviously has benefits in helping

them access networks that then provide alternative means of surviving the conditions of homelessness. However, this limited social milieu or field also ties them to the other negative consequences of social capital.

The second negative consequence of social capital relates to the demands placed on people within a given social network. Norms that mediate mutual assistance and obligation to others within a given social network can have positive effects. However, these demands and cycles of reciprocity can also restrict an individual's chance of improving their social standing. Forms of demand sharing and sharing of resources (discussed in Chapter Four) constrain the ability of homeless youth to pay off their debts or attend to other demands, since they fear the consequences of not reciprocating the generosity of their peers and associates. The form of demand sharing seen amongst homeless youth is an example of sometimes forced payment for past services or previous gifts or tacit loans, whether asked for or not. Escaping these cycles of reciprocity can be dangerous but it is often necessary to break out of homelessness.

Third, group participation creates shared norms and values and sometimes demands for conformity. In light of the negative aspects of social capital this may be referred to as 'peer pressure' with its negative connotations. The enforcing of social norms and values can facilitate social cohesion, control and safety in some social networks or communities. For example, neighbours may ensure that other people's children are obeying road rules or not being bullied at the local playground. However, not all norms enforce safety and wellbeing. For example, for homeless young people the pressures to use alcohol and other drugs is an

example of the negative pressures to conform. There are numerous factors that contribute to homeless young people using alcohol and other drugs as it is seen to facilitate sociality and is a means of escapism. However, once someone starts using drugs and alcohol it is hard to break out of patterns of use. Tash articulates some of the social dynamics that make it hard for some young people to stop using alcohol and other drugs.

Tash explained to me how she and her friends expected her boyfriend, Chocko, to return to using Ice (a form of methamphetamine) after a protracted stay in hospital and then a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program. Referring to using Ice Tash noted: "It is just what we do. There is no way he will be able to just watch us get stoned. We want him to use with us." The norms and values attached to such practices are inextricably tied to the fourth negative aspect of social networks, downward levelling norms.

The fourth negative aspect of social capital is downward levelling norms. Portes refers to "situations in which group solidarity is cemented by a common experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society" (Portes 1998:17). In these instances success stories are considered to undermine social cohesion (Portes 1998:17). Downward levelling norms hold people back and discourage individuals not only from aspiring to, but investing in, mainstream practices or ideals that would assist them in breaking out of their marginalisation.

Downward levelling norms are seen in the value homeless young people place on transgressive behaviours that speak of their ability to wilfully control their environment in

102

often rebellious and anti-social ways. Young people who are seen to conform to the norms of broader society have low social standing amongst other homeless youth who have come to value countercultural practices that symbolise their defiant autonomy (this countercultural capital, or negative cultural capital, is the centrepiece of the Chapter Five). An example of these downward levelling norms is expressed in Tash's resentment of her ex-boyfriend's return 'home.'

Chocko had been hanging out with Tash and a few other homeless young people that I knew for about one year. He couch surfed at numerous people's accommodation and would get stoned with them through the day and night. No one knew where he lived and we all assumed that when he was not couch surfing he was sleeping rough.

Tash and Chocko had been in a relationship for more than six months before his problems with Ice became so bad that he was hospitalised after a very public and violent psychotic episode. After rehabilitation Chocko did not return to Tash, nor continue to hang out with her peers. He disappeared. It was discovered months later that Chocko had returned 'home,' to live with his parents. One of Tash's friends had seen him working at a coffee shop in a suburban shopping mall and asked what he was doing. The news quickly spread to Tash and the rest of her peers. All of the homeless young people who knew Chocko, especially Tash, were outraged that Chocko had returned home and got a job. This outrage was mostly framed by his apparent deceit, that he had not really been 'hard up' but had just been hanging out with homeless young people. Tash felt personally slighted by Chocko. His apparent 'success' in escaping both drug addiction and homelessness confused,

embarrassed and angered other homeless young people. Ultimately Tash tracked Chocko down and beat him up in front of some of Tash's peers (referred to elsewhere as a "God bless is soul flogging", Chapter Five).

Homeless young people do delight in telling stories of other people who have succeeded in escaping homelessness. These stories express hope at the prospect of being able to break out of the conditions of their lives. The most prevalent template of this 'escaping homelessness' narrative is of a 'friend of a friend' (sometimes known by name) who becomes a public servant, buys a car (usually a model of car is provided) and buys a house in a particular suburb (and the number of rooms in the house is usually known). However, this common storyline never refers to close associates or friends. Rather, the person who escapes his or her marginalisation is a 'friend of a friend' who may have been met once, at best. The downward levelling norms only seem to apply to people who are an immediate part of one's social network. The closer a homeless person is to someone attempting to escape homelessness, the stronger the sanctions are that enforce those norms.

Every time Luke attempted to return to school or start a job his friends and peers made it difficult for him to succeed. They would discourage him from waking up in the morning and try to stop him from leaving, baiting him with more exciting alternatives. Upon his return from school or work his friends would delight in teasing him about how hard he worked and how little he had to show for it. In the meantime Luke's friends had been conspicuously doing very little or enjoying themselves and still earning almost as much

104

money as he did. There is very little street credibility involved in attending school or getting a job, despite most homeless youth secretly hoping to do these things.

While it is important to examine the negative aspects of social capital when looking at homeless youth, I do not want to suggest that these dynamics are exclusive to homeless youth. Although the negative aspects of social capital may be more striking and have a more direct effect on homeless youth than on other people, it is important to note that similar negative consequences are possible amongst the broader community, perhaps especially amongst other young people.

Family as Social Capital

Family life is typically considered the "bedrock of social capital" (Winter 2000: 5). Bourdieu asserts that the family is the main site of accumulation and transmission of social capital (Bourdieu 1993: 33). Other theorists similarly claim family is: "the fundamental form of social capital" (Putnam 1995: 73); an "obviously important source of social capital everywhere" (Fukuyama 1999:17); and, "may also be the most fundamental source of social capital" (Newton 1997:579). Here I argue that the lack of family as a source of social capital for homeless youth is central to the formation of the habitus of instability.

The proposition that the family is a central component of social capital is not only strongly supported by the case study of homeless youth but it highlights one of the most significant factors that shape the lives of homeless youth: homeless young people lack the support that families normally provide. The families of homeless youth do not function as social capital

and this leads to homeless young people exploring other options of support, most profoundly the overemphasis on self-reliance due to the lack of trust in other people, referred to in this thesis as the strategy of autonomy (see Chapter Four). Before this discussion goes any further, I need to clarify what I mean by 'the family.'

The family

The family seems intuitively self-evident, a taken-for-granted, omnipresent idea fundamental to modern Australian culture. Yet this notion is notoriously hard to define. Definitions of the family can often be too simplistic, and represent an ideal type that rarely exists in practice. Any claim to objectively capture what the family is can be refuted by different subjective definitions of the family. Nonetheless, homeless young people have an inculcated idea of the family that *is* somewhat narrow and idealistic.

Homeless youth relate to 'the family' on two different levels. On the one hand, the family is a set of people and relationships with whom they interact. On the other hand, the family is a cultural norm, a set of expectations, hopes and normative prescriptions. Moreover, the expectations and hopes emerging from the ideal or cultural norm of the family haunts many homeless youth who are acutely aware of this ideal of the family due to its marked absence.

For homeless youth the ideal of the family refers to three interdependent components. Not all homeless youth refer to all three components. Rather the component(s) that are missing for any individual are attributed or subjectively prioritised as the necessary missing ingredient(s) of the ideal family. When asked for more details, variations on the statements

from homeless youth such as "If I had a normal family…" or "I don't have a normal family" were referring to one or more of these missing aspects of the ideal family. Emic or subjective understandings of what constitutes the normal family were presented from the perspective of each individual homeless youth.

Firstly, the ideal family refers to the prototypical nuclear family. This family consists of a father, mother and children who are all biologically related. Variations on this prototype are implicitly and explicitly less ideal. The degree of difference from this ideal is often noted by homeless young people: a step-parent, a single parent, half-brothers and sisters, and siblings not related at all. Any one or more of these 'differences' are invariably noted as a factor that makes any given family not 'normal.' Thus, those homeless youth whose family do not fulfill this criterion would note this 'difference' as a contributing factor to their homelessness. The more 'different' they are from this aspect of the ideal family the more this component is emphasised.

Secondly, the ideal family is intimately linked to a residence, a home. Returning home referred to being able to go to a house where one's family resided. This component of the ideal family is linked to the first as 'ideally' one's entire family is in one residence. Variations on this residential unity were noted by homeless youth as not normal. The greater the difference from this ideal, the more this component of the ideal family was emphasised by any particular homeless young person.

The third component of the ideal family refers to designated responsibilities and roles informed by patterns of obligation and interdependence. This component refers to the ideals of support that a family, in particular one's parents, are expected to provide. For homeless young people who come from a family that resembles the nuclear family and is unified under a residence (thereby meeting the first two components of the 'ideal family'), it is the behaviour and practices of the ideal family that are emphasised. For example, Kelly noted that her family looked "normal" from the outside but was abusive and her parents neglected her and her brothers. Kelly and her family maintained a façade of normality that fitted the 'ideal family.' However, Kelly's father systematically abused her, and her mother provided no support to Kelly, which she attributed to her mother's alcoholism.

Like Kelly, this third component was emphasised by homeless youth whose families fulfilled the other components of the ideal family. However, all homeless youth were ultimately unified by this last component; their families did not provide the support that was expected of them. The first two components of the 'ideal family' were given by homeless youth as reasons for their families not being able to fulfil the last component. In the terminology of this thesis, the families of homeless young people are unable to act as social capital.[22]

In effect it does not matter who constitutes 'the family' in the context of this thesis – whether it is the biological parents, adoptive parents, a single parent and step-parents, an

---

[22] The family is not defined by its role as social capital – one still has a family even if it does not fulfil the role of being social capital. Of course, a group of people that offers support does not become one's family; however, these people often end up being referred to in terms of pseudo kin relationships (Liebow 1967:167-174) or as fictive families (McCarthy et al. 2002).

extended kin group etc. No matter what the permutation of those who make up one's family, or where they live, what matters is that the family does not function as social capital for the young person. The family may not be absent, but they are not fulfilling what is perceived to be the obligations, expectations and roles of the family as social means of support. The families of some homeless youth are absent while others are unwilling or unable to provide support. Sometimes a homeless young person will not accept the support and, for whatever reason, leaves the family to support him or herself. The family not functioning as social capital is the primary reason for young people becoming homeless. Whilst there may be exceptions to this I have never met one.

The Normal Family

Whilst tutoring first year anthropology I did an exercise with my students to examine how much contact and support they derive from their families. There were fewer than 70 students in the group ranging in age from 17 to mid 20s. Initially I asked the students to draw genealogies of their families. Next we discussed how frequently the students contacted everyone on the genealogy they had just drawn. More than fifty percent of them still lived with a parent or parents. Another 35 percent who were not living in the family home still had financial support from their parent(s). All but one of the students had contacted their parents within the last fortnight.

The discussion that followed the genealogies brought to light the degree of support that most people under the age of 25 years of age have available to them. Throughout the schooling years, including university, young people have accommodation provided at no

expense, including utilities and food. Food is usually prepared for them, giving them plenty of time to invest in other pursuits. Transport and, when they get their license, access to a car seems to be the norm. All of these tangible supports are framed by emotional support and encouragement.

The exercise with the students in the tutorial does not constitute exhaustive research into the lives of 'normal' young people. Nonetheless, their lives provided a stark contrast with those of homeless youth. Both the students and I took for granted the sheer quantity and quality of support provided by parents. Homeless youth, on the other hand, have no one to: provide financial assistance; do the shopping; clean; wash clothes; cook; wake them up in time for school; remind them to go to the dentist; drive them to an appointment when they wake up late; discuss the events of the day; or display their concern and support through nagging, setting curfews and expressing their anxiety over the lack of school work they are doing.

Homeless young people come from a diverse range of family backgrounds. However, what unifies the family life/experience of homeless youth is that their families do not operate as social capital. The reasons, history and manifestation of this 'lack of support' does not take one shape: it cannot be simplified into a homogenous experience. However, when we look at the formulation of social capital outlined above, the families of homeless young people are missing at least one of the three key components that make their families function as social capital. For family to constitute social capital they need to fulfill each of the three components that constitute social capital. In other words, for family to function as social

capital a young person must have: (1) contact with a group of people (or a person) considered family (2) this family must have access to valued resources (such as to economic, cultural and/or social capital), and (3) have shared norms of trust and reciprocity. Below I elaborate on how these three components of social capital are related to homeless youth. Considering these three components will provide insights into the diverse factors that lead a young person to homelessness.

(1) Contact with family

If a young person has no family, then, self-evidently, their family does not function as social capital. Some homeless young people have no contact with their family; some do not even know who both their parents are. Separation from family often closely relates to the third criteria (norms of trust) as young people can become disconnected from their family due to family conflict and lack of trust. Many young people have escaped from families where there has been abuse or neglect and do not want to contact their families. Other young people have been 'kicked out' and are unable to contact their families, the young person being considered the reason for the separation.

Christine's relationship with her family is a common story and demonstrates how contact with the family is closely tied to 'norms of trust.' Christine's stepfather started to sexually abuse her when she was about 15 years of age. After some time Christine told her mother what her new partner, Christine's stepfather, was doing. Christine's mother believed that Christine was lying, that Christine was attempting to break up her relationship. This led to Christine being 'kicked out' of home, being told that she was not welcome in the family

home anymore. Since this time Christine's mother has not provided any support. Moreover, she has actively tried to make Christine's life difficult. As a result Christine actively avoids contact with her mother.

Some homeless young people seek support from extended family, such as uncles and aunts. However, this is rare for two reasons. Firstly, as a result of the genealogies that I collected with homeless young people it became evident that many homeless young people had little or no knowledge of who were in their extended families or where to find them. Secondly, those who did have knowledge of their extended families and where to find them were hesitant to contact them for support. Homeless young people often believe that their extended families are too closely connected with and sympathetic with the immediate family from whom they have separated.

For the few who do seek support from extended family this option is short lived. Supporting a homeless young person often creates family conflicts that undermine the ability of the homeless young person to sustainably receive support. The added emotional and economic strain of supporting a young person often results in the extended family only offering support for a short period of time. Sometimes extended family provides a platform from which to find alternative accommodation or means of support within either formal or informal support networks.

(2) Access to Valued Resources

Some homeless young people come from families that have little access to valued resources. Most notably, the strain of economic poverty can lead to difficulties that result in a young person leaving the family home. An inability to support a young person in the family home can lead to an early transition into independent living. This move into independence can easily result in homelessness due to lacking the financial safety net that families can provide or being unable to return home due to inadequate housing.

In some families there is an expectation that young people will fend for themselves when they are able to. This can be the expectation within families who otherwise struggle to support themselves. The demands of poverty can beget norms and values that emphasise independence. It is difficult to separate the lack of resources and the norms and expectations. Troy's story highlights how this happens for many young people who become homeless.

Whilst Troy was helping me create a timeline of his family history it became evident to both of us that Troy's mother 'kicked out' her children when they were around the same age. Troy's older brother "became a problem" at around 15 years of age and was 'kicked out.' Similarly Troy became unwelcome in the family home when he turned 16 years of age. Both of these boys had become unwilling to attend school or find employment which caused conflict in the family home. His mother made it clear to both of them that they were no longer welcome in the family home unless they could pay rent and contribute to the family financially.

Later in Troy's life he acquired a large sum of money due to an injury incurred whilst he was being arrested. Promptly his mother asked him if he wanted to return to the family home. Leaving his accommodation in Civic[23] he happily returned 'home.' However, when the money ran out Troy was again unwelcome and was again asked to leave. At this point it became clear to Troy that his mother was only willing to have contact with him when he was able to provide her with financial support. This concerned Troy as his younger brother was 15 and wanting to leave school which Troy believed would lead to his brother being kicked out of home and becoming homeless. As Troy was without accommodation he was unable to look after his younger brother, just as his older brother was unable to support him. Instead they all had to fend for themselves independently.

Whilst poverty contributes to the conditions that lead to homelessness, many families that struggle financially stay together. Strong family norms and expectations of trust and interdependence can keep families together despite lacking adequate housing or financial resources.

(3) Norms of trust and reciprocity

The majority of homeless young people do have contact with or know how to contact their families. However, for many there is a lack of trust or norms of reciprocity and support between the young person and their family. Some young people have been brought up in families that offer little or no support. This may be due to a lack of resources (outlined

---

[23] Civic is the name of the central business district of Canberra.

above). Others come from a family culture where every individual looks after him or herself and individuals do not support each other. As noted above, there is often a strong link between the material conditions that a family lives in and the expectations, norms and values placed on independence. In these circumstances independence is inculcated from a very early age as these young people learn that they must look out for themselves. However, the most common reason for a lack of trust is abuse, including neglect.

Sometimes the neglect or abuse that has contributed to a young person's homelessness is strikingly evident. At other times it is difficult at first glance to see what has led to a lack of trust between the family and a particular young person. Occasionally homeless young people come from families that seem to otherwise have the resources available to support the young person. Services and other homeless young people often look at these young people from seemingly stable families with access to social, economic and cultural capital and wonder why they are homeless, sometimes assuming that they have chosen this lifestyle. In all the cases that I have encountered, however, it has become evident that there is a lack of trust between the young person and their family that prevents the family from providing support. This may be the result of a family member breaching the norms of trust. Yet it can also be the young person's behaviour that leads the family to no longer trust them. At other times it is abuse that has indelibly marked the young person's ability to trust not only their family but also other people more generally. Nonetheless, the result of a lack of trust is that no matter how well resourced a family is they no longer function as social capital.

Chapter Two: Homeless Youth and the Habitus of Instability.

The following case studies provide examples of young people who lack trust in their families. Jess' story provides an example of a young person whose reasons for being homeless were not at first evident due to her parents' apparent ability to support her. Luke's family story provides an example of a young person whose family history presents a more overtly apparent lack of norms of trust and reciprocity.

I first met Jess when she was fifteen and, at the time, unable to access many services due to her age and struggling to get an income from social security (Centrelink). When I first met Jess she was with her mother, Monica. We met in a café across the road from Centrelink. While Jess and her mother took turns going to the toilet the other talked to me about the situation. Her mother started crying, fearful of where Jess was heading in her life as Jess kept 'testing' her parents with behaviour that upset them. Jess was worried for her mother and just wanted her to "back out of [her] life" and let her live how she wanted, even if that meant Jess doing the "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' thing" at the tender age of fifteen. At first it seemed like Jess chose to leave the family home and move into the uncertain terrain of homelessness. However, over the years I knew Jess it became apparent that she felt unwanted and not trusted by her parents, a lack of trust that she reciprocated, feeling unable to accept her parent's offers to support her.

Jess had not met her birth father but had lived with her stepdad (who from here on is referred to as her father) for as long as she could remember. Throughout the years that I have known Jess she has often expressed how her mother would defer to her father's expectations regarding Jess and her older sister. Both of the sisters felt as though their

116

mother prioritised her relationship with their father over them. This was compounded by Jess' perceptions of the secrecy surrounding her birth father and other information that she believed her parents could not trust her with.

By the age of eighteen Jess noted that the 'testing behaviour' that led to her parents being unwilling to have her in the family home, was exactly that: behaviour that tested how much they loved and trusted her. Her 'risk taking' behaviour with alcohol, other drugs, and sexual practices, was a means by which Jess could test if her parents trusted her and her judgment. However, her father's rules were upheld and her mother supported his policy of only letting Jess live in the house if she complied with these rules. Jess continued to stay in contact with her parents but did not receive any support from them and became homeless.

By the age of fifteen Luke's father had been in prison for ten years. The times that he had been with his father had ended in violence as his father invariably beat him. Luke does not know why his father was violent. He does suspect that his father was a little "crazy" and drank and used other drugs as a way of coping. Luke's mother was an alcoholic and prioritised getting drunk ahead of looking after her son.

By the age of twelve Luke was very independent, supporting himself through crime. Despite being placed in foster homes Luke would run away from these placements and try to stay with his mother or find somewhere else to stay.

As Luke got older he had periods of stability during which his mother would come and stay with him, usually because she had lost her accommodation. Although Luke looked out for his mother he knew that he could not trust her. He had learnt not to get his hopes up and was not surprised when she would leave his house and take either money or a household item to sell.

Despite the lack of trust in his mother and father, Luke still loved them and felt that they still loved him. On several occasions when visiting Luke, his mother was drunk and talked to me about how she wished she could have been a better mother but she had too many of her own issues to be able to support Luke. Similarly, Luke would talk about how he wished to see his father but had lost track of which prison he was in, let alone whether he had been released.

Hope and the resilient connection to family

Despite feeling let down by their families a large number of young people long to have a continuing relationship with them. The majority of homeless youth continue to have some contact with their families. The expectations and hopes attached to the ideas of a normal or ideal family are amazingly resilient. Even those homeless youth who have been the victims of systematic abuse and neglect seem to hold onto a hope that their family will provide the support that is lacking in their lives. Many homeless youth articulate how they both hate and love their parents. This tension between the love and hate for parents was never more clearly demonstrated to me than when interviewing Andy.

I sat with Andy in a back alley in the city centre of Canberra. During the interview Andy told me how he had been homeless for so long that he no longer knew who he could trust as he had so frequently invested in relationships with other people and been let down. In a truly unsettling moment Andy said:

> Like, I even look at you and wonder if you are going to rip me off. Like I know you're not but I feel the fear and wonder if I should protect myself. You know? Just hit you or stab you.

Within the time it took to articulate a couple of his slowly spoken words Andy's demeanour would switch from seemingly friendly and trusting to fearful and threatening. This emotional switch was most evident when Andy spoke of his father. Andy went on to talk about how his father used to beat him and his older brother: "I fucking hate him for that. I wish I could see him and bash the shit out of him." Then in the blink of an eye, almost within the same breath Andy's emotions inverted, sounding almost childlike: "But I wish I could see him. You know? I miss him." Andy's placid demeanour was short lived as two people walked past and he very quickly looked over his shoulder and glared at them, assessing or assuming that they were a threat.

Andy, like many other homeless youth, held onto a hope that his parents could be what he needed despite continually being proved otherwise. For many homeless youth this lingering hope fuels the conflicts they have with their family, as they will return home or contact their parents only to be let down again. For example, Michelle would call her father to tell him good news or ask for help only to be "slapped in the face." Whitey's mother would sometimes drop off food for him but would chastise him for his drug and alcohol use and the people he spent time with. She loved Whitey but could not live with his behaviour.

Both Whitey and his mother exhibited matching frustrations; they both hoped that the other's behaviour would meet their expectations, the ideal visions they had of the roles each other should play in something more closely resembling the ideal family.

The image of an ideal family haunts many homeless young people. The continued investment in relationships with family despite the lack of support that they offer highlights the significance of the image of the family that pervades modern Australian society. The lack of support that families provide to homeless youth highlights the tacit norms and values that can go unnoticed for those whose families more closely resemble a normal family. As noted by William Foote Whyte "It is only when the relationship breaks down that the underlying obligations are brought to light" (Whyte 1943:257).

The dynamics of family life shape the dispositions and expectations of homeless youth, affecting how homeless youth access and use social networks outside of their family. The families of homeless young people are a model or template of sociality, inculcating the expectations and norms that underscore their engagement with other people. Most significantly, experiences and relationships with family underscore the instability that is the organising theme of youth homelessness – the foundations of the habitus of instability.

The Practices and Responses of Homeless Young People

Homeless young people deal with the instability of their lives by adopting and adapting a range of strategies, skills and attributes. These diverse means of coping are not used by all homeless young people in equal measure. Nonetheless there are common strategies and

practices used to manage each of the types of homelessness (sleeping rough, living in refuges, couch surfing and independent living). The strategies used by homeless young people are generalisable and transferable, being mobilised in a diverse range of conditions and providing a means to adapt to the pervasive instability of homelessness. Yet at the same time these strategies are central to the reproduction of the conditions of their lives. The instability that pervades the lives of homeless youth brings about a seemingly limited number of responses. What follows is an explication of some of the responses and practices of homeless young people, generated by the interaction between their current conditions of existence and their habitus, formed by past experiences.

Hanging Out

The lack of a reliable place to sleep is generally seen as the primary problem for young people who find themselves homeless. While the logistics of sleeping are one of the main preoccupations for people in this situation, there are many other accompanying difficulties. Often these other difficulties do not occur to someone who has recently found him or herself with no place to reside, since a place to sleep is often the looming priority. My research shows that homeless youth confront problems when they become most urgent, addressing the most pressing demand as it presents itself. It often appears that for homeless youth their immediate interests or whims are prioritised ahead of matters that are necessary to improve their circumstances, for example: getting drunk or stoned or going to the movies instead of paying their rent, attending to debts or even buying food.

Chapter Two: Homeless Youth and the Habitus of Instability.

Homeless youth are often considered to sabotage their lives – "collaborators in their own exclusion" (Hall 2003:104) – reminiscent of counter-cultural or subcultural resistance and debates around underclass and culture of poverty. Homeless youth seem to exhibit a freedom from the demands that their economic circumstances presumably impose. Their 'hanging out' appears to outsiders as a disinterested and gratuitous squandering of time, labour and money. Excluded from any legitimate economic activity, they find fulfilment in the time they spend actively *not* seeking a place in an economic world within which they would struggle to achieve. "Those who have no future before them, as the saying goes, are unlikely to form the individual project of bringing about their future, or to work for the coming of a new collective future" (Bourdieu 1979:vii).

'Hanging out' is a practice that is central to the daily lives of homeless young people, a way of dealing with time, and boredom. Hanging out may best be described as an approach to time, a disposition and coping mechanism for those faced with nothing to do and unlikely to find much to do. It can involve walking around trying to find someone or thing to pass the time and keep you occupied; watching TV; engaging in criminal activities; engaging in violence; getting stoned or drunk; sitting around chatting; walking; telling stories[24]; almost anything to keep you occupied and keep boredom at bay. However, hanging out is also the act of avoiding doing certain things. Hanging out is what you do when there is nothing to do but avoid doing things you probably 'should' be doing. The apparent abundance of 'wasted' time could be spent actively trying to change the

---

[24] However, as addressed in Chapter Five, retelling and reworking stories and accounts of past events has many different purposes and achieves much more than just keeping occupied.

122

conditions of one's life. Yet hanging out is both a subtle act of rebellion against what one 'could' or 'should' do and is also what reproduces one's circumstances.

Despite a lot of time spent hanging out, youth homelessness can be very time consuming. One is constantly haunted by having to negotiate the logistics of survival, by coping: Where will I sleep tonight? Where and how will I get food, money, smokes, etc? The short term or immediate concerns take up a lot of time and energy. At the same time, for the most part, homeless young people need to consider longer term ways to address the issues of accommodation, and the interrelated concerns of employment, money, food, cigarettes and drugs, if there is a medium term goal of stability or securing accommodation. If one manages to find the time to think about other less urgent concerns, then the issues of washing (clothes, teeth, and body) and health may become an issue, yet these are rarely the primary concerns of those who find themselves in this situation.

Being Mobile

Many young homeless people see mobility as a positive attribute. Homeless young people often fall back onto their capacity for mobility – the ability to leave any given situation to find an alternative. This mobility is used to escape problematic situations or even abandon seemingly stable conditions. The capacity to be mobile is a means for homeless youth to exercise some control over their lives. This reliance on mobility is seen across the different types of homelessness but is most evident in those roughing it on the streets.

The tactic of mobility refers to a heuristic distinction made between the valued tactic of mobility and the instability that underscores youth homelessness. The tactic of mobility is a conscious component of the habitus of instability. Mobility can be seen as making a virtue out of necessity, attributing value to what is actually demanded of them. It is often upon reflection that a young person will attribute the transience and lack of stability in their lives to a conscious rational action, evoking a sense of agency and control to lives that are often, in fact, driven by amorphous instability. These two terms, instability and mobility, are by no means clearly distinct. It is difficult and perhaps unhelpful to extricate the conscious acts of agency or transience from the self-destructive reinforcement of the instability of youth homelessness.

Minimising Belongings

The value attributed to mobility ties into the notion that the fewer belongings you have to worry about the more you can move around. With few belongings you can stay in a park one night, couch surf at a friend's place the next, and stay behind a shopping centre the night after that. Storing or hiding your belongings is a risky business as they can get stolen or damaged. It may seem strange that someone would steal things that are hidden in bushes, underneath a building, or up in a tree, but it happens. Usually it is people suspected of doing it 'for a laugh.' If you carry a lot of gear/belongings around you start to look like a homeless person – carrying sleeping gear, your clothes, a radio and bags full of other 'stuff.' These practices are left to 'the homeless.' As will be discussed in Chapter Three, homeless youth generally distinguish themselves from 'the homeless,' the brand of homeless older person with whom they do not want to be associated. Generally, young

people seem to have less gear with them. This can be for a range of overlapping reasons: they are less prepared; they do not expect to be homeless for long; they are more mobile and less restricted by having less to look after; and, they do not want to look like homeless people. Having a car solves many of these problems, providing shelter, storage, and mobility.

Keeping Clean

Homelessness usually entails having no place to store one's belongings, to cook, to clean oneself and go to the toilet. These restrictions have seemingly inevitable consequences, such as poor health due to bad diet, appearing untidy, being unclean (and often smelling less than desirable), all of which contribute to the appearance of a young homeless person. Homelessness overtly marks the physical appearance of homeless youth; impacting on homeless people's lives in such a way that it is hard to hide its effects.

Cleanliness and hygiene become issues for homeless youth. These issues are compounded by the lack of changes of clothes that exacerbates the dilapidated appearance of homeless young people. Furthermore, due to the lack of places to safely store one's belongings, homeless young people frequently wear all of the clothes that they own to save them from carrying their belongings like a 'bum' does.

The lack of toilets and showers available to homeless youth to clean themselves contributes to their physical appearance, their lack of cleanliness and hygiene. However, these issues do not appear to be a concern for these young people; even when housed and with facilities

available to them they may not wash themselves frequently. The burdens and constraints of youth homelessness make it harder to put into practice any inclination to clean oneself, and the more pressing priorities mean that these issues rarely factor into their concerns. The demand to find food, on the other hand, cannot be so easily pushed aside.

Obtaining Food

Although free food is available through numerous charity organisations, homeless young people often avoid using these options since they see them as servicing 'the homeless.' Receiving food vouchers from charities is desirable as it does not entail having to line up in a public place and having to identify as being part of 'the homeless.' Young people are not averse to asking for or receiving money or charity more broadly as long as it does not involve being linked with a group of people that symbolise an admission to oneself that there are no other options, an acknowledgment of one's homelessness.

Having nowhere to store, prepare, or cook food usually entails buying ready-to-eat food. This means not eating often or very healthily. One meal a day, usually lunch or dinner, is common due to the difficulty in paying for or finding food. Cheap McDonald's meals are often the meal of choice, not only because of the minimal expense but even when price is no object.[25] Set alongside the difficulties in acquiring food is the inclination to spend money on other things, whether alcohol or drugs, accommodation or servicing a debt.

---

[25] I have taken numerous young homeless people out for lunch or dinner for their birthdays or on special occasions and am surprised that they choose to go back to the budget options that they can afford at normal times. This may in part be due to feeling uncomfortable in more 'dressy' settings.

"Getting off your face": alcohol and other drugs

One of the most significant financial costs for many homeless young people is alcohol and other drugs, including cigarettes. These substances are often seen as the most important need by young homeless people: more important than food, paying bills, and other things that, to the outsider, may seem more significant. The role of these substances is significant for many reasons including how they are used to facilitate social interactions and as a means to cope with the hardship of their lives whilst, at the same time, continuing to add to them. Food can be lived without for a reasonable length of time, or acquired by other legitimate means: food vouchers, 'free feed' from services. Knowing other ways to get food often allows one to prioritise money on cigarettes, drink and or drugs.

One of the reasons for the often-huge expense relating to alcohol and other drugs is that they are frequently bought for other people, as part of a reciprocal or exchange economy (addressed in Chapter Four). This reciprocity can be applied to any goods or services as one needs to repay others who one has relied on between paydays: while someone bought you food and grog during the week they are banking on you, implicitly or explicitly, to balance things out when your pay packet comes in. This cycle of reciprocity can leave little room for saving money or to pay for other needs. Breaking these tacit agreements can often lead to trouble, with a previously best friend becoming someone to avoid at risk of retribution.

Dealing with finances

Youth homelessness, of any type, is financially difficult. There are numerous difficulties involved in obtaining and maintaining an income. Literal homelessness usually means that you do not have an address or a phone number, which leads to some significant bureaucratic and administrative problems. These, in turn, can have financial ramifications. It is widely maintained by homeless youth that if you do not have an address you cannot receive welfare payments from Centrelink, the primary source of income for homeless youth. Using the address of a friend or family member and/or having a mobile phone can avoid these problems. However, mobile phones usually lead to further financial difficulties due to costs and accruing debts that are unable to be serviced (unless the phone is stolen).

Employment and training are difficult to undertake whilst in any form of homelessness. The time demands of these life circumstances leave little time to find or perform paid employment. Almost without fail anyone who has a job, or is involved in education and training, will be forced to give up due to the demands of youth homelessness. Moreover, the toll taken by his or her conditions makes someone who is homeless a less than desirable employee. Most significantly, employment and training are rarely at the forefront of their subjective hierarchy of needs; sometimes these are the last things on their minds.

The financial difficulties of the homeless are often addressed by criminal means. Crime looms large in the blurry area of 'cause and effect' of youth homelessness. The cycle between crime and homelessness often works more like a downward spiral that gets increasingly harder to pull oneself out of. Stealing food, clothes, or goods that can be

128

exchanged for money is commonplace. For some the symbolic act of crime contributes to the decision around whether to commit crime or not (addressed in detail in Chapter Five).

Keeping safe

Whilst cold and sleep deprivation are more likely to affect homeless young people who are sleeping rough in an immediately physical sense, the 'fear of others' weighs most significantly on an emotional and phenomenological level. The fear of other people is often framed by the experiences that contributed to someone becoming homeless and is reinforced by their experiences whilst homeless. Having no secure safe haven to retreat to whilst homeless exacerbates the generalised fear of others.

Issues of safety – and especially fear of other people – loom large in the minds of homeless youth. A constant vigilance towards, and suspicion of, other people is the primary strategy used to ensure self-protection. This fear of other people is the foundation of the often aggressive and volatile attitude of homeless youth. Expecting and fearing conflict, they often initiate violence, believing that such 'pre-emptive' strikes have protected them in dangerous circumstances in the past.

Being homeless often involves being exposed to and immersed in a culture where crime and violence are commonplace. Regular exposure to crime and violence affects the value placed on these practices and they can come to be seen as a legitimate and valid form of supporting oneself. In other words, violence and crime can come to be seen as a viable and readily available means of solving problems. However, the apparent normalisation of crime

and violence does not inoculate these young people against the fear of these practices.

Rather their awareness of crime and violence exacerbates their fear of crime and violence.

This fear can lead them to initiate violence or crime in an attempt to ensure that they are the

perpetrator and not the victim. Moreover, homeless young people are still situated within

the broader cultural values that view violence and crime negatively.

Finding companionship

A sense of isolation and loneliness, of being alone, pervades all types of homelessness.

However, the absence of social support (social capital) and the safety net it provides

becomes most evident when one is trying to find a place to stay. Due to homeless young

people's trepidation regarding other people the sense of having nobody to support them, of

isolation, is present even when in the company of others. However, this sense of isolation is

what also fuels the desire to be with other people.

Youth homelessness does not necessarily entail being alone either by day or night. The

strategies of autonomy and relatedness (addressed at length in Chapter Four) are deployed

across every type of homelessness. Some young people isolate themselves due to their

belief that other people will bring problems. Conversely, other homeless young people

endeavour to surround themselves with people as a means of protection. However, the need

to find other people to stay with whilst living on the streets is more pressing if one wishes

to, for example, escape from literal homelessness into couch surfing. Moreover, the ever

present need to pass time and just be in the company of other people, even at the risk of

being exploited, can override homeless youth's fear of other people.

Luke only ever slept rough when he was by himself. I would often meet him throughout the day and then we would separate at night-time as he retired to the location where he was going to sleep for the night. For Luke sleeping rough was only a viable option when he had no one else to worry about. Moreover, Luke never clearly let it be known to the people he hung out with during the day where he slept. Conversely, for Tash sleeping rough was only ever a viable option when she was with friends or a partner. She quite readily slept in parks with a friend during summer instead of struggling to find alternative accommodation that would potentially make her indebted to someone. Moreover, the desire to stay with one's partner or companion(s) can make it difficult to find alternative accommodation.

The vast majority of services for homeless young people, in particular accommodation services, are for single people. The limited number of services for couples and the strong drive for people to stay with their partners often results in young couples sleeping rough instead of being split up. For many the significance of being with a close companion far outweighs the inconvenience of 'roughing it.' For those young people who are already separated from family members or have a history of being removed from their home by Care and Protection,[26] the importance of being with their companions, whether lovers or close friends, is exacerbated. This is highlighted below in the case of James and Amber.

---

[26] Care and Protection is the ACT Government service responsible for facilitating coordination across government for the care and protection of children and young people. Care and Protection assess the safety and wellbeing of children and can apply for protection orders through the Magistrate's Court and place children in 'out-of-home care,' including in foster care.

Chapter Two: Homeless Youth and the Habitus of Instability.

James and Amber had been homeless for several years and had recently returned to Canberra. They had with them Amber's daughter, Keira, who was four years old and Amber was pregnant with a second child (to James). Amber's history with Care and Protection, having been put into 'out of home care' at the age of eight years, led her to resist any involvement with services, fearing they would separate her from her child. James was an indigenous Australian who had similarly been in numerous foster homes and been separated from his family. Unable to find accommodation where they could all stay together they chose to sleep in a car, a station wagon, which they left in a park in the inner northern suburbs of Canberra, near a public toilet, BBQ, picnic table and tap. They stayed in their car, in the park, for several weeks during winter when temperatures got below freezing. James tells a story of how Amber and her child, whom he "treated like his own," dropped him off in a taxi at a refuge as they left for alternative accommodation. He described the heartbreak he experienced as he watched them drive off, reminded of past experiences. The family he did have had become so important that he did not want to leave them under any conditions.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the habitus of homeless youth in Canberra, focussing especially on the unifying theme of instability. The instability of the conditions of existence of homeless youth underscores this habitus and the practices that it produces. Homeless young people develop a habitus of instability within their family upbringing. The conditions of homelessness reinforce this pre-existing instability. However, the habitus of instability is not inculcated in all homeless youth to the same degree. Past experiences and

exposure to instability vary in quantity, quality and duration. Nonetheless, the demands of youth homelessness can reinforce and exacerbate a habitus of instability as young people adapt to the conditions of insecurity and uncertainty. The following chapter provides an exploration of the living conditions of youth homelessness where the instability of youth homelessness is most evident, as both a cause and result of the habitus of instability.

Chapter Three

The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in

Canberra

Introduction

The instability of youth homelessness is most evidently seen in their transition and mobility between types of accommodation (or modes of living) and within these types of accommodation. Therefore, this chapter ultimately demonstrates the conditions of existence and ensuing 'ways of coping' that underpin the instability that is the centrepiece of the habitus of homeless youth. I aim to provide insights into the interdependence between the external material conditions of homelessness and homeless young people's 'way of being in the world.' In the theoretical terms of this thesis, this chapter shows the demands of the conditions of existence of youth homelessness that are inculcated and internalised in a habitus of instability. This chapter provides a detailed exploration of what youth homelessness looks like in Canberra. The accommodation options experienced by homeless young people in Canberra can vary a great deal, encapsulated in the notion of a spectrum of homelessness. Nonetheless, homeless young people are exposed to conditions and events that provoke an apparently limited range of ways to cope.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

This chapter is structured by outlining the conditions of the different accommodation options that are used, and are axiomatic, to define and explain types of homelessness. Thus, this chapter is divided into four discrete parts: (1) literal homelessness; (2) refuges; (3) couch surfing; and, (4) independent living. This structure mirrors a theoretical trajectory or 'career' of homelessness: leaving or being 'kicked out' of home onto the streets; staying at a refuge; moving in with friends; and, obtaining independent accommodation. However, in practice the order of these options changes: some young people avoid certain stages or types of homelessness, some move back home after a brief sojourn with homelessness in one or a few of its guises. No two experiences of homelessness are ever the same. Nonetheless, many people get caught in a seeming cycle, oscillating between these accommodation options: in a refuge, then staying with friends, back on the street, living independently, and then abandoning their accommodation to couch surf with friends before moving back onto the streets. The instability of their lives changes its manifestation but follows them even into apparent stability.

The types of homelessness outlined in this chapter are explicated in delineated sections for purposes of clarity. However, this chapter needs to be read with an awareness that each accommodation option, any moment in the life of a homeless young person, is framed by the other possible, though limited, living conditions that are available. The transience and instability of youth homelessness entails that any one accommodation option is framed by the other 'viable options.' What I have defined as 'viable options' is an analytical category not a folk category. This notion encapsulates how any moment in the life of a homeless young person is set within a sense of impermanence and uncertainty, the threat of being

uprooted again, which imposes the need to assess the subjectively viable alternatives to deal with what they perceive as the immanent and imminent instability.

Weighing up the alternatives or choices and deciding what is the best path to take, what constitutes a viable option, is a subjective endeavor. Some young people prefer to 'live on the streets' than go back to their parent's home or to a refuge. For others the fear of potentially having to live on the streets motivates them to endure conditions that would previously have seemed intolerable. In an objectivist vision all accommodation options are available to all young people. Yet what is perceived as a viable option is another matter. What is a viable option to one person does not even occur to the next. Yet no young person's life stays the same – what is not a viable option at one point in time can become viable under other conditions. The limited number of viable options that haunt homeless young people frames all of the accommodation options addressed below. It shapes how homeless young people live in any one accommodation option and is central to the ebb and flow across the spectrum or types of homelessness.

Part One: Literal Homelessness: Roughing It

Matt slept on the streets for "a few months" whilst having his name on waiting lists for accommodation. His previous experiences in refuges led him to choose the street instead of "those shit holes." The rules and restrictions imposed by refuges were incompatible with Matt's independence – he was not going to exchange his sense of dignity for a bed and meal. For Matt 'roughing it' had become a viable, but nonetheless far from ideal, option.

Matt: "I was sleeping on the streets. She [girlfriend] wasn't. She did for a little while, she was out in the tent with me. Most of the time I was out in the street with just me. I did it mostly down in Tuggeranong.[27] Just wherever I ended up. I slept in a car when it was raining. I slept under the stairs at the community centre. There is nice little cove under there, I got quite comfy for awhile."

He settled into the cove under the stairs, referred to above, for nearly two weeks. This was the longest period of time that he stayed in one place whilst on the street prior to moving into a tent in a caravan park. Usually his accommodation would differ every day or two. This mobility was seen as significant by Matt, as outlined in Chapter Two, which was inextricably tied to the value he attributed to minimizing possessions, giving him less things to be attached to and worry about.

---

[27] Tuggeranong valley is an area that encompasses several suburbs in the south of Canberra.

Matt: "I needed food when I first became homeless. Shoplifting you can only get chocolate and biscuits and shit. I lost so much weight and looked like crap...When you get sick you get sick for longer."

Since turning eighteen years of age Matt's accommodation options have dramatically decreased. The two places for adult males that he knew he could go to were for 'homeless men', a category that he felt he did not belong to: "Old bums, fuckin' mad dudes and guys just out of prison, man. Fuck that. I would rather be out and about." According to Matt he had debts with Centrelink and ACT Housing which prevented him from getting welfare payments.[28] This made getting housing difficult, since he had no income. An income was hard to get because he was on the streets and his life of homelessness marked his gait, manner, speech and appearance.

In the spectrum of definitions and explanations of what constitutes homelessness, literal homelessness is unequivocally considered 'homeless.' Whilst subjective understandings of homelessness vary greatly from formal definitions, young people, service providers, and the general public see literal homelessness as the epitome of homelessness. This notion dominates the public viewpoint as it is the most visible, visibly shocking kind of homelessness that confronts people (Hutson & Liddiard 1994:27): people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, deserted buildings, cars, or makeshift shelters, asking for money (panhandling/begging). Yet there is a difference between 'living on the street' for young

---

[28] Whether this was the case or not is almost beside the point as this perception prevented him from even addressing these debts, not even setting foot into Centrelink or ACT Housing.

people and for those they call 'the homeless.' I clarify this distinction below as the way

homeless young people cope with living on the streets is framed by their desire to not be

seen as part of 'the homeless.'

The 'homeless' and 'homeless youth'

The term 'the homeless,' as used by homeless youth in Canberra, refers to predominantly

older men who could otherwise be called bums or derros (short for derelict). These are

adults who are considered to have chosen a lifestyle of 'homelessness,' living on the streets,

carrying all their belongings with them, generalised as junkies, drunks, and or mad.[29]

Young people, on the other hand, consider living on the street as a temporary condition that

is not an ongoing lifestyle choice. I have not met a young person who has dedicated him or

herself to life on the streets (this of course does not mean there are not any). However, this

does not preclude young people from staying 'on the streets' or 'living rough' for long

periods of time. Homeless youth consider their homelessness a temporary or transitional

phase, until they "get their shit together." This assumption made by homeless youth about

'the homeless'– that 'the homeless' have resigned themselves or chosen to live 'on the

streets' or are unable to get out of their circumstances – situates themselves against, and

distinct from, 'the homeless' implying at least a hope, if not an expectation regarding their

futures. Homeless youth hope or assume that they will not continue to live as they are now.

Homeless young people do not see their homelessness as an alternative lifestyle or culture

that they have knowingly adopted. Consequently, homeless young people avoid practices

---

[29] My experience with older homeless people does not confirm these views to be true. A few of the older
people I have met have chosen a 'homeless lifestyle' yet predominantly they held onto a belief or hope to
move into a more 'normal' life sometime in the future.

that associate or link them to 'the homeless,' and this affects what homelessness looks like for these young people.

Roughing It

There are many terms which are interchangeable when talking about literal homelessness. Young people use terms such as; roughing it, sleeping rough, sleeping or living on the streets. There are also terms used by the service providers: literal homelessness, primary homelessness, houselessness, and rooflessness. Whilst 'sleeping rough' implicitly draws one's attention to the logistics of sleeping in a public environment, this accommodation option also entails many issues that relate to the daytime, the time spent awake. 'Living on the streets' better encapsulates what this kind of homelessness involves as it is not only sleeping that is done on the streets; rather one is often living on the streets throughout the day – not in your own private space/place. However, the notion of the 'streets' similarly obscures what most consider these terms to mean. Many young people use cars as a place to store their things and sleep. The cars can be either their own or someone else's, legally or illegally. Similarly, the option of breaking into a house or building that is empty is an alternative that people include under these different ways of describing this kind of homelessness. Again, people may sleep in public but spend the day with friends or acquaintances in their homes. Hence 'roughing it' seems to be the most appropriate term to use, since this kind of existence is invariably considered hard going. The only problem with this term is that often all of the alternatives to 'roughing it' are equally, or more, 'rough,' depending on who you ask. For some people the idea of sleeping on the streets is less

*un*attractive than staying in a violent home or some other situation that they find impossible to live in for whatever reason.

Sleeping rough is considered the most extreme kind of homelessness by homeless young people and service providers, often the last resort for those who cannot find another option. Yet, as mentioned above, some people seem to have chosen sleeping rough in place of other, seemingly more comfortable options like staying in a refuge or in the family home. Despite this apparent choice, living on the streets is without variation seen as an unpleasant experience, which speaks volumes about how these people feel about the other available options.

The majority of young people involved in this research who had 'roughed it' had done so at the last minute: escaping or running away from a situation with nowhere else to go; kicked out of previous accommodation and unable to find another option. Some had been kicked out of home or a refuge late in the day or night and were unable to find vacancies at other accommodation or refuges. Often young people have found themselves out in the suburbs of Canberra and been unable to get to other accommodation. In these circumstances many people stay awake all night, sometimes walking throughout the night. Alternative accommodation options like refuges, which are often full, are hard to get to without transport as the refuges will rarely come and pick up a young person or cover a taxi fare. Furthermore, most young people are unaware of support services prior to becoming homeless. Few young people have had to turn 'roughing it' into a longer term living situation.

'Roughing it' involves sleeping anywhere that is not a house or home. People choose certain sites and not others using several criteria that are interdependent: visibility, safety, protection from the elements, storage and mobility. It is important to note that these criteria do not constitute a conscious list that a homeless youth runs down while searching for somewhere to sleep; rather this is my own list based on conversations with homeless youth reflecting back on the locations they chose on past occasions.

Invisibility and safety from other people are often interchangeable. Usually, being out of sight when sleeping protects you from the threat of other people and the attention of the police. However, it has been pointed out to me that a degree of visibility can have its benefits. Whilst security guards often make sleeping rough harder, moving people on and sometimes harassing them, they can also be sympathetic. I have heard of security keeping an eye out for people who slept near the shopping centre or location they have been employed to protect. Furthermore, visibility during the day is very obviously an advantage if one wants to 'beg' or 'pan handle.' Invisibility can extend itself to sleeping in a place sufficiently hidden away so that one can leave belongings behind, saving one from carrying makeshift bedding, extra clothes, cooking implements, or radios etc during the day. However, a well hidden spot is not always well protected from the elements.

It is a contextual matter as to whether a young person chooses to be out of sight or remain visible for reasons of safety. If you are sleeping in an area where people are staying out late drinking, then being out of sight is usually preferable. However, in a more suburban

location in the middle of the week, where there are fewer passers-by, being visible may be preferable, since it may elicit support from those who see you.

The weather, in particular the cold and rain, is one of the most significant impediments to sleeping rough for an extended period of time. The cold is probably the most dangerous aspect to sleeping rough even if the perceived threat of other people figures more prominently in subjective views. The cold is less of an issue throughout the day time, both because it is warmer then and because one can find places indoors to keep warm: shopping centres, malls, friends' houses, youth centres. These same places can provide respite from the heat in summer and none of them necessarily cost any money. Blankets, extra layers of clothes, hats or beanies, sleeping bags, newspaper or cardboard are the most useful items to help protect oneself from the cold and frost, but they are inadequate for rain. Yet one needs either to store these belongings or to carry them.

Sleeping in cars is a very common form of 'roughing it' as it provides shelter, makes you less visible, and can make you potentially mobile (if the car works). If you have a car and your previous accommodation becomes unavailable, your car is always an option. Finding an inconspicuous place to park the car so that you do not have any unwanted visitors, including the police, is an important issue. Often cars are parked out the front or near the accommodation of friends or family or near public toilets. Both stolen and legitimately owned vehicles are used. Whilst cars do not afford much insulation it is possible to store blankets or sleeping bags in a car which makes it a more viable and attractive option. Cars do provide a reasonably safe place to store your belongings, allowing you to carry and have

available more things than you would if restricted to carrying or hiding your possessions. The mobility that having a car affords is a very helpful factor during the day, making it easier to get around and do whatever one needs to do, such as find food, money, or other accommodation. Moreover, along with its immediate use value, a car is valued as a symbol of mobility and status more broadly, a culturally significant artefact.

Although cars are a highly valued asset, and are often relied upon for accommodation, they can also be a source of anguish. Many homeless young people drive with at least one, if not all, of the following: no license, no registration, no formal ownership, a car that is not roadworthy, outstanding fines and police records. A young person driving an un-road-worthy car, without a license and on bail, is almost invariably going to end up in worse circumstances than he or she was prior to using that vehicle. This often leads into a cycle of felonies that becomes increasingly hard to escape, especially if the person insists on continuing to use cars. Moreover, the cost of petrol alone is usually beyond the budget of most homeless youth and is often covered through criminal means.

Parks are another frequently used location for the literally homeless, depending on the time of year. Sleeping in parks is rarely a viable option during winter, yet in summer some young people will 'rough it' in a park quite readily. Nestled amongst bushes one is at least partially, if not totally, out of sight, and partly protected from rain and frost. However, one is in no way protected from low temperatures without a reasonably good sleeping bag or too many blankets than is practical to carry. If you have a good location you can leave things like blankets amongst the bushes. However, they are still exposed to rain and can be

stolen. As the ground can get very cold it is important to try and get something between you and it, especially in winter. This is where newspapers, cardboard boxes, or park benches become helpful. However, park benches are visually exposed and you need to stop the breeze from coming up underneath you.

Park benches are often thought of as places where homeless people sleep. Given the highly visible nature of sleeping on a bench this gives the misconception that this is the place of choice for the homeless. While people do sleep on benches or bus shelters they are usually avoided for the very reason of the visibility. The materials from which the bench is made – metal or wood – and its shape, factor into whether the bench is comfortable. Town planners take into consideration the possibility of people sleeping on benches, and design them to either accommodate or deter this likelihood – for example, armrests set across the bench make it hard for someone to lie down and metal is cold and uncomfortable. Similarly, town planning can kill two birds with one stone by illuminating an area with poor lighting, to improve security and make it less attractive for 'unsavoury' loitering.

The underside of urban structures such as ramps, bridges, alcoves or hidden behind buildings in alleyways, are all possible sites to sleep at night. Whilst concrete gets very cold and is of course hard these sites are often protected from rain and wind, and offer protection from people's view. Next to office blocks there are often little alcoves for heating and air-conditioning, structured to be out of sight of people walking past. These alcoves can be noisy if the air-conditioning or heating is turned on, but can sometimes provide warmth – though not usually. There is also the issue of lights that stay on at night, often to discourage

both crime and loiterers, which can make it harder to sleep and make one more visible. Commercial sites usually have security guards attached to them who can either be a problem or a blessing. As mentioned above, security guards can be both helpful, providing food and 'looking out' for someone roughing it, or move homeless people on and even harass them.

Abandoned buildings and vacant houses offer some of the best shelter. However, this option has often proven to be dangerous as other people can return to these places and trouble can arise. Housing that has been vacant, often in Public Housing blocks, is sometimes used as a temporary residence for squatting (Doherty 2009). As squatting is illegal, police and security can become a problem, exacerbated by any damage or illegal activity that has been going on there. Some abandoned buildings in Canberra have been providing accommodation for groups of homeless people since they have well insulated shelter, toilets and even running water. These places have been generally safe, providing a kind of community whose members look out for each other. One downside is that these buildings are falling down and can be unsafe, mostly due to damaged asbestos in the ceilings. However, these sites are for 'the homeless'; few if any young people become part of these communities, since this would involve associating with something that they are not.

Despite some homeless young people opting for sleeping rough over other accommodation options this by no means implies that it is ever the ideal. When another viable option is available homeless young people will readily take it. The self-professed choice to live on

the streets is obscuring that there were actually no other viable options. It is far more common for young people to endure other less than ideal accommodation options than to live on the streets. However, as explored in Chapter Five, homeless young people maintain a sense of dignity and self-respect by laying claim to having agency and exercising choices in order to appear to have some control over their lives. The opinions that homeless young people have regarding youth refuges are tainted by this sense of 'saving face'; this is more important than admitting that they need the support and assistance that these services provide.

Part Two: Youth Refuges

Being accommodated in a refuge is classified as a form of homelessness by service providers and advocates. Refuges are often the first homelessness service encountered by homeless young people. Most young people arrive at refuges in the middle of family conflicts, having just been evicted or kicked out of their previous accommodation with few other options. For many this is the last resort, coming to the refuge in the middle of bad or even desperate times; unable to find other accommodation options, unwilling to stay with other family or friends, ashamed or embarrassed at the conditions and circumstances in which they find themselves. The conditions under which young people enter refuges impacts on their experience of the refuge. Time in a refuge is thus framed by the young person's uncertainty and trepidation about their homelessness. Refuges become places where young people meet other young people in similar circumstances and can form networks or communities of homeless young people. However, the other residents can also be the most difficult aspect of life in a refuge as young people assert their independence and act out their frustrations on others around them.

Refuges are residential accommodation services that provide support and accommodation for numerous people under the one roof or address. At face value youth refuges seem to vary little; the size, rules, and appearance are all very similar. They are nestled in suburban streets looking very much like any other house on the block at first glance. The number of people coming in and out, the van or number of cars in the driveway or condition of the house does not necessarily make it obvious that a house is in fact a refuge. At the entry to these establishments there is often a doorbell, intercom or fly screen that is locked to police

who comes into the building. Most refuges have an office for the staff, a shared lounge room (sometimes two) where there is a TV, and sometimes a games room, with a table tennis or pool table in it, and a communal kitchen. There are a number of single bedrooms, usually with locks on them, where the residents sleep, store their belongings and find an escape from the otherwise never-ending company of other young people and staff. The rooms have single beds, storage space for clothes, and sometimes a desk and lamp. There is usually a bedroom for the staff member who stays overnight.

Refuges are almost all staffed 24 hours, seven days a week. During busy, post-school hours until after dinner, there is often another staff member to help. One worker stays overnight and starts the morning routine. During the day the staff member on duty, often the manager, does a lot of the necessary paper work and attends to the bureaucratic demands. Whilst some of the residents go to school throughout the day, those who do not are sometimes asked to leave the refuge, allowing the day worker the freedom to catch up on his or her work. Some refuges deny this practice as it is often frowned upon by the service sector.

At the time of writing there were 10 refuges in Canberra (Youth Coalition of the ACT 2008). These refuges accommodate between 6 and 8 young people at any time. All of the refuges except one charge 'rent' (a more appropriately term would be 'board') and require proof of income as a prerequisite to enter. However, informally many of these services will help young people obtain an income upon entry into their service. Nearly all of these refuges include the provision of food except for the one service that operates as a 'boarding

house' where the residence are more autonomous and expected to do their own shopping and cooking.

Refuges vary in the length of time one is able to stay; however they usually provide crisis, short or medium term accommodation. Crisis and short-term services offer up to 3 months accommodation, whilst medium term services offer up to 12 months accommodation (Youth Coalition of the ACT 2008). Some services are associated with longer accommodation options and their clients can transition through the short and medium term services into a longer-term boarding house or supported independent living.

Within Canberra there is a lack of 'exit points' from refuges. The lack of public housing and the difficulty young people face finding private rental properties in Canberra affect the possibilities of transitioning out of refuges into independent living. Refuges, and other services, often extend the length of time young people can stay with them as their clients have few places to move on to. Thus, the length of stay at a refuge can be negotiated.

Different refuges cater to different client groups within the broader category of homeless young people. These groups are often delineated by gender, age, and even the circumstances contributing to one's homelessness. For example, women who are victims of abuse or accompanied by a child have access to different services that often keep their location secret. Some medium term accommodation services will only take referrals from other services funded by SAAP. There are formal or codified distinctions that determine who is able to access a service and also tacit and informal selection process. For example,

some refuges will not take referrals from particular services that are known for dealing with more problematic or 'hardcore' clients. Furthermore, some young people choose not to use refuges.

Towards the end of my fieldwork research, refuges were reporting fewer 'hardcore' young people using their services. 'Hardcore' clients are also referred to as the chronically or career homeless by service providers. These terms refer to young people who are seen as more problematic, or in my chosen terminology, who have a more inculcated 'habitus of homelessness.' This observation from the workers at youth refuges echoed the sentiments of these 'hardcore' young people who felt that there were more 'normal kids' using refuges. Refuges were not only selecting the less problematic clients but the more 'hardcore kids' were also selecting not to use refuges, entertaining other viable options, such as roughing it, that are not so viable to the relatively 'normal kids.'

Refuges cater to different age ranges. Whilst the term 'young people' refers to 15 – 25 year olds 'youth refuges' do not cater to people over the age of 21. Moreover only three 'youth' refuges in the ACT are available to people between 18 and 21 years of age. The other services available to people over 18 are for homeless adults, with no maximum age category. Furthermore, age restrictions can change informally depending on the clients who are residing at a refuge at a given time. For example, a refuge may officially accommodate young people from 15 to 18 years of age, yet an 18 year old may not be accommodated if the current residents are mostly 15 years old as the workers may believe that the older person will be a bad influence or may simply not get along with the other clients.

As referred to above, after the age of 18 the number of services that can accommodate a homeless person decrease dramatically. Residential services that are available solely for people over 18 years of age have a reputation for catering to a different client group: 'the homeless.' The following quotes from homeless young people highlight the almost unanimous sentiments about services available to people 18 and over:

> #22: "You turn eighteen and then you're thrown into these places with guys just outa prison, real fucked up dudes. There needs to be something else."

> #2: "I would rather do a whole lotta crazy shit before I go to one of those places."

These comments relate back to the difference between 'the homeless' and homeless young people who see themselves as temporarily without stable accommodation. Unwilling to associate with 'the homeless' many people refuse to use certain services. Being able to exercise this choice not to use these services requires the homeless young person having other viable options.

The mood or ambience of a refuge is largely dependent on the interaction between the young people who are residents as well as their relationship to the staff and the structures that the staff are there to oversee. A group of young people who get along well and are reasonably compliant with the rules and structures of the refuge can result in a pleasant atmosphere. However, the dynamics between just one resident and the staff or other residents can make for an unpleasant and volatile environment. As many young people arrive in the midst of great turmoil, their lives turned upside down and unsure of what is

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

going to happen to them, it does not usually take much for conflicts to arise. One particularly difficult young person can detrimentally affect the entire refuge.

Youth workers at refuges spend much of their time managing the personalities of those that live in the refuge: negotiating chores, preventing or intervening in conflicts, and counselling young people as they go through the dramas and trials that are the centrepiece of their lives. While young people complain about refuges the workers can see that many homeless young people are reliant on the refuge at the time of a crisis and can be pivotal to giving them a chance at negotiating the new demands of their lives. The rules and structures are an issue for the young people but are seen by the workers as necessary. From the perspective of the workers the rules are needed to create the stable environment that young people are considered to need in order to inculcate an independence and responsibility that is consistent with the workers view of an autonomous, productive, and functional young person. However, this vision of what is needed is sometimes at odds with the lives of homeless young people. Homeless young people's lives are structured by the newfound autonomy that has emerged as a way to cope with the instability of their lives. Often proud of this autonomy, which is examined in detail in Chapter Four, these young people are adamant that they are going to exercise their right to make choices about their lives, even if workers see the choices they make as counterproductive or destructive.

Experiences and views of refuges

Many homeless young people have been to numerous or, according to their own reporting, all of the refuges in Canberra. There are many accounts of young people being blacklisted

154

or banned due to bad behaviour. Yet services deny that such practices ever occur. In my research, for every homeless young person who claims to have been to every refuge in Canberra there is one that has only stayed at one refuge and been sufficiently turned off to never go to another. Some reappraise their past conditions at home with their families and, where possible, return there, as refuges prove too unpleasant and the crowd too much to handle. Others have never set foot in a refuge but know by word-of-mouth, a potent and valued resource, that it is not worth their time and that they are better off entertaining other options.

Homeless young people rarely have anything positive to say about youth refuges. Having to stay in these places is often demoralising and a symbol of homeless young people's impotence and lack of options. Even those who are thankful of the support, accommodation, food and company provided by a refuge, voice brave and proud discontent with the refuge as though it is unacceptable to be happy there. Usually in hindsight some young people are willing to admit that a refuge and its workers were a key support that gave them the stability to arrange new lives.

The overwhelming response from the young people involved in this research was that they only used, or would use, a refuge under dire circumstances. The rules and restrictions were generally seen as too strict and unforgiving. The very conditions that the young people felt they had escaped from were being reproduced in refuges and they would find another viable option.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

Rules structure life in a refuge. The following set of rules are part of a contract signed by clients upon entry into a Canberra youth refuge. Although lengthy, the following verbatim excerpt demonstrates the array of rules and expectations placed on homeless young people in refuges.

<div align="center">

REFUGE RULES
</div>

To maintain a safe and functioning house we need to have some rules for everyone to stick by

Rules for residents:

NO violence, no vandalism, no theft, no weapons, no threatening behavior, no drugs or alcohol on the premises, no returning to the refuge under the influence of drugs or alcohol, no staying out overnight without permission, no sex on the premises.

FINANCES... you are expected to contribute 30% of your income/benefit (if you have one) toward your stay. This contribution will be capped depending on your income.

HEALTHY/MEDS... you must notify a worker when you enter the refuge if you are on any medication, some medications will have to be stored in the office where you can access it when it's due to be taken.

CHORES... you must complete your allocated chore/s each day by the times indicated on the chore descriptions. You must complete your chore before you leave for the day. You may be allocated more than one chore, these are decided at dinner time the evening before. You are also expected to clean up after yourself.

HOME and BEDTIMES... home time during the week is 6pm for dinner unless you have other commitments and have discussed this with the worker. Scheduled house meetings are compulsory. Curfews are 9pm weekdays and 11pm Fri and Sat nights. Bed times are 10pm weeknights and 12 midnight Fri and Sat nights.

FOOD... dinner is at 6pm. If you are not home for dinner it will not be saved for you unless you have had discussions with the worker about this. The 'Head Chef' cooks dinner. This is generally the worker but residents are encouraged to cook and assist. Residents are responsible for making their own breakfast and lunch, food is provided for this. No oven cooking is allowed during the day. The refuge has a healthy eating policy. Residents may purchase their own food if they desire but must eat dinner at the same time as everyone else.

MORNINGS... a worker will wake you at 8am weekdays and 10pm on weekends. If you need to be up earlier than this make sure you set an alarm or ask the night worker to wake you in the morning.

OVERNIGHTERS… overnight stays away from the refuge are allowed twice a week. This is a privilege not a right and is at the workers discretion. If you are under 18 you must provide the worker with contact details for an adult that will be at the place you plan to stay. Requests for overnighters will not be accepted after 6pm on the night you wish to stay out.

COMING and GOING… enter and exit the refuge via the side kitchen door. Inform workers when you leave and return, and request that your room be locked/unlocked. Make sure you've done your chore before you leave (unless you are on night dishes).

VISITORS… visitors may be welcome at the refuge but you must ask permission from the worker before they come. Visitors must come to the front door on arrival. You are responsible for your visitors actions whilst they are at the refuge and they must follow the same rules as residents. Visitors must leave at a time designated by the worker.

PHONE CALLS… you are allowed to use the refuge phone for contacting support workers, or arranging appointments etc. If you want to make a social/personal call you may only phone landlines. This is limited to 3 calls per day. A worker will put the call through for you. Your calls must be brief (5-10mins) and you must hang up if you hear call waiting.

SMOKING… smoking is only allowed in the designated outdoor area (through the laundry). You may never smoke inside. Smokers must put their butts out and use the bin/ashtray provided.

PETS… you may not bring pets to the refuge.

VEHICLES… resident's vehicles are not allowed at, or in the vicinity of, the refuge. This is refuge policy and is designed for the safety and concern for residents and the neighbors

COMPUTERS… you may use the resident computers within the designated hours (shown on the computer room wall). Computer use is a privilege. Staff have the right to refuse access to computers. Residents abusing the computers or internet access may be banned from using them. The same rules apply for personal computers of residents.

STAFF AREAS… always knock before entering the staff areas (past the computer room)

DRUGS/ALCOHOL… you may not bring drugs or alcohol onto the premises or use any drugs or alcohol on the premises. You may not return to the refuge under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

FORMAL WARNINGS… there will be consequences for failure to follow the refuge rules and directions from workers. You may be banned from privileges such as TV, computers, and overnighters or you may be given a formal warning. On receiving your 3rd formal

warning you will be asked to leave the service. If you are asked to leave you may not return or re-refer for 2 weeks, this may be extended for serious breaches.

INSTANT EXIT.. there are some behaviors that will result in an instant exit from this service:
- Violence or threats of violence toward others or yourself
- Sexual harassment towards residents or staff
- Deliberate damage, theft of property at the refuge
- Illegal drugs on the premises, use of drugs or alcohol on the premises
- Tampering with fire safety equipment (alarms, detectors, extinguishers)

BEDROOMS... the bedroom you are assigned whilst at the refuge is your space. It will have a bed, pillow, sheets, blanket/quilt, towel, drawers, a heater/fan if needed. You will also keep your personal possessions in your room. You must seek staff approval to bring any electrical items (computers, TV etc) into your room. You must not go into other residents rooms or allow any residents into your room. You must not have any open flames.. i.e. Candles in your room.

ROOM CHECKS... staff will do weekly room checks to ensure fire equipment is working and there is no damage or graffiti. Staff will not go through your personal belongings and notice will be given the day prior to inspections occurring. If it is suspected that there are drugs, alcohol or weapons in your room no notice will be given. Please keep your room clean and tidy. Remove any dishes, rubbish or washing from your room.

POSSESSIONS... the refuge does not take any responsibility for your possessions. It is your responsibility to keep your belongings in your room and ask for staff to lock your door when you leave. If you leave belongings behind when you exit the service they will be held onto for a maximum of 2 weeks.

The following conversation between Luke and Jake epitomises the sentiments many homeless young people have towards refuges:

> Jake: You get bored in the refuge because there's nothing to do and, and because there's curfews and all that shit. And when you are on the streets you've got all your mates who are also on the streets and there is no authority – that is what it comes down to, authority. No sixteen year old who has left home two years earlier wants to deal with authority, they don't want nobody telling them what to do. At a refuge you got a curfew... and kids love to hang out at night.

> Luke: Yeah. I think they should be a bit lenient. I think they should have a good look at themselves, why are they makin' it so strict? Kids are comin' in and they are putting all this pressure on them. And they're, more or less,

setting them up to fail – they're not given a fuckin' chance. They are setting them up to fail, that's the problem. They don't make it so it's a bit easier and they have got a bit of free time, and they can go and relax.

Jake: Cos' they wanna run you around and be stupid. And when you're not doin' it, because your fuckin'…you know, because you would like to sit down and relax and just be a kid because you are a fuckin' kid…make it a bit easier for them, not make it so they've got all everything riding on their shoulders all the time. They are pretty much told, constantly, 'you fuck up and you're gone'…you think, I might as well just fuck up.

Luke: I would rather rely on myself rather than be told what to do all the time and live under others' rules. They don't let you do fucking shit man. I mean I been looking after myself since I was little – I am independent man. Anyone else who doesn't live in a refuge wouldn't have to live like that, they could do what they want. Even at home man I could smoke and leave the house and come back pissed and stoned. No cunt's going to tell *me* how to look after myself, I do that better than any of those cunts.

For Luke and Jake the terms of living at the refuge are seen as unreasonable. They swapped a life with their respective families for the independence of living on the streets, for circumstances that they considered better to live under, to which they became accustomed. They would not swap their hard earned independence for the apparent stability of the refuge.

It is interesting to note that the refuges that have stricter rules, surveillance and policing of rooms seem to have a significantly worse reputation regarding sexual activity, drug use and even sexual abuse among residents. Conversely, those that are considered more lenient according to young people have less of this rebellion or resistance. The stricter the rules of a refuge the greater the pull to resist, presenting a larger platform for rebellion and asserting one's independence.

Though the rules and structures of the refuges are considered as reasonable and in the best interests of the young people as seen from the perspective of the workers and many who look in from the outside, these young people are often harbouring resentment towards authority figures. Some have left houses where the rules of their parents were a factor that contributed to their becoming homeless, either escaping the rules or being 'kicked out' for not abiding by them. Other young people have worked hard at becoming independent, and find it hard to succumb to the demands of others. Their acts of rebellion, defiance, or independence are often more than a survival strategy; they have become part of their identity, a form of counter-cultural capital and sometimes even an habitual but self-destructive act seemingly valued in its own right (addressed in detail in Chapter Five). The restrictions around alcohol and other drug use in refuges highlights how the rules and structures of refuges conflict with the ways of coping that homeless young people often adopt to deal with the conditions of homelessness.

Alcohol and Other Drug use in Refuges

The banning of illegal drugs and alcohol is a formal policy of all the refuges I have encountered. Even substances that are legal, for those above the age restrictions, are not permitted in the refuge, nor are young people allowed to turn up drunk or stoned. The response of homeless young people when asked whether the ban on drugs and alcohol would prevent them from using a refuge was overwhelming: 72% (30 participants) of those who responded said that this would prevent them from using refuges. Of the 21% (9 participants) who responded with a 'no,' 3 of them clarified that not being allowed to use

drugs and alcohol would not prevent from using refuges as they would do it anyway and if they got caught just deal with the consequences.

> Luke: Most refuges kick you out on the street, on your ass, because you're like...like me. I am dependent on weed, right, I have to have at least two or three bongs in, like, in the day...and if I go back there [to a refuge] with the two or three bongs that make me feel better – because I am dependent, right – they would kick me out on the fuckin' street. Because I need marijuana to live right. If I was running a refuge, right, I would let 'em come in if they were stoned man.

> Jake: They shouldn't be like 'you can't do this. You can't do that.' Cos, like, you can't just quit like that...I have never had workers ask like 'why ya doin' it.' [They] need to look at what's going on. 'What are the reasons you're doin' this? Why do you feel that you want to use drugs?' Like 'What can we do to support you, help you move on?' They need to forget about the drugs, it's about people.

Although there is a formal policy of no drugs or alcohol or turning up intoxicated, a few refuges are informally lenient, on a case-by-case basis. This cannot be formally recognised as their policies are often directed by the demands of funding bodies. Nonetheless, they are often more than aware that their residents are going 'walking' to get stoned and still let them back into the refuge. Despite the rules regarding alcohol and other drugs some refuges are good places to 'score' – to acquire drugs – and their clients are regularly getting stoned on the premises without the staff being aware.

The issue of drug and alcohol use, especially in refuges, is hard to separate from the issue of young people asserting their independence and ability or right to make choices. For homeless youth these acts of rebellion, defiance or independence, become a site of action and agency. Within the rigorous sets of rules and structures in place at a refuge there are not many other ways to enact agency other than by running away and breaking rules.

As seen at the beginning of the list of refuge rules provided above, refuges aim to provide "a functioning and safe house" for homeless young people and endeavour to prepare them for independent living. The structures, rules and expectations that are placed on these young people, the clients of the refuges, underscore these aims. Refuges do provide a site of relative stability. However, all too often the refuge is a site where the inculcated instability of homeless young people is highlighted. The ways in which homeless young people come to cope with the conditions of their homelessness does not sit comfortably within the rules and structures of the refuges. The need to feel in control, to stake a claim to the minute details of their lives, addressed extensively in Chapter Five, is often expressed in the domestic context of the refuge.

Sociality in a Refuge

Young people come into contact with other people who are experiencing similar conditions to their own in a refuge. Refuges become places where social networks are developed that are later used to find alternative accommodation once people move out of the service system. The unsettled state in which young people are living whilst in a refuge invariably leads to tension and conflict amongst the residents. The nominal unity of 'homeless youth' can hide the diverse social backgrounds that homeless young people come from.

Upon entry into a refuge some young people are confronted by the behaviour of the other residents. The stories of others' living conditions that led to their homelessness combined with the ambience of living with other homeless young people can lead to residents

reappraising the conditions which they have left. Some young people have returned home after finding the refuge experience too confronting. Conversely, other more seasoned homeless young people have left refuges as a consequence of feeling ostracised and alienated by residents who were new to homelessness and of feeling as though they were being looked down upon by young people from wealthier, more educated social milieu.

Homeless young people stress the importance of having other young people as a means of support. This emphasis on being with other people is addressed in Chapter Four, summarised in the strategy of relatedness. Young people feel that the significance of peer support and human interaction, most notably physical contact, becomes most obvious in the confines of a refuge. Whilst surrounded by their peers they are restricted by rules regarding physical contact, even to the extent of forbidding relationships. Rules restricting physical contact are seen as preventing them from obtaining something that they really need, as Michael sums up succinctly:

> Not being able to have relationships, that's bullshit. Like, if you have someone that you like heaps and you want to be with them. They can't stop you really. Especially in a situation like this you really yearn for affection and love. And if you get that off someone it really does help.

This quote came from a group interview with clients of a refuge, males and females. The interview was done in a closed room with no workers from the refuge present. After clarifying that the interview was confidential, and that I did not work for the refuge, the young people started to sit on each other's laps and lean on each other. The young people clarified after Michael's statement that they were not allowed to have physical contact with each other in the refuge. The interview provided an opportunity for these young people to

touch each other. They longed for physical contact, a tangible sign of support, caring and nurturing. Another young woman went on to express the importance of peer support: "Our greatest support is each other, from your friends. Services shouldn't stop that from happening. Don't say we can't do that."

Refuges become an important site for meeting other people who are unable to live at home and who are looking for alternative accommodation. Upon leaving a refuge the social networks that a young person has developed are often used to find alternative accommodation. This alternative accommodation usually takes the form of 'couch surfing.'

Part Three: Couch Surfing

Couch surfing refers to a person staying at someone else's accommodation, indicating the most frequent place to sleep, the couch.[30] It can involve staying with friends, family, acquaintances, or strangers. It can be a short, medium, or long term accommodation option – from one night to months – and vary tremendously in regards to stability, safety, and sustainability. Couch surfing is, of course, not actually restricted to sleeping on a couch: it can also involve sleeping on the floor, on a mattress or even in a spare room.

Staying with friends is seen as the most viable or favourable option for homeless young people aside from independent living. However, there is no security of accommodation for the couch surfer as he or she is not on a lease and, furthermore, the couch surfer's accommodation is generally insecure as it is contingent on maintaining relationships. Nonetheless, these arrangements can last for long periods of time and there is a blurry line, at best, between someone who is couch surfing and someone who is living with a friend or partner without being on the lease.

Whilst couch surfing can last for significant periods of time these arrangements usually do not last long, most commonly a matter of days. The pressure of being homeless does not dissipate enough for couch surfing to be easy for the host or the guest, with their

---

[30] 'Couch surfing' can also refer to an alternative method of travelling, akin to backpacking. In this sense couch surfing means staying with different people, in their homes to save money and to have access to locals. There are sites on the Internet where one can find places to stay and get hints at how to do it successfully. Despite a passing resemblance to couch surfing as a form of homelessness the most significant difference between these forms of couch surfing is at a phenomenological level. Knowing one has other options, choosing this practice as a form of leisure activity, and having somewhere else that you know of as 'home' makes this form of backpacking vastly different from homelessness.

circumstances impacting on the sustainability of the relationships and thus the accommodation itself. Couch surfing is dependent on the negotiation of sociality. The interaction between the host(s) and the guest(s) is a precariously balanced relationship upon which the accommodation is dependent.

Couch surfing is attractive to the guest for numerous reasons. When seen in light of the criteria used earlier to look at the choice of sites of the literal homeless, one can see that couch surfing can provide a relatively high level of comfort, safety, storage, and still allow one to be mobile. A couch, mattress or even the floor of someone's house is considerably more comfortable than even the best form of 'roughing it.' There is less anxiety about safety, and this allows one to sleep more easily. However, the safety and security of any couch surfing experience can vary dramatically. Most importantly, couch surfing provides companionship for both the guest and host; this is one of the most significant roles that it fulfils.

Couch surfing hosts can include friends, extended family, and strangers. Not all of these options are seen as viable to all homeless young people. As addressed in Chapter Two, many homeless young people do not know their extended family. Furthermore, those that do know extended family often avoid them, thinking that they will contact their parents and contribute to their difficult circumstances. Furthermore, often extended family members cannot offer support as they want to avoid being drawn into family conflicts, fearing they will be seen to be taking sides with the young person. It is important to highlight that some homeless young people do stay with extended family but it may not be couch surfing, as it

can be stable ongoing accommodation. For some young people staying with extended family prevents them from having to find alternative accommodation options, in short preventing homelessness.

Couch surfing is most frequently done with other young people who are living independently. In contrast to staying in a refuge, couch surfing with other young people is marked by the ability to exercise one's independence, or autonomy as it is referred to in Chapter Four. For some young people couch surfing with their peers is the first time that they have been able to have almost unrestrained autonomy. Couch surfing can initially be fun for both the guest(s) and host(s) as they enjoy the lack of rules and constraints. Although refuges generally offer a more reliable supply of food and the rules ensure a relatively tidy environment, young people readily exchange these apparent advantages for the freedom of couch surfing. However, this apparent freedom contributes to the instability and insecurity of couch surfing for the guest and can bring about the end of the accommodation for the host.

The initial excitement and enjoyment of couch surfing, for both the host(s) and guest(s), does not last long. The seemingly unrestrained autonomy of independent living becomes tiresome, especially for the host. The guest(s) contribute to the mess but rarely clean or tidy up. For the guest(s) there are no consequences for not paying bills, damaging the accommodation and its contents, or annoying the neighbours. However, the host(s) quickly starts to feel exploited. Letters of complaints and warnings from landlords fall solely on the formal tenants. The debts for unpaid rent and bills, similarly, are only the responsibility of

the tenant. More pointedly, staying with other homeless young people who have similar self-interested dispositions, encapsulated on the strategy of autonomy, can lead to a head-on collision between two separate parties both vying for what they believe to be in their own best interests. The guest(s) can perceive even reasonable requests by the host(s) as unreasonable. Couch surfing becomes an interesting diplomatic game of negotiating, deceiving and appeasing those around you – feeling indebted or obliged to others yet at the same time resenting what comes to feel like exploitation or abuse of power. When conflicts arise the guest can fall back on the tactic of mobility, leaving behind the troubles associated with couch surfing with a particular host. The two points of view provided below illustrate different perspectives of couch surfing, as host and guest.

Andrew: the host

After staying with a friend's family for a couple of weeks Andrew was accommodated in a one bedroom flat provided by a youth service in the southern suburb of Philip. He had stopped attending school as he found it too difficult to get organised in the mornings, get food ready and complete his homework whilst trying to live independently. Nonetheless, Andrew's friends would come to his house after school. Andrew's flat became a safe haven of sorts for other young people who could not or did not want to go home to their parents. This suited Andrew because, as he openly admitted to me when others were not around, he not only got very lonely but was also scared of his neighbours.

Andrew and his guests drank a lot of alcohol and started smoking marijuana in the early afternoons. His house became a popular place to 'hang out.' Andrew enjoyed being popular

for a little while until his neighbours started to complain about the noise levels, particularly in the stairwell. On one evening a guest of Andrew's, named Denis, started arguing with one of the other residents in the block of flats that lived on the ground floor. When Denis realised that he had actually been tempting fate with local small-time drug dealers he left Andrew's flat. Andrew was not only left with angry, dangerous neighbours but his flat was in disarray – no longer was his place a popular respite for other young people. Not feeling safe in his flat anymore Andrew left the apartment, burdened with debts for the damage to the flat, electricity and phone bills.

Denis: the guest

I met Denis at Andrew's house. Denis was a noticeably intelligent young man who was the son of a senior politician. His brother was in jail for drug-related offences and this gave Denis a strong reputation on the street (referred to as street capital in Chapter Five). Denis was unwelcome in his parents' home unless he obeyed their uncompromising rules. Like his brother before him, Denis was drawn to experimenting with alcohol and other drugs, in part as a way to test the boundaries with his parents, as he flaunted his drug use in front of them.

Denis was a welcome guest to Andrew's flat as Denis supplied marijuana and was popular with young women. At first Denis contributed to the house by cooking and paying for food. With Denis and other visitors hanging out at Andrew's flat it quickly fell into disrepair. Denis told me that he felt Andrew was exploiting him, benefiting from his reputation, not paying for marijuana and still expecting him to contribute to the house financially.

Walking up the stairs one evening to Andrew's flat Denis and a young female friend were mocked by neighbours sitting out the front of their ground floor apartment. Never one to let go an opportunity to show his quick wit and bolster his reputation, Denis told the neighbours they were "as useful to society as a cock flavoured lollipop." Denis' quip took a little time to take effect but shortly after Denis entered Andrew's flat the neighbours knocked at the door. Everyone in the flat went quiet and any posturing as a tough guy (referred to as a 'big man' in Chapter Five) was replaced with a desire to not get assaulted. After waiting until it was safe to leave, Denis and his friends left Andrew's apartment, never to return again.[31]

Some homeless young people stay with a friend's family. For example, Andrew moved in with his best friend Whitey's family when he needed to escape from his parents' home. Whitey moved between his mother and father's houses, as his parents were divorced. Andrew followed Whitey between these houses. Andrew slept on a mattress in Whitey's bedroom and kept his clothes in a bag. Despite Whitey's family supporting Andrew and providing stable accommodation, Andrew always felt out of place, as if he did not belong, and he moved out as soon as he found an alternative viable option.

Staying with another family usually provides a more stable and reliable form of couch surfing. Ironically, this stability can be unsettling for homeless young people. The stability of another family who are willing to be supportive provides a counterpoint to the families

---

[31] Andrew's resentment towards Denis did not last long as Denis died in a car crash a couple of weeks after these events.

that the homeless young people have left. This counterexample can be difficult to live with, causing anguish and frustration for the homeless young person who is reminded of what he or she lacks. Like the example of Andrew above, staying with a friend's family rarely lasts long as the homeless young person seeks more autonomy and feels out of place. Frequently the friend's family are only able to provide short-term accommodation and often assist their guest(s) in finding alternative accommodation. It is interesting to note that homeless young people who have been 'kicked out' of their family home for problematic behaviour, including crime and violence committed on their family, seem to not continue this behaviour at the friend's family home. Their 'problematic' behaviour may still continue, and usually does, but it is not done at the home of their friend's family.

Couch surfing also includes being accommodated by strangers. This may include 'crashing' at the accommodation of someone who one has just met, with no sexual involvement. However, couch surfing can entail having sex in return for accommodation.[32] Some young women involved in this research had been sexually assaulted by their host, or other guests of the host, who sometimes considered it a form of payment. Some homeless youth become involved in what appear to be expedient or convenient relationships in order to obtain accommodation. Upon reflection some homeless young people identify that past relationships were indeed founded on the need for accommodation. Partner choice can be seen as a strategic decision, finding a partner who offers more than just companionship, but also protection, money, status, and/or accommodation.

---

[32] My structured interviews revealed that of the 25 people who were interviewed 11 knew people who had had sex for accommodation. It was interesting to note that all of the female respondents knew of people who had sex for accommodation, while all but one male did not.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

Tash used couch surfing almost exclusively for accommodation, relying on a range of hosts. The following account demonstrates how she utilised numerous couch surfing options and even had a crisis couch surfing option that she used when other options failed.

Tash never stayed long with any host(s) as she did not want to become too indebted or overstay her welcome. Tash rarely stayed with anyone for more than two nights in a row. She was very well known by other homeless young people and used her social networks to acquire temporary accommodation. Having a boyfriend or girlfriend, or several, provided Tash with more options for couch surfing. However, on occasions Tash's social networks would collapse. One such instance occurred when it became apparent to her social networks that she had several sexual partners who became aware of each other. Conflict ensued between Tash and many of the people she had previously relied on, ultimately resulting in her being assaulted by another young woman. Onlookers called an ambulance but did not offer any other assistance. Unable to call on any of her friends Tash called me from the hospital. It was 11:30 at night when she called and explained how she had a broken jaw and was stuck at the hospital. When I got to the hospital Tash was waiting out the front of the emergency department, looking the same as ever, except a bit swollen in the face and with a black eye (not the first time I had seen her with a black eye) and a fat bloody lip that she dabbed with a tissue. She got in the car and thanked me immediately. She explained her predicament. I asked her where she was staying that night. Tash asked me to take her to Kanangara Court, a housing complex just out of the city. I asked again if she had somewhere 'safe' to stay, after all she did have a possible broken jaw. She said that she

thought she could stay with 'Aunty.' As it turned out Aunty was Tash's crisis couch surfing option.

Aunty was an Indigenous woman who lived with her partner in a bedsit (a flat with one all-purpose room with an attached bathroom and kitchen) in Kanangra Court. Tash said that if she had a spare spot in her flat she could stay there. We got to Kanangra Court and I went with Tash to Auntie's place. Tash wanted to introduce me. We walked into the block of flats. Aunty lived on the ground floor. We knocked on the door and an obviously stoned woman answered the door:

"Sister Girl [referring to Tash]. What has happened to you?"

"I got my jaw broken."

"Come in, come in."

I introduced myself to Aunty and she thanked me for bringing 'Sister Girl' back to her place. Auntie's place was the cleanest flat I had ever seen in Kanangra Court, which is not really saying much. A tall skinny white male who was sitting in the corner stood up as Tash and I walked in.

"Hey what happened?" he asked.

"Broken Jaw." Tash replied.

Aunty introduced me to her partner. They had both been sitting on the couch watching TV. On their coffee table was a bong and a huge bottle of port.

Tash told her story and explained how I had picked her up. Aunty and her partner thanked me. I thanked them for looking after Tash and they said that she was always welcome.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

Aunty explained how she looked after "young folk" who needed help but they "didn't have much. We don't even have a spare bed, they have to sleep on the floor or on the couch." Aunty told me how she had no children of her own so she looked after young people whenever she could.

The financial costs of couch surfing are hard to measure, but can range from minimal to very high. Costs are hard to calculate as there is often an informal deal whereby the guest is expected to contribute to food, drink, bills and rent where possible and appropriate, although this is always open to negotiation. This informal debt system can end up being more expensive than when a pseudo rent or board has changed hands. Supplying alcohol or pot for an evening's binge, or buying pizza as a sign of thanks, are examples of informal payment. The feeling of exploitation on the part of the host and/or guest is frequently the cause (or excuse) for these arrangements to end. In other circumstances a formal rent and a strict percentage split of the bills is put into place; this is less likely to lead to a feeling of exploitation. However, the feeling of being out of place, of being in someone else's space, is one of the most significant factors that contribute to couch surfing being a short-term option.

Couch surfing is the most desirable form of temporary or crisis accommodation even though it is considered less than ideal. While the material conditions are comparatively comfortable there is a general sense of 'treading on peoples' toes,' of being out of place. This sense of being in other people's way contributes to the already unstable and insecure conditions that these young people find themselves in. Always being in someone else's

space, not quite belonging or fitting in, being in debt or owing their host(s) something contributes to couch surfing not lasting long.

In some instances couch surfing can last for long periods of time. The line between couch surfing and living together is tenuous. Couch surfing can act as a trial period, as both the guest and host see what the other is like to live with. However, I have never seen a couch surfing arrangement last longer than a month unless there was a romantic relationship involved.[33] Although not on the lease or not 'your place' some people live with friends for a long time. This happens frequently in romantic relationships. This can be a helpful strategy as in public housing rent is determined by the number of people in a residence and their respective incomes. If only one person is on the lease then the total rent, when shared, is obviously much less than doing such things legitimately.

Even the most stable and reliable couch surfing experiences are underscored by instability. The sense of instability, uncertainty and the perceived need to assess other viable options pervades couch surfing as the guest is constantly reminded that they are not in 'their place.' As was seen above with Andrew, even the relative stability of a couch surfing option can contribute to a sense of uneasiness – even stability can be destabilising. Ultimately all homeless young people are looking for a place of their own – a place where they do not feel out of place. When homeless young people move into independent living many of them become hosts for couch surfing friends.

---

[33] It is interesting to note that couch surfing arrangements seem to last longer for Aboriginal young people. This may be due to a greater sense of obligation and norms of reciprocity within the Aboriginal community.

Part Four: Independent Living: the housed but homeless

For homeless young people independent living is usually seen as the ideal accommodation option. To obtain housing through ACT housing, community housing, supported accommodation (SAAP funded organisations), or private rental is considered by most young people as the end of homelessness. However, this is often the other end of the spectrum of homelessness: the precariously or marginally housed, the housed but homeless. The demands of independent living often lead to attempts failing as homeless youth often lack the support or skills needed to sustain independent living. Most significantly however, homeless youth bring with them many of the conditions that make their lives difficult. Moreover, the lessons learnt from past attempts to 'get it together' often leave young people with debts to accompany their failure. Debts with ACT Housing, Centrelink, phone and other services often present as impediments to trying again. There are only a limited number of options for housing in a market where private renting is available only to those with a substantial and steady income and where landlords can choose their tenants.

The pool of housing available to people on low incomes in Canberra is poor, relative to the expectations and norms of the community. This is reflected in the views of homeless youth who do not sit outside of these expectations or lack knowledge of how others live. Whilst many people confronted with homelessness will take whatever accommodation they can get, homeless young people will often reject accommodation options presented to them if they do not meet their expectations or hopes. However, as the waiting lists get longer and other viable options become less viable, the likelihood of people turning down the accommodation offered to them reduces.

The usual accommodation available for homeless young people on the public housing list,[34] or through community housing or SAAP organisations, is in housing complexes: blocks of flats, semi-detached houses nestled together in blocks. Bed-sits, one and two bedroom flats are the most common. The less desirable the accommodation the more frequent the turnover of occupants and therefore the more likely it is to be presented to someone who needs accommodation urgently. A higher turnover usually means that both the blocks and the individual units are in poor condition.[35] The general state of these housing blocks/estates is rundown. Perhaps more significantly, the reputation and the ambience of these places are unmistakably hostile. The following description of Wiltshire Flats would fit numerous housing complexes and illustrates the kind of conditions that most homeless young people move into as they try to transition out of homelessness.

Wiltshire Flats

Wiltshire Flats (not the real name) are accessed by car via a side street yet they face onto Northbourne Avenue, a major road that one drives down as one enters the city of Canberra. These flats are often referred to as the Northbourne Flats, despite there actually being a group of flats specifically named as such. All of the flats on Northbourne Avenue – the public housing, not the new expensive looking creations – have a bad reputation: the closer to Civic (city centre), the worse the reputation. People driving into Canberra from out of town take note of these flats, expressing dismay at the standard of housing. While they look

---

[34] The public housing list refers to the waiting list for accommodation through ACT Housing.
[35] It is unclear whether the flats are undesirable because of the high turnover, or if there is a high turnover because they are undesirable, or both.

poor from the main road, when accessed from the back streets their poor condition is even more evident.

Wiltshire Flats is one of the most readily accessible housing complexes in Canberra as it has a high turnover and most people reject it. Usually only those with few options take these flats, i.e. people released from jail, the homeless, or those that are unfamiliar with their reputation. A high turnover results in dirty and run down flats. Furthermore, the vacant flats often contain squatters who use the flats until someone else moves in.

It is common knowledge in certain circles that if you want to buy or sell stolen goods or drugs then Wiltshire Flats or other similar complexes are a good place to go.[36] But sometimes people are unsure of which flat to go to, or a little disoriented or confused about which block or number they went to last time. This means that people often wander around – sometimes quite 'strung out'– and ask people covert questions or guess which door to knock on. All of these factors result in residents being nervous and anxious about other people in the complex. A knock on the door can be a scary prospect. A stranger wandering around, even someone that lives in the block could potentially be a threat. Even those people who are there to score or sell goods are hesitant about other people they see around. Almost anyone is a potential threat – and for these reasons everyone is similarly a potential

---

[36] Covert transactions and deals seem to be perpetual. Just recently the police have been doing raids on flats (the one at Wiltshire Flats was in the news) and seizing large amounts of drugs and stolen goods.

victim.[37] Even for those who are unaware of Wiltshire Flats' reputation it does not take long to understand that this place is 'a bit dodgy.'

The reputation of any given housing complex changes over time. Criminal activity and drug use are the two interrelated factors that most profoundly affect the reputation of a complex. One drug dealer moving into a block of flats can have an incredible impact on the amount of visitors and the ensuing violence, noise, crime and, after a period of time, police presence. During one period many of the young people I knew who lived in a housing complex similar to Wiltshire Flats did not feel safe leaving their flats. Within a 24-hour period four people were assaulted while walking between the blocks. After the police were called the perpetrators went through the blocks and knocked on doors and either verbally or physically assaulted anyone who answered their door as retribution for the police involvement.

Wiltshire Flats are accessed via Wiltshire Avenue. There is nothing on Wiltshire Avenue apart from these flats and the back fences of other houses. There are five blocks (Block A, B, C etc.). Between the blocks are carports, filled with broken down cars, discarded broken furniture and white goods.

Although there are always some people living very publicly – arguing in public, drinking, meeting, eating etc. – there are those people who don't leave their flats unless they really

---

[37] 'The scary' are almost always the most 'scared.' Those who commit violent acts and crime are more acutely aware of the frequency of these events. Furthermore, people cope with their fear by 'striking first,' to ensure they are not the victim.

have to, trying their hardest to be invisible. People of all ages are scared of their neighbours, and often with good reason. Young people moving into public housing, especially the more notorious flats, are often advised to keep to themselves by their youth workers and avoid becoming enmeshed in the local 'community'. This is hard as the inevitable 'interview' (an analytical term similar to the 'street interview' outlined in Chapter Four) occurs not only outside the flats, and in the stairwell, but the neighbours come to the door. Asking for smokes, or an impassioned plea from a fleeing or scared girlfriend seem to invariably get residents involved in the internal politics of the flats. Even keeping to oneself can make one a target for robbery as people know everyone's 'ins and outs' without even trying – it doesn't take an attentive and experienced criminal to know when your neighbour has left for the day.

There always seems to be some kind of activity between the blocks of flats. Often music is blaring from one of the flats. It can be noisy both day and night. A knock on someone else's door can be mistaken for a knock on your own as they are so close together and poorly insulated for sound. You can hear other people talking, opening doors and flushing their toilets. Arguments, conflicts, fights, and arrests invariably become quite public. These events often spill out into the open where most of the residents can hear if not see the commotion.

The following example describes my introduction to Miles and his living conditions in Wiltshire Flats. This description provides an illustration of how many homeless young people live when they move into independent accommodation.

I drive in with Ed, a youth worker, and park in the parking bay allotted to Miles' flat. There is about a dozen other parking spots but with only three other cars, only one of which is vaguely road worthy, the other two with doors or wheels missing and bonnets open. Apart from the cars there is an assortment of broken furniture, car parts and even a punching bag hanging from the rafters of the carport. Next to the parking bays is an industrial sized bin that is filled to capacity, spilling over with refuse and larger items propped up next to the bin.

Miles lives in block C. Each block looks the same, four flats across, three stories high with three stairwells. Each flat has a small balcony and large windows. The flats on the ground floor do not have a balcony but open out to a small grassy area. Some residents have laid claim to the grass by cordoning it off with furniture, pot plants and/or rubbish. There is a group of three people, two men and a woman, who all appear to be in their late thirties, sitting on the grassy area in deck chairs, drinking, chatting and smoking. They have a young dog with them. Despite their surly and rough appearance they seem friendly as I initiate a conversation about their dog.

I go up the stairwell with Ed to Miles' flat. The stairwell is quite clean. There is a dry, dusty smell in the stairwell, reminiscent of bad body odour, with a hint of vomit. Some of the doors to the flats have graffiti on them and or a broken fly screen hanging loosely from its hinges. Miles is on the top floor. We knock on his door. A tall, skinny, worn looking young man with long tangled hair opens the door. "Hey man, how you doin'? Is everything ok in

the flat?" says Ed. Miles steps back, opening the fly screen with his left arm welcoming us to come in.

"Hey Ed. Yeah, it's ok."

What was a vague smell of body odour is very strong as I walk into Miles' flat, now mixed with the smell of a dog, cigarettes, and the smell of a warm, damp rubbish bin.

Ed and I walk in, greeted by a dark chocolate coloured puppy sniffing at our feet. I have the seemingly mandatory introductory dog conversation whilst I squat down to meet the dog.

"What is it?"

"Don't know. Did you see that one down stairs? That's his brother. I know he got rotty [Rottweiler] in him. See, look at the head"

Miles' flat has one bedroom which comes off the main living area which is a lounge/dining area with a kitchen that is cordoned off by a small wall. This entire living area is about five by five meters. A small balcony, about two square meters, enough for a chair and a small pot plant (with a dead plant) is accessible from the lounge room. The bathroom is next to the bedroom and is nearly completely bare, no shampoo, soap or even towels, just a tube of toothpaste left open, a dishevelled toothbrush, and empty rolls of toilet paper on the floor. There is carpet in the main living area, marked and stained from previous tenants. The kitchen has room for a fridge, a single sink and an electric oven and cook top that sits on the kitchen counter. The windows are quite large and let in a lot of natural light. Whilst the windows let in light, unless sufficiently covered, they also make the residents very visible, especially at night-time. Given the expense of curtains, old sheets or cloths are often draped

over the windows, held in place by tacks or nails. Whilst these can give a bit more privacy they are unable to prevent light from coming into the room in the early morning. At these flats you will rarely see blinds or curtains that are anything other than makeshift.

Miles' flat is an amazing mess. The fly screens for the windows and door to the balcony are buckled, on the floor resting against the walls. His dirty broken furniture is covered in empty food packets, dog food and random stuff. The floor is scattered with dog food, advertising material, and more rubbish – when a mess gets to certain size individual items seem to disappear and become an amorphous entity. Amongst the mess on the floor and on his coffee table are numerous knives and makeshift weapons. There is a small TV and an old Nintendo – another important part of every young person's flat. Like many other young people living independently, Miles spends most of his time in the lounge room, lying on the sunken couch which is also used as a bed. Often the lounge is where he sleeps, in front of the TV. If not Miles then a friend or surrogate house mate/couch surfer resides here.

The adjoining kitchen is full of even more rubbish. The sink and bench space (of which there is very little) is covered with dirty plates, glasses, empty bottles and rotting food scraps. What draws my attention is the plate on top of the pile that is full of food and what looks like a thick carpet of mould and perhaps maggots. I think this is the source of the smell, however I suspect amongst the human mess is the dog's mess to add to the bouquet.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

Ed introduces Miles to me. He seems pleased to have visitors and keen to talk. Ed talks about the mess and the need for him to clean up or he will get sick. "I am serious man. You will get sick."

I ask him whether he likes it here. He says "No. It's shit"

"Do you feel safe? I know another guy a few blocks up who lives on the ground floor who keeps getting broken into and doesn't leave his flat. Top floor is better though, hey?"

"Nah. It's shit up here too. I want to get out of this place. I don't feel safe at all man."

This starts Ed and Miles talking about his request to be moved to another location. They have put in a transfer request but these are famously slow if possible at all. Miles says that the local housing manager was going to come around and talk to him. "Then you better clean up man or they aren't going to move you." Miles agrees, half laughing, seeming almost proud of his defiant mess. He jokes that he has tidied up – at least it seems like a joke.

I talk to Miles about my research and he is keen to be involved. He likes the idea of me not being a worker, not telling him to do stuff and not passing on any information. He talks about the blurry line between stories that are lies and the truth and that even he gets unsure after telling the same stories for some time – again, I think he is kind of joking.

I talk to him about the knife on the floor. It is a hunting knife about ten inches long with a scabbard near it on the floor.

"Is that sharp?"

"Nah. But it would still go through your rib cage"

"A butter knife would too, though hey?"

"No shit. I was throwing a butter knife the other day in me room and it went straight into the door"[38]

This story is conveyed with a big smile on his face – is it a true one? He goes into detail about the hole in the door and the techniques used to throw the knife. There are numerous makeshift weapons and knives throughout the flat. Again, these items seem to be another necessary part of the homeless young man's accommodation. Living with a mixture of fear, violence, anger, frustration and a great deal of insecurity, young people often arm themselves, providing at least a symbolic gesture of security and expressing their felt need to look after themselves.

The move to independent living rarely provides much improved security or stability to the lives of homeless young people. The initial excitement of being independent is typically reveled in by staying up late, sleeping on the couch, having friends over, getting drunk and/or stoned and not doing any chores. Yet as the surrounding environment, most notably one's neighbours, starts to sink in, and as the flat slowly becomes increasingly untidy the feeling of independence gives way to a feeling of isolation. The chaos and instability of their new living conditions, of which they perceive themselves to be the authors, weighs down on these young people and becomes the breeding ground for depression and frustration. The move into independent accommodation is not the panacea to the living conditions of homelessness that many young people hope it will be. Whilst some young

---

[38] Whilst this story seems to exemplify his musing about the blurry line between fiction and fact, knife holes in doors and walls are common in these flats. The first time I saw these marks in a door I did not know what they were until a young person explained it to me. Since then I have noticed that they seem to be wherever a young man has been accommodated. Similarly, fist dents or marks in walls and doors are often found.

people obtain better housing in safer locations they are still faced with more mundane yet significant day-to-day challenges to maintaining their housing.

Living Skills

The term 'living skills' is used by the service sector to refer to the skills that it believes homeless young people need to transition into independent living. Living skills training has become a seemingly self-evident necessity within the services that work with homeless young people. Living skills training encompasses a range of models, methods and toolkits that aim to encourage *self-sufficiency* through assorted experimental and didactic programming delivered at various times throughout a young person's transition into independence (Propp et al. 2003:259). These skills are a range of attributes that aim to help a young person to maintain aspects of independent living.

The term 'living skills' does not recognise the diverse sets of skills and attributes that are used by homeless young people that are intimately linked to the conditions of their lives. The notion of 'living skills' imposes a sense of legitimate or proper sets of skills that are recognised as such, as opposed to the skills that homeless youth have acquired. The 'living skills' discourse creates the impression that some attributes qualify as skills and others do not. Consequently, the skills and attributes of homeless youth and the demands of their lives to which those skills are linked are often misrecognised by service providers. The following quotes demonstrate how homeless youth acknowledge that they have different sets of skills that are not recognised within the living skills discourse: "I have the skills to get drugs and not get bashed. They are the skills you need around here"; "Just staying alive

is a pretty good skill"; and, "I have the skills to live rough but not in the outside world. I live in a different world."

Living skills training rarely takes into account the conditions in which these young people live. As mentioned above, some homeless youth suggest that they do have adequate living skills but their living conditions do not allow them to use these skills. However, it becomes evident that the vast majority of homeless youth do indeed lack skills needed to sustain independent living. The strategies and tactics used to survive in other forms of homelessness continue to be relied upon in independent housing that ultimately undermine the security of their accommodation.

Existing living skills training toolkits and models outline a huge array of skill sets that come under the notion of living skills training. The following list of skill sets have been included in different models and conceptualisations of living skills: cooking, cleaning, budgeting and money matters, health (including 'alcohol and other drug' training and mental health), sexual health, personal hygiene, social development, personal development, education and employment, tenancy and accommodation, accessing and using government and non-government organisations, and parenting skills and support. These skill sets are sometimes referred to by different names and rarely are all of these included in any one model of living skills training. Nonetheless, this list provides an overview of the wide range of areas that can be included in living skills training.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

The skills necessary to sustain 'independent living' become obvious when one encounters young people who seemingly lack even the most taken-for-granted living skills. While there are skills that immediately and explicitly have an impact on the longevity and standard of living independently, such as continuing to pay rent and not 'trashing' the place, there are a myriad of other factors that contribute to making the lives of these young people difficult. Living in a messy flat, diet (quantity and quality of food) and the collateral damage of friends and associates staying at your place (both psychological and material), all combine to make living independently difficult.

There are obvious skills pertaining to finances that are needed to live independently, the most immediate of which is paying rent and bills, without which the accommodation cannot be sustained. An income of some sort is thereby essential. However, even though rent in public and community housing is calculated as a proportion of one's official income, usually one-third, rent is often not prioritised on a budget, to use the term lightly. Paying certain bills or debts can be delayed more easily than others without there being an immediate felt impact. What gets priority can change from pay packet to pay packet, depending on the pressing demands. Repaying friends that have been relied upon can be more urgent than a utilities bill, food shopping or the rent. Moreover, the need for alcohol and other drugs can provide a pressing demand that can supersede the need for almost anything else. Many young people suggest that, despite first impressions, they have become very good at managing with the meagre income they have at their disposal, a point Rebecca summed up succinctly: "I can live on nothing, just not very well." Rebecca suggested that if

she had enough money to pay her bills and buy some food she was lucky: "When you got no money budgeting skills don't mean shit."

When moving into independent accommodation homeless young people are still overwhelmingly dependent on social security payments. Thus, the income that is available to these young people is minimal. Finding or maintaining employment whilst in independent living is difficult. One has to find appropriate clothing for work, let alone for interviews, and keep the clothes clean. The financial reward for doing a day's work is set against the money that can be acquired by alternative means – both legal and otherwise. However, the most significant impediment to sustaining employment – and this is true for education and training as well – is that one's peers are rarely encouraging (see 'downward levelling norms,' Chapter Two). Rather, upon returning home from work, one often finds friends sitting around, having done little all day. Employment can start to ostracise the young person from their peers. This is often set against the feeling that the culture of a work place and one's colleagues are foreign, leaving a feeling of neither fitting in at the workplace nor with one's peers. It is all too easy for a homeless young person to leave their employment, or get fired for not turning up, and return to the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed.

Cleanliness and hygiene are another issue that seems far from significant in the lives of young people in independent living. Standards and expectations regarding cleanliness and hygiene are often a continuation of past norms and conditioning from the family home and through their history of homelessness – conditioned to perhaps not see, let alone act on

what many would see as an astounding mess. However, many homeless young people are ashamed of the state of their accommodation. Nearly all interviews recorded during my research that were done at young people's accommodation began with an apology by the young person for the state of the house, seemingly waiting for the recording to start to make sure it is 'on the record'. Thus, I am not implying that these homeless young people are not house-proud. Sometimes it is an issue of not much time spent at home, over-crowding or simply lacking the knowledge of what to do, where to start, and knowing that when their place is clean and tidy it may still not live up to their hopes. The lack of enthusiasm to clean or tidy the house can also be laziness that is hard to extricate from mental health issues, most evidently depression. Yet the cycle of lack of motivation to clean, and the task getting larger by the week, further contributes to the depression to which their surroundings become a multiplying factor.

Some homeless young people suggest that their unkempt living conditions, lack of personal hygiene, or poor health while living in independent accommodation is not simply a case of the absence of living skills. These homeless young people were adamant that they had many of these living skills but the conditions in which they lived made it very difficult to put these skills into practice. For example, inadequate cooking facilities stood out as an issue that contributed to young people not cooking. It would indeed be a challenge for the most experienced chef to cook on the small electric stoves that are provided in most public housing let alone the need for having the necessary cooking paraphernalia: pots, pans, knives, plates, bowls etc. However, despite the claims of a few homeless youth who

believed they had the skills, the overwhelming majority of homeless young people acknowledged that they lacked skills specific to the demands of independent living.

Perhaps the most overwhelming and striking challenge to living independently that affects homeless youth is the fear and anxiety associated with living in some public housing complexes. One young woman explained how she and her friends were too scared to take their rubbish to the bin outside, check their mailbox and would not use the clothesline to hang their clothes out to dry: "[We] are put in the wrong environments to expect to look after ourselves. These places are hardcore for anyone let alone some kid who is homeless." This fear and anxiety, along with the pervasive sense of loneliness, is often addressed by bringing friends into one's accommodation, an expression of the strategy of relatedness. However, with these guests invariably comes an increase in noise and mess that can jeopardise the longevity of the host's tenancy.

The feelings associated with struggling to keep the house in order, balancing bills, eating, cleaning and often being afraid of one's neighbours, culminate in some homeless young people choosing to leave their accommodation as it is too emotionally and psychologically draining. The sense of freedom from the difficulties of independent housing that comes with other forms of homelessness becomes familiar and comfortable: to some the burden of responsibility attached to independent living can be too much.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

Abandoning flats

Often homeless young people attempting to transition out of homelessness into independent living abandon their accommodation, not feeling safe and not wanting to put up with this standard of living despite the alternatives being seemingly less stable, secure or safe. Again, this provides an insight into how difficult the conditions of independent living can be for some who would prefer to be back on the streets or couch surfing, relying on mobility as a way to cope, as outlined in Chapter Two. However, instead of informing the landlord that they have moved out homeless youth often just leave, thinking that ceasing payment of their rent is sufficient. This often gets them into a cycle of debts as they accumulate unpaid rent. Moreover, sometimes the keys are passed onto friends to use the flat, and these invariably 'trash the place,' further adding to the debt. If not with the person's consent then people often break in and stay there. There is a danger in turning up to someone's flat to visit someone and find other people there who know they have done something wrong, and often the only escape route is the front door or the balcony.

Eviction from ACT Housing, community housing and SAAP independent accommodation is rare. I am aware of numerous instances where young people have not been paying rent, damaging the property, and causing distress and sometime harm to neighbours yet the landlords have struggled, despite their best efforts, to evict the young person. There are protracted processes that need to be adhered to for someone to be evicted. Some young people are asked to leave their accommodation and do so before being formally evicted. Other homeless young people remain in their accommodation and take advantage of the difficulties landlords face in evicting them. However, the anticipation that they are going to

192

be evicted, more than the actual threat of eviction, leads to homeless young people pre-emptively abandoning their accommodation.

Once ACT Housing, or whoever the landlord is, discovers the tenant/young person has moved out the damage bill is tallied. This combines with the rent due to debts often reaching into the thousands. This starts or continues the cycle of housing problems that contribute to homelessness and also to the 'bed-sit circuit' (addressed below). Unable and often unwilling to pay these debts these people are then unable to ever use these services again, cutting them off from the already meagre amount of affordable housing options, leaving them little option as to where to stay. This also happens with utility services, accumulating electricity or phone bills preventing these young people from ever using these services again legitimately, unless they service the debts.

The 'bed-sit circuit'

The 'bed-sit circuit' (an analytical category not a folk category) refers to the ongoing cycle of support or reciprocity that is used by young people to continue to have access to dwellings. When a young person gets offered accommodation through ACT Housing or a supported accommodation service they will move in and their friends will come with them 'couch surfing'. Whilst only one person is on the lease the rent is minimal as it is calculated as a percentage of the income of those who are formal residents. All of the young people make contributions to the person on the lease, which can include: paying rent/board, paying for food occasionally, supplying drugs or alcohol etc (as addressed above in 'couch surfing'). Sometimes other services are tacitly used as payment, such as protection, status

by associating with someone who has a strong reputation, and sometimes sexual favours. These arrangements are rarely formally or consciously recognised as such, by either party. Although these arrangements can make life easier in the short-term for those people on the lease and their unofficial housemates – reducing costs, supporting each other and providing much needed company – these arrangements severely jeopardize the longevity of the tenancy. Complaints from neighbours regarding noise, break-ins, and general 'wear and tear' multiplied by the number of 'guests,' add to the likelihood of being evicted and multiplying the difficulty of sustainable housing. Almost inevitably, the young people abandon the accommodation when it all gets too much, falling back on the practice of mobility. However, by the time they leave this accommodation someone else whom they have helped with accommodation has often found housing, and they can unofficially call on the debt, moving in as one of the unofficial tenants. This cycle or circuit can keep people 'housed' for significantly long periods of time, as new people with a clean slate (no records with ACT Housing, other accommodation or utility services) can be relied on as a 'name' on a lease or service. However, the accommodation is usually only reliably available to the person on the lease, as the contingencies of couch surfing make it only sporadically available to the guests. It is best to have more than one person/place you can call on when temporary couch surfing expires – when one's housing credits have expired with one person, call on someone else. However, there are inevitably gaps between housing options that require these young people to find other viable options.

Housed but Homeless: Unstable Stability, Stable Instability

The relative stability of independent living entails not having to continually look for alternative accommodation options. Unlike couch surfing and sleeping rough the housed but homeless are relatively free from the daily chores of finding a place to store belongings or find alternative accommodation. Moreover, to acquire the housing in the first place entails that one has secured a relatively stable income, if only through social security. However, independent living limits the mobility that homeless young people often rely upon as one of their key survival strategies and manifestations of their independence. Rather than finding safety in this secure accommodation, many young people find this stability unnerving and ironically feel insecure. This is not only due to the condition of the housing that they are put into but also because of the deeply ingrained sense of instability that has been inculcated into homeless young people. Thus, looking for other viable options and the strategy of mobility still underscore the conditions of homeless young people when they move into independent housing. The examples of Marty and Luke highlight how the instability of homelessness can pervade the relative stability of independent housing, making them the housed but homeless.

Marty, a relatively stable 23 year old who had been housed for nearly two years, lived in a two-bedroom house with his partner Jess and their newborn baby boy. Marty continued to find it difficult to get work and remained unemployed. Their house stayed tidy, they ate regularly and developed a stable routine. This stability became unnerving for Marty. In a conversation he mentioned how the experience of years of homelessness still affects his daily life:

> Starting to feel the other fears now. About people breaking into the house and the fears of getting kicked out by the government and getting evicted. Fears of people breaking into my house now. I get like paranoid sometimes at night. Cos, I used to do it, man. I know it can happen. Most people you meet if you ask them 'would you expect your house to get broken into' or like, 'do you expect to get home invaded' most people would say nup, but it can happen.

Marty always felt his housing was potentially under threat from old 'associates,' his unstable income, or ACT Housing kicking him out for some unknown reason. However, none of these things undermined his stability. Rather, Marty's pervasive sense that his current living conditions were "too good to last" and what seemed like boredom and frustration with his new life led him back to the streets.

Marty began using methamphetamines and staying out late with old associates. He would not come home for days and returned to doing crime to get money for his alcohol and other drugs. Both Jess and Marty knew that he was finding his new stable living conditions difficult after years of living from moment to moment, a life precariously balanced between survival, jail, rehabilitation, hospital and the extreme highs he got from both drugs and crime.

For Marty and other young people who have adapted to the conditions of homelessness the stability of independent living is ironically unsettling. This adds insight to the seemingly self-destructive sabotaging of one's life when things seem to be going on track. For some young people there is a safety and familiarity in instability or mobility: 'unstable stability' or 'stable instability.' For Marty it was a case of 'better the devil you know.'

Luke lived in foster homes on and off since he was very young – he is unsure of when it started. From his perspective he first became homeless at the age of thirteen. He considers his mother's alcohol abuse as the main reason for becoming homeless, despite his father being "a junkie" and absent from Luke's life since he was little, often in jail: "My mum was an alcoholic and I didn't want to live with her. So I went out and done crime and supported myself."

When Luke turned sixteen Family Services (Care and Protection) referred him onto a supported accommodation service. Prior to this he had been oscillating between foster homes, juvenile detention, living on the street, refuges, and couch surfing. Luke was moved into independent accommodation supported by an outreach service that leased the flat to him. Many of his friends, associates and "co-offenders" would spend the days and some nights at Luke's place. Even when he was accommodated he told me: "I still don't feel like it is gonna last, I don't think of myself as homeless now but I am always under threat of losing my accommodation"

Luke was put into a flat in a suburb, as the service that accommodated him was keen to keep him away from the more notorious housing complexes afraid that he would become embroiled in the criminal and drug culture. However, with constant guests Luke's flat started to get 'trashed.' Luke and his friends kept on making too much noise, leaving broken down cars in the driveway and the more urbane neighbours made complaints.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

When things got too difficult and the debts mounted, Luke left the accommodation to move

to other options:

> I feel a little bit bad and all that because they [outreach service] have helped
> me out as best they could and then I leave the place fucked. I can see how they
> would feel. I would feel better if I could pay them back but I got other debts
> too that seem more urgent, you know. I got a debt with housing for my old
> place, I owe them like a thousand bucks. And I owe [a phone company] a
> thousand bucks too. Last week they reckon I had 72 hours to pay a thousand
> bucks. I just went [mimes ripping up the notice/bill] and put it in the bin.

Both Luke and Marty are emblematic of the 'housed but homeless' or the marginally

housed. The instability and uncertainty characteristic of their homelessness continues into

their attempts to live in independent accommodation. Yet, despite the difficulties of living

independently it is important to stress all the homeless young people involved in my

research unanimously considered independent living the best option and invariably the

most significant step towards moving out of homelessness.[39] Even Marty states that he

would like to try again, hoping to learn from his past attempts and is in no way resigned to

homelessness. Luke finds it difficult to find legitimate accommodation options as his debts

and 'burnt bridges' with alternative accommodation services severely limit his options.

However, he still aspires to live independently and believes that he has learnt lessons from

his previous attempts:

> I am remorseful[40] that I fucked it up. I know they [his youth workers] were
> trying to help me out but I just fucked it. I don't know if it could have been
> any different. But now, you know, I just, I would try and do it differently.

---

[39] This may seem to contradict my above statements regarding people choosing to leave their housing as it
becomes too difficult. However, these events are often not articulated or accounted for, their subjective
attribution different from mine. Moreover, despite the difficulties involved in independent living it is still seen
by those that have 'tried and failed' as the best option, wanting to try it again, hoping to learn from their past
trials.
[40] 'Remorseful' and 'co-offender' (shortened to co-ey) are two terms that Luke has acquired from his
numerous appearances in court. These terms have become part of the vernacular of Luke and those that
associate with him.

Despite the difficulties faced by homeless young people attempting to live independently, for some the relative stability of this accommodation allowed a distance from the urgency demanded by other forms of homelessness that permitted them to make other changes in their life. After several attempts at independent living and experiencing literal homelessness, couch surfing, and numerous refuges, Rachel started to feel as though she was feeling secure in her new living conditions. Rachel maintains that stable accommodation provided the initial conditions that allowed her to "get off the drugs" and go back to school, able to plan for her future and not be completely absorbed by her immediate conditions.

> I am now stable and every morning I don't wake up thinking 'where am I going to sleep tonight' like I know where I am going to sleep. That is all that matters to me. Yeah, like I could have...I mean, I want stuff but as long as I have a roof and my bed that is all I have wanted for the last seven years of my life, that is all I have wanted, and now I got it.

Independent living is a form of homelessness for several reasons. Having a relatively reliable place to reside does have many benefits, such as: having a place to sleep, store belongings, cook, wash, having an address for mail. However, as illustrated above, the accommodation that is available to young people attempting to transition out of homelessness presents an array of challenges that more often than not reinforces insecurity and uncertainty in a new setting. Even stable and secure accommodation can be undercut by the internalised strategies, skills and attributes that these young people have acquired during their homelessness. Hence the notion of the 'housed but homeless,' which highlights how what could simplistically be seen as the end of homelessness by having a roof over one's head, obscures the embodied, inculcated affects of homelessness.

Conclusion

It is important to end this chapter with a reminder that most homeless young people move across these types of homelessness described above. The instability of homelessness underscores the transience across the different accommodation options and shapes how one lives in each of these options. Sarah and Andrew's story, with a few details changed, could be the story of many other young people, and is indicative of the ebb and flow of youth homelessness.

Sarah left home when she was 17 years old, after a big fight with her mother in which Sarah became violent and the police were called. Sarah ran off before the police arrived: it was late at night, middle of the week, in the outer suburbs of Canberra. Sarah was not prepared for her newfound homelessness and wandered the streets looking for places to sit down and rest. She stayed awake all night.

Sarah did not want to contact any other family members, who she felt would contact her mother. In hindsight Sarah notes that she did not want her mother to know where she was, she wanted her to feel worried and to realise that she had put her daughter at risk. Instead, Sarah contacted a close friend, Amy. She stayed with Amy and her mother, Denise, for several days. Despite the relative stability Amy's family provided, Sarah felt painfully aware that she was a burden. The support Amy's mother provided acted as a reminder to Sarah of what her mother was not providing.

Unable to continue to support Sarah, Denise helped Sarah get in contact with a refuge. The refuge had a vacancy and Sarah moved in. Denise went to Sarah's mother's house to collect some clothes and the identification Sarah needed to get income support from social security. Sarah's mother did not make an offer for her to return.

The refuge staff contacted Sarah's mother, at Sarah's request, and realised that she was not welcome to return home. The staff helped Sarah obtain a 'living away from home' allowance from social security. Sarah very quickly became close friends with most of the other residents at the refuge. After little more than two weeks Sarah left the refuge to live with Andrew, her new boyfriend that she met at the refuge. Andrew had acquired independent accommodation through a supported accommodation service. He had been homeless for about seven months, alternating between roughing it and refuges. The supported accommodation service turned a blind eye to Sarah moving in and only charged rent for Andrew, one third of his income.

Andrew and Sarah lived in a bedsit at Kanangra Court, a short walk out of Civic (the city centre of Canberra). At Kanangra Court there were numerous other young people trying to transition out of homelessness to living independently. Before long Andrew and Sarah were part of a group of young people whose lives revolved around the Kanangra Court. This is where I first met Andrew and Sarah. I was introduced to them by Dane who lived on the top floor of the same block of flats as Sarah and Andrew.

Chapter Three: The Living Conditions of Homeless Youth in Canberra.

The social network that lived at Kanangra Court would often hang out together throughout the day and evening. Often I would turn up in the late morning and a group of young people would be sitting together in someone's flat; the TV or music on, a bong on the table, and people sitting on the floor, bed and chairs, talking, passing time. There was always a 'newbie' hanging around – a new young person who I had not met before – who was couch surfing with one of the other young people who resided at Kanangra Court.

After a couple of months I was contacted by Sarah who told me that she and Andrew were no longer staying at Kanangra Court. Andrew had a falling out with Dane and his mates. Andrew had been beaten up by Dane and a couple of other young people. It was rumoured that Andrew was telling "everyone" that Dane's girlfriend, known as 'Shells,' was a slut and that her mother committed suicide. (Shells' mother had committed suicide and she openly spoke of how she "sold herself" for money to keep up her drug habit). Dane later admitted that he regretted beating Andrew but people were watching their argument escalate and Dane had to maintain his reputation and "smash Andrew" (the importance of reputation is examined in Chapter Five).

Andrew and Sarah slept rough for a few days, unsure of what to do. They primarily slept in a park just out of Civic, in a garden bed behind some bushes. Andrew had not 'formally' left the flat at Kanangra Court and they were scared to go back to get their belongings. It was summer time but they both wore all the clothing they had with them all the time. They had not showered or brushed their teeth for days. They agreed to go with me to Kanangra Court early one morning. They had nowhere to store their precious few belongings they had

acquired so they decided to keep the flat until alternative accommodation was available. The next two weeks were spent moving between different couch surfing options and sleeping rough. They did not want to return to a refuge and be split up and spoke of how they could not go back to refuges now.

After living independently refuges seemed like a huge step backward, an admission that they were not in control of their lives. Andrew noted: "Just couldn't do it. We're not like we were back then, you know?"

Andrew and Sarah did not continue to pay rent on the flat at Kanangra Court. Luckily the service that had accommodated them kept their few belongings but could not house them again until they attempted to pay off the debts associated with their previous accommodation.

Shortly after informing ACT Housing of her new circumstances Sarah was offered public housing.[41] ACT Housing presented two options for her to choose from, one of which was Kanangra Court.

Sarah and Andrew moved into Stuart Flats. The accommodation and other bills were all in Sarah's name. They lived in relative stability at Stuart Flats for nearly two years until Sarah had a child. Less than two months after their child was born the stress of being a young parent got too much for Andrew and he left. Andrew moved back to Kanangra Court, his

---

[41] The waiting period for housing, even for those on the crisis list, has become significantly longer since this time. At the time of writing people could be waiting months who are on the crisis waiting list.

feud with Dane and his mates had abated and last I saw him he was 'hanging out' with Dane in Civic.

Sarah still lives in Stuart Flats. Last time we met she was 21 and her child was two years old. She still has no contact with her mother. Her younger sister, Katrina, is couch surfing in public housing, currently embroiled in a conflict with her mother and stepfather. Since becoming a single mother Sarah has been in contact with Denise, her friend Amy's mother, who still acts as a model of the mother that she never had and the mother that she would like to be.

Instability and insecurity can be seen across all of the types of homelessness, as demonstrated throughout this chapter. Homeless young people cope with the instability of their living conditions by adopting and adapting a range of strategies, skills and attributes. Not everyone adopts the same strategies and attributes to the same degree. Nonetheless, these strategies and attributes span the types of homelessness. The strategy of mobility, the conscious handmaiden of the instability of homelessness, is seen in the transience between these types of accommodation and affects how homeless youth live in each option. In the interest of acquiring a degree of security some people isolate themselves whilst others surround themselves with people. All of these 'ways of coping' are adapted to their differing living conditions.

The resilience that these young people exhibit, dealing with the range of challenging conditions they experience, is in part due to the generalisability and durability of the

habitus of instability. In other words, the generative schemata of the habitus of homelessness (manifest in their strategies, attributes, and skills) continue to respond to new conditions of existence with familiar habits. Their habitus enables these young people to mobilise their 'ways of coping' to changing situations, improvising and responding according to the organising principles of their habitus. The next chapter explores the two central strategies that shape the lives of homeless youth that emerge as response to the pervasive instability: the inclination to independence and self-sufficiency on the one hand and its counterpart, relatedness, the drive to have the stable and secure social relationship missing in their lives, on the other.

Chapter Four

Alone Together: social lives of homeless youth

Introduction

In Chapter Two the social instability of youth homelessness was examined through the concept of social capital. By considering the role social capital plays in the lives of homeless youth I identified how the lack of social support is a critical factor in shaping the conditions of youth homelessness. It is this lack of social support that results in homeless youth needing to either look after themselves (the strategy of autonomy) or find a means to acquire alternative social support (strategy of relatedness). This chapter examines the role of people and relationships as a resource in the lives of homeless youth and it becomes apparent that relationships are not only valued as a resource but also valued for their own sake.

The strategies of autonomy and relatedness both stem from, and are ways of coping with, the same conditions of existence: the instability that underscores youth homelessness. These strategies are responses to instability that take divergent, even contradictory approaches to dealing with the same problem. The instability of youth homelessness, most

notably the instability of their social lives, and the strategies of autonomy and relatedness, are mutually dependent. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is twofold: to provide an understanding of the social instability of youth homelessness, and to demonstrate how the strategies of autonomy and relatedness structure and are structured by this instability.

I begin this chapter by defining the concept of strategy and then provide an understanding of the strategies of autonomy and relatedness. I then examine the social lives of homeless youth. The social relationships of homeless youth are divided into the two fields of non-institutionalised or informal (peers and associates) and institutionalised or formal (services and organisations). These two domains of relationships are accessed by homeless young people as a means of support due to the lack of social support available from their families. Furthermore, in exploring institutionalised and non-institutionalised social networks we see how the strategies of autonomy and relatedness are mobilised in the lives of homeless youth.

The Strategies of Autonomy and Relatedness

Fajan notes that autonomy and relatedness "emerge from ethnography not as two opposing forces but as part of a dialectical relationship in which the manifestation of one provokes the assertion of the other" (Fajans 2006:103). Moreover, she suggests that there is not so much a balance between these two patterns of social action but a movement along a continuum or spectrum between these two poles (Fajans 2006:103). One of these extreme poles rarely take precedence over the other; neither dominates exclusively (Fajans 2006:117). However, homeless youth present an example where there is little or no

dialectical interplay between these poles. Homeless youth live in a context where an almost unrestrained autonomy is both the result of their conditions of existence, a response to their homelessness, and a significant contributing factor to reinforcing their conditions of existence. The emphasis on autonomy by homeless youth is offset by the feeling of isolation that brings about an equally disproportionate investment in relatedness. In this thesis autonomy and relatedness represent conflicting stances that interact in a tension where compromise and a middle ground are lacking.

The use of the notions of autonomy and relatedness as defined in this thesis below, as well as my use of the concept of strategy, is founded on observations from my fieldwork. The observable strategies of autonomy and relatedness as they relate to homeless youth in Canberra do not exactly mirror conceptualisations that have emerged from other fieldwork settings/sites or the broader generalised speculations regarding the diverse constructions of the person and sociality. Rather, in this chapter primacy is placed on accounting for the dynamics that structure the sociality and survival strategies of homeless youth.

Strategy

The concept of strategy grounds the potentially abstract notions of autonomy and relatedness within practices enacted in everyday life. Strategy encapsulates the pragmatic, affective and effective means by which the actions of homeless youth adhere to observable patterns of practice without suggesting they rationally negotiate every action in accordance with a conscious stance or particular interest. Like Bourdieu I use the term strategy to distance myself from the false dualisms of theories that situate the source of action as

rational, voluntaristic and calculated choices of actors, on the one hand, or the strict structuralist form of determinism, on the other (Swartz 1997:98). Rather, Bourdieu proposes that people pursue strategies within the framework of the cultural dispositions inculcated in their habitus (Bourdieu 1987:62-63; Jenkins 1992:39). Thus, people confront ever-changing situations neither wholly consciously nor unconsciously (Miller & Branson 1987:217). Nonetheless, the practices of social agents can be unified by an adherence to a diffuse organising principle, a recurrent prevalent sentiment that guides their actions.

The concept of strategy aims to address the homologous patterned regularity of practice (of behaviour) without recourse to codified rules or norms that regulate behaviour. Bourdieu noted that the Kabyle of Algeria perform the action of their lives based on a strategy guided by a generalised "sense of honour" that is inculcated from childhood (Bourdieu 1977:93-153; Bourdieu 1979:10-15; Bourdieu 1990b:100-111). This "sense of honour" is not a fixed and static value but a sentiment that is learned and reinforced through constant and complex negotiations and interactions between people. Strategies are inculcated as the result of observing particular strategies used by others as well as sharing the conditions of existence that shaped the observed strategies.

Like the "sense of honour" for the Kabyle, the strategies of autonomy and relatedness are derived from dispositions (see Introduction) that are internalised in a practical form of what seems appropriate or possible in situations of challenge, constraint and opportunity (Swartz 1997: 100). These choices and actions are not deduced from objective interpretation of a situation, adhering to a set of rules or norms that govern life. Rather they involve embodied

practical problem solving, as agents improvise based on the opportunities and constraints that face them in different situations.

The notion of strategy is best explained with reference to particular examples. Below I outline the strategies of autonomy and relatedness as they relate to the lives of homeless young people in Canberra. The overview of the strategies of autonomy and relatedness provided below frames the explication of the social lives of homeless youth.

Autonomy

Autonomy is the most notable and recurring strategy and the default modus operandi of homeless youth. This strategy encapsulates a wide range of behaviours/practices. All of these practices attempt to derive advantage from a situation (or minimise disadvantage) for the individual agent. Moreover, the means of pursuing these diverse ends is through self-reliance and independence. In other words, this strategy emphasises deriving advantage for the individual, by the individual. This defiant independence and self-interestedness prioritises immediate personal gain at the expense of other people. The practices generated by the strategy of autonomy can often be characterised as exploitative; exploiting even those people who support homeless youth for immediate gain.

The strategy of autonomy is shaped by, and emerges from, the instability of homelessness, most significantly the social instability. The habitus of homeless youth, founded on instability, has an inculcated perception that their lives are out of control, unstable and uncertain. Most notably, other people are perceived as unreliable and often exploitative, based on past experiences. Many homeless young people have had uncertain relationships

with their family, as seen in Chapter Two, and have learned not to rely on others at the risk of being exploited, let down and hurt. Surrounded by other individuals who come from similar conditions of existence, and sharing the same internalised system of dispositions associated with these conditions, homeless youth constantly encounter other people using the same approach to survival, the strategy of autonomy. This exacerbates and reinforces their need to look out for themselves.

The perception that other people are not reliable leads homeless young people to rely on themselves in order to survive and gain some sense of control. This self-reliance becomes habitual as homeless young people address and perceive challenges, constraints and opportunities through a lens that can only conceive of appropriate responses that rely on the individual and benefit the individual. This strategy emerges as a way of coping with the conditions of homelessness, a brand of resourcefulness and resilience. Yet at the same time this strategy features as a significant barrier to breaking out of homelessness.

The instability of youth homelessness instils a strong sense that relationships will not last. Exploiting others in order to derive advantage from situations can become almost habitual and pre-reflexive for some homeless youth. The target of this exploitation extends to friends, lovers, family and even the services that aim to provide support. Homeless youth come to expect to be let down by other people based on their past experiences and exploit others before they are themselves exploited. However, this self-fulfilling prophecy contributes to the instability of their lives as potentially beneficial relationships are undermined due to suspicion.

For many homeless youth other people and social relationships have only brought about unhappiness and trouble. Often family life prior to homelessness is the foundation or model of sociality that is reproduced in their lives. Betrayal, abuse, uncertainty, and a myriad of other experiences, from the subtle to the strikingly overt, contribute to the perceived need to be independent. It is no wonder that social relationships come to be perceived suspiciously, with hesitation and trepidation. Lack of trust and norms of reciprocity within families become the basis for lacking trust in others outside the family.

The conditions of instability and the strategy of autonomy create an ensuing sense of isolation and alienation. This isolation and alienation usually result in a longing to be with others, a longing for relatedness and social interaction. Homeless youth desire that which has been denied them: stable and secure relationships. Moreover, homeless young people often seek support from other young people, feeling unable to cope with their homelessness by themselves. Thus, the defiant independence of homeless youth is offset by their opposing desire to be with others.

Relatedness

The strategy of relatedness emerges from the same conditions of instability that create the strategy of autonomy. The unstable and uncertain conditions of youth homelessness can result in these young people coping by surrounding themselves with other people and pursuing social interaction as a means of support. This strategy is manifest or mobilised in the diverse means by which homeless youth endeavour to create social relationships.

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

Homeless youth seek other people who have had similar experiences and can understand their circumstances. Homeless young people often create complex social networks as a means of support, central to the practice of couch surfing and the bedsit circuit outlined in Chapter Three. However, social relations are not sought after only as a resource. Many of these social bonds are valued in their own right. Relationships that are counterproductive and sometimes abusive are maintained due to the sometimes overwhelming need to be with other people.

There are numerous means by which young people can facilitate creating social interactions and relationships (addressed in depth below). Crime, alcohol and other drugs, sexual favours, and sharing of other resources, especially housing, feature as means to create bonds. Exchanging these valued resources for company and companionship, like other forms of gift exchange, can create bonds and social obligations. Alcohol and other drugs can facilitate social interaction by diminishing inhibitions. Sharing experiences, such as criminal activities and getting intoxicated, help homeless young people create social bonds under the guise of wanting to just acquire money or 'get stoned'. As seen in Chapter Three, having independent housing and offering temporary accommodation to other homeless young people provides a means to be with other people.

Homeless young people's longing for companionship results in them having an 'all or nothing' approach to relationships. In the interest of lending integrity to their social bonds, and in an attempt to bring about strong relationships, homeless youth tend to romanticise and exaggerate their connectedness to others: bro' or soul mate, on the one hand, and

enemy and nemesis, on the other. This romanticising of connectedness ironically exacerbates the fragility of their relations. Often the same person oscillates between these polar roles within a short period of time due to the high expectations of the romanticised relationship being breached.

The social ties of homeless youth are unreliable, uncertain and volatile due the unstable conditions of homelessness. Furthermore, the strategy of autonomy, and the perceptions that drive this strategy, results in homeless young people undermining the stability of relationships, perceiving them as unlikely to last or fearing being exploited. Even seemingly stable relationships are often sabotaged by those whose drive to have some control over their lives leads to a pre-emptive exploitation of other people on the assumption that those people will inevitably exploit them.

The dualism of autonomy and relatedness frames the sociality of homeless young people, structuring the way they engage with other people. The strategy of autonomy brings about either a drive to isolate oneself or expedient relationships, exploiting others for personal gain. The strategy of relatedness fuels romanticised or exaggerated connections to others in the hope of bringing integrity to relationships. Thus, relationships become a 'sacred covenant' with high hopes and expectations (Liebow 1967:181). However, these expectations invariably create volatile and precarious social ties as the unrealistic expectations and unspoken social contracts are broken, leading to a swing between the poles of best mate or lover, on the one hand, and enemy, on the other. Particularly sensitive to being let down or exploited by other people, but longing for relationships and company,

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

homeless youth have an 'all or nothing' approach to relationships that is encapsulated in the strategies of relatedness and autonomy.

Homeless young people long for that which has been missing in their lives: stable, trusting and supportive relationships. The loneliness and isolation of being homeless and their ever vigilant suspicion regarding other people is set against the opposing desire to have relationships that can provide all that they are hoping for. However, rather than slowly developing a relationship there are numerous tactics used to fast track the bonds that they long for.

The Social Lives of Homeless Youth

Unable to rely on their families for support homeless young people become independent and/or turn to other social networks for support. Outside of the immediate family there are institutional or formal support networks and informal networks. The institutional/formal networks are government and non-government services and organisations that can provide support to young people. The informal networks are relationships with other individuals or groups of individuals from whom homeless young people can obtain some support. Both informal and formal networks are utilised as a resource, functioning as a form of social capital, and are also valued in and of themselves. These two domains, formal and informal social networks, are sites where the strategies of autonomy and relatedness can be seen to structure their lives. However, conjuring up images of the Möbius strip, these strategies are at the same time reinforced by the dynamics of the sociality of homeless youth in a mutually dependent cycle that is difficult, and perhaps unhelpful, to untie.

Informal Networks

Informal social networks, support from friends and peers, are the most significant resources in the lives of homeless young people. As their families do not function as social capital homeless young people often work to create new networks that provide company for its own sake and as a resource. While these networks are the favoured form of support before accessing services, these networks are not a reliable form of social capital. The instability of homelessness is echoed in the unstable social lives of homeless youth, both a cause and consequence of the conditions of homelessness. Lacking shared norms of trust, the underlying drive to self-interested autonomy underscores the frailty of homeless young people's social relationships. This inclination towards autonomy is what ultimately fuels the longing for connectedness as well as what undermines these relationships.

Homeless young people rely on one another as a resource. Moreover, most homeless youth would rather rely on their peers than their extended family or services. The accommodation options of couch surfing and the bedsit circuit, as addressed in Chapter Three, both revolve around creating social networks that can be drawn upon to access accommodation. As noted, these relationships are not reliable and can have negative consequences. As mentioned previously, the obligations and social pressures that are linked to the positive outcomes of social capital also have negative consequences for homeless youth (see Chapter Two).

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

In order to lend some support and integrity to their relationships with other people, homeless young people exaggerate or romanticise the bonds that they have with them.[42] Public claims of being best mates, soul mates or one's brother or sister are an initial rhetorical tool used to facilitate these relationships, entering into a pseudo spoken social contract. There are promises to stand by these friends and defend them in times of need, even pursuing and encouraging attacks on others who have previously harmed their friends. These spoken gestures of mateship and camaraderie are often followed up with acts that support claims to being someone's best mate.

In what follows I explore how shared experiences and the informal exchange economy used by homeless youth facilitate the creation and strengthening of social bonds. I then examine the unspoken social contract between homeless youth. Next I look at how relationships are valued for their own sake, not only as a means to another end. Finally, I illustrate how the contradictory strategies of autonomy and relatedness can exist simultaneously.

Shared Experiences

For homeless youth shared experiences and practices can both create and confirm a strong social bond. In particular, risk-taking behaviours act as rites of passage that bond participants together. Committing a crime or performing a rebellious act with another person or persons helps to develop a sense of camaraderie, of sharing something that bonds homeless youth together. These experiences are often retold to each other or in front of

---

[42] As mentioned by Liebow (1967: 176) regarding African American males in inner city Washington: "[t]he pursuit of security and self esteem push him to romanticize his perception of his friends and friendship".

others as a means to reaffirm the social bond. For example, Luke developed numerous friendships that started with a shared desire to get stoned. The desired outcome of getting stoned is itself a means to create or reaffirm social bonds. Furthermore, the process of acquiring alcohol or other drugs is a journey with many steps, all of which facilitate the creation of a shared experience and friendship. The example given below is representative of the diverse array of means used to create relationships.

Luke and his associates had to find a means to obtain the economic capital needed to acquire their drug of choice, usually marijuana. They planned crimes that would ultimately provide them with money. When Luke was young this would usually involve stealing a car. However, the car itself was not sold it was stolen and driven around although this was unnecessary in order to acquire money. Yet this 'joy riding' was both an important act of bravery and a shared experience. After some time the car would be 'dumped' and was stripped of anything of value that could be sold or exchanged for drugs. At this point Luke and his associates would contact a drug dealer. Together they would obtain the drugs and then go through the ritualised process of getting stoned. Luke always smoked his marijuana at someone's home and with a bong[43] that was shared. Getting and being stoned made socialising easier for Luke. The bonding process would continue as Luke and his associate(s) would spend time together stoned, talking, finding food, and often starting this process again from the beginning in order to acquire more drugs or embarking on another adventure that would entertain them, bolster their reputations, help them obtain more money, and further develop their social bonds.

---

[43] A bong is an apparatus used for smoking marijuana (and other substances) which involves inhaling smoke through water. It is otherwise referred to as a water bong.

Upon reflection Luke identified that the process of acquiring drugs and getting stoned was not only about his desire to have drugs. This process provided him with a means to spend time with other people. Luke, like the majority of other homeless young people, did not meet people at school or work, neither of which played a part in his life. However, he could create shared experiences and stories with other young people who lived in similar conditions to him in order to develop a sense of togetherness.

Reciprocity, Demand Sharing and Exploitation

Gifts are used by homeless youth as a means to acquire social networks and the company of other people. These gifts include resources such as accommodation, food, money, and drugs, but also protection and sex. Although homeless youth have very little economic capital they will willingly spend all the money in their possession in the hope of having company and to develop a relationship with someone. These exchanges highlight the significance of sociality for homeless youth who prioritise relationships over economic capital despite their lack of means to acquire more economic capital. However, social networks also provide a means to access economic capital or other valued resources. Thus, social capital can be converted into other forms of capital and vice-versa.

The informal exchange economy amongst homeless youth is seen in the dynamics of the bedsit circuit outlined in Chapter Three. Homeless youth will often rely on their friends and associates when they have no money (or other resources) and repay the debt when they can. This exchange economy or good faith economy can be used to acquire a vast range of

goods and services. For example, while someone buys food, drugs and alcohol during the week they are banking on others, implicitly or explicitly, to balance things out when their pay packet comes in. This exchange economy functions through a form of demand sharing, where individuals will demand that others share what they have.

The demand sharing in this context refers to a shared understanding regarding the mutual support and reciprocity that exists between homeless young people. Demand sharing among homeless youth has much in common with the processes outlined by Peterson for Australian Aboriginal Societies (Peterson 1993). As noted by Fred Myers regarding Aboriginal life (Myers 1986), demand sharing reflects the underlying tension between autonomy and relatedness that structures the lives of Aboriginal Australians. This demanding of resources does not usually require explicit recounting of past debts or services rendered. This informal exchange economy is rarely explicitly acknowledged as the obligations and balance sheets are either accounted for quietly or are misrecognised as such, hence being a function of social capital as opposed to economic capital. The concealing of the function of these exchanges and social interactions is important as everything takes place as if the economics of the relationships are not explicitly recognised (Bourdieu 1990b:112-113). Moreover, this demand sharing is not a conscious practice but, as suggested by Peterson, it is part of the habitus of these social agents (Peterson 1993:865).

'Demands' are not always made in a verbal form; rather, just turning up at opportune moments can be a strategic measure used to share resources with someone (Peterson

1993:862). For homeless youth this most often involves turning up at someone's house or tracking someone down on his or her payday or observing when someone has returned from a trip to a shop.

The benefits of demand sharing outlined by Peterson are relevant to this practice as used by homeless youth. There are four benefits of demand sharing (Peterson 1993:864). Firstly, demand sharing allows individuals to avoid having to make difficult decisions of who to share resources with. The second benefit is that the onus is placed on others to receive benefit from this practice. Thirdly, discrepancies in the balance of resources shared are not explicitly accounted for. Fourth, demand sharing allows for the strategic use of time as individuals can delay reciprocity.

In the conditions of economic scarcity found amongst homeless youth, demand sharing facilitates a distribution of goods that can potentially benefit everyone. With demand sharing no one person needs to manage their meagre finances on their own as they can rely on others. However, this cycle of reciprocity can leave little room to save money or to pay for other 'needs,' as one is required to share what one has with others (Peterson 1993:867). Breaking these tacit agreements can lead to trouble, with the previously best friend becoming someone to avoid at risk of retribution. This reciprocal economy requires good faith, people being able to rely on others to pay their debts. However, amongst homeless youth there is little good faith, as self-interested survival (the strategy of autonomy) often entails that not everyone can be relied on to repay his or her 'debts'. Almost invariably

these exchange economies come to an abrupt and violent conclusion as the tacit balance sheet becomes questioned and everyone begins to feel exploited by everyone else.

Homeless youth often balance a range of demands from a large number of friends whilst actually prioritising their own individual needs. While homeless young people have high expectations (or hopes) of their friends, they are aware that they themselves cannot maintain such lofty standards. Unable to adhere to the standards they expect from others, it becomes important for homeless youth to maintain a façade of the sacred bonds of friendship. In regards to avoiding demand sharing, "hiding, secretive behaviour and lying" are a common means to avoid sharing one's resources (Peterson 1993:864). While there are no 'formal' tactics (Peterson 1993:862) used to avoid sharing particular goods at a given time, homeless young people justify not sharing by relying on a range of excuses that are usually considered reasonable. The most common excuse is that they need to attend to other debts that take priority. An example of this is the need to pay drug dealers, landlords or other outstanding debts that jeopardise one's housing. However, rarely are these excuses the actual reason for not sharing, rather they are excuses that are known to be valid.

Along with sharing material resources homeless young people will share with each other intimate details of their personal histories in order to create a relationship with another person. Disclosing is a term used in the service sector that refers to clients' divulging past events or expressing personal feelings. Homeless young people come to see the story of their personal history as a form of currency as it affords them support from both services and informal support networks. Amongst peers and associates, however, disclosing is a

form of reciprocity, where people exchange personal stories in order to create trust and intimacy. The act of disclosing amongst peers speeds up the bonding process. Sometimes this disclosing is done upon first meeting someone. Longing for the quality of relationship and trust that is usually required in order for people to reveal their most personal secrets, some homeless young people hope to create these relationships by interacting as if they are already in such a relationship.

Tacit Social Contract

Following the myriad tactics used by homeless youth to create a meaningful bond, or the appearance of one, there is an unspoken set of expectations or social contract between the social agents. The hopes and expectations relating to these relationships lead to an unforgiving set of tacit rules. Particularly sensitive to exploitation and being let down by other people, homeless youth invest so much in these relationships that any transgression of these expectations or rules leads to great disappointment. The centrepiece of the unspoken expectations is an unconditional support between homeless youth. Those involved in the relationship are expected to be each other's primary concern. The needs and demands of other people are considered secondary. As a result it is easy for this expectation to be breached, as merely tending to another person's needs or demands can be seen as transgressing the sacred bond. Moreover, looking after oneself can similarly be seen as transgressing the tacit social contract. Thus, it is in the dynamics of these relationships that the irreconcilable extremes of relatedness and autonomy become apparent in the lives of homeless youth.

What destabilises relationships between homeless youth more than actual breaches of the unspoken code is the assumption that one has been exploited. In other words, homeless young people view their relationships with a suspicion that taints all other practices and interactions as a potential catalyst for undermining their social bond. The cynicism of homeless young people imbues all relationships with more than a tentative caution. Rather, there are often pre-emptive accusations made toward friends and lovers. Homeless youth perceive these relationships as 'too good to be true.' Consequently, they often break up relationships on their own terms rather than be surprised at a later date. Almost invariably social networks among homeless youth are destabilised and undermined due to the prevailing strategy of autonomy. The sense that other people cannot be counted on and that one must look after oneself becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as homeless youth perceive and expect things to go awry due to the habitus of instability. The strategy of autonomy begets a tacit sentiment of 'exploit or be exploited,' framed by the desire not to be a victim.

Often homeless young people break away from their peers and associates as the pressure to conform and the downward levelling norms become apparent. Relying on the valued attribute of mobility (outlined in Chapter Two) some homeless young people escape by removing themselves from the mutual obligations of demand sharing, mounting debts, or patterns of alcohol and other drug use that have become problematic. Homeless young people become aware that their peers become part of the conditions that reinforce the instability of their lives. This is true for Michael who went to great lengths to avoid becoming part of what he came to see as counterproductive social networks.

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

Michael came from Brisbane, where he had been homeless since he was 15 years old. He had tried numerous times to break out of homelessness and break his addiction to Ice (methamphetamine). Each time he had to remove himself from his social networks and the patterns of crime, drug use and demand sharing that had developed with his peers. However, whenever he had got 'clean' or got a job he would return to his peers and be "dragged back into the whole scene." Michael noted:

> You get caught in this subculture of 'deal or steal' – where there seems like only a few options to survive. You are all connected by struggle and it creates a subculture. You have to isolate yourself to get out of the culture.

At the age of 21 Michael moved to Canberra where he did not know anyone. He accessed services that supported homeless youth but consciously avoided becoming networked with other homeless young people. He never accepted 'gifts' including cigarettes, as he knew that if he accepted these he would become obliged to other people. Michael not only isolated himself from other homeless young people but no longer trusted services and government organisations. He was determined to be autonomous. Yet Michael lacked any support whatsoever and struggled to support himself. Moreover, his isolation from other people made him profoundly lonely.

Isolating oneself, as Michael did, is a common manifestation of the strategy of autonomy. For Michael this involved moving to another city. Some homeless young people attempt to isolate themselves from other people when they are first put into independent accommodation, trying not to be noticed by their neighbours in order to avoid becoming embroiled in local feuds and exchange economies due to the excessive demands these social ties bring. Yet this isolation is unsustainable as homeless young people become

lonely, let their guard down and attempt to create social networks in order to have company. It is often the drive to be with other people, not as a resource but company for its own sake, that ultimately underscores the sentiment of relatedness.

Relationships for their own sake

Given the prevalence of the strategy of autonomy amongst homeless young people it is easy to assume they are attempting to derive advantage from other people at every turn. However, homeless youth are often seen to invest in relationships that seem to provide very little benefit in terms of accumulation of capital. Some relationships are maintained despite great costs. By looking at the relationships that do not constitute social capital it becomes apparent that homeless young people desire to be with other people and value relationships for their own sake. Troy's situation is representative of attempts at isolating oneself and the consequent drive to be with other people, despite exploitation and expecting to be let down.

When Troy moved into his own apartment at Wiltshire Flats[44] he was determined not to socialise with his neighbours. Moreover, his youth worker actively persuaded Troy to avoid contact with other residents. After about two weeks of isolating himself Troy became so lonely that he almost did not care who he spent time with, he just wanted company. Upstairs from Troy's ground floor flat lived two young men, Matt and his couch surfing friend Morgan. Troy started to talk to them in the stairwell and whenever he saw them, eventually inviting them into his house to play on his Playstation (computer game consul). He went to great lengths to be in their company, buying them alcohol and food. Troy

---

[44] Wiltshire Flats is a housing complex in the inner north of Canberra. These flats are described in detail in Chapter Three

admitted that he knew that they were exploiting him and would exploit him further but did not care at the time, living in hope that they would prove him wrong. However, while Troy was out of his flat he was broken into, his place 'trashed' and his Playstation stolen. He was told by other neighbours that it was Matt and Morgan. This was confirmed when he found out that his Playstation was at Matt's house. Troy consciously returned to the strategy of isolating himself. This time he lasted four weeks before the isolation and loneliness became too much for him to handle and he forgave, forgot or pretended to not care about Matt and Morgan's past transgressions and pursued their company again.

Troy's story is an example of a common set of events that transpire for homeless young people. Often past friends are forgiven for their past transgressions. The cycle of autonomy and relatedness parallels the ebb and flow between two people who move from best mates to enemy and so on. This cycle of autonomy and relatedness is, again, best represented by the Möbius strip, where the twist that transforms these irreconcilable strategies into one another is obscured by a strategic use of time, misrecognition or bad faith in order to meet the demands of the lived conditions of homeless youth.

Exploitation and Mutual Obligation

Some homeless young people invest in either the strategy of autonomy or that of relatedness at the expense of the other. However, the majority of homeless youth move between the extremes of these two strategies. Homeless youth highlight how the majority of people in modern Australian society actually find a middle ground between these two extremes, rarely having to disproportionately invest in one of these strategies at the expense

of the other. With some homeless young people it can appear as though the two extremes exist together. In the example below, Luke and Michelle can be seen to feel very strongly about supporting their peers and having other people at their house for companionship. Yet at the same this longing for and valuing of relatedness contrasts against their drive to exploit others and to look after themselves.

When Luke got a house through ACT Housing it very quickly became a busy place, where many young people came to hang out during the day. Friends and relatives of both Luke and his then girlfriend, Michelle, would sometimes stay there when they had no other options. Even Luke's mum would come and stay with Luke when she had been in a fight with her partner and 'kicked out' of her own home. However, despite Luke and Michelle wanting to look after their friends who were 'hard up' they also found it quite a lucrative venture to charge them rent or board. Luke and Michelle would lie about how much rent they paid and asked their 'guest(s)' to pay one third, which invariably almost covered their rent too. Moreover, the guests would have to provide alcohol and food as thanks for the emergency accommodation that Luke and Michelle were providing.

Luke and Michelle would talk about how they could not let down their friends and family when they were in need: "what kind of person doesn't look out for his mates." Yet simultaneously they were exploiting these same people. At Luke's place I met about ten other young people who came through his house. However, both those that stayed with Luke and those that 'hung out' there were subject to the extremes of social relationships – being their best friends who they would do anything for, to their worst enemy who were not

only unwelcome in their home but worth hunting down to give them a 'flogging' to teach them a lesson.

On a Thursday at about 2pm I turned up at Luke's place. I always came to the back door as I parked my car in their carport next to the car he was always working on (which just sat in the carport propped up on bricks and with the bonnet open). After a few seconds Michelle came to the door. They had been expecting me as I called prior to my arrival. I walked past their laundry, toilet and into the open kitchen and lounge area. The house was in relatively good condition – relative to the other houses of young people I visited. Their lounge was filled with an assortment of furniture that Luke had found on the streets or collected from random sources. A black leather couch was the most recent acquisition, which was torn, revealing white stuffing, and with one arm dangling precariously off the end of the couch. There were four other people at their place. I knew Luke and Michelle, Luke's 'best friend' Mac (they had known each other since childhood and been locked up together on a couple of occasions but were always 'on again, off again'), Michelle's 'best friend' Lisa (similarly, these two would regularly oscillate between 'best friends' and enemies on a weekly basis), and another couple that I hadn't met before. Michelle introduced me to Jon and Anne-Marie.

Anne-Marie was 6 months pregnant and she and Jon had nowhere to stay. They had been sleeping in his car on and off, sometimes able to stay with relatives and friends but only a night or two at a time. Anne-Marie explained that they were on waiting lists but nothing was available. They did not want to be apart from each other and have Anne-Marie stay at a

refuge by herself (it later became clear that they both did not want Anne-Marie to stay by herself as they trusted very few people in light of her history of abuse). Jon was working late shift as a security guard so they could get enough money to support themselves. Jon said nothing but just sat looking surly. On the other side of the lounge room, which was only small, Luke and Mac were talking 'business', they were going to go down the road to visit someone who had being "talking shit" about Luke and was denying that he owed Luke any money. Luke would otherwise not have demanded the payment of the debt but when accompanied by this attack on his reputation, which was so strongly maintained by Luke and his friends, this obliged him to at least talk up, if not actually implement, plans to "get this guy". This was creating a bit of a stir as Luke and Mac were posturing and postulating what they were going to do to this guy. Anne-Marie was ignoring the commotion and kept telling me how they were unable to stay at Jon's uncle's place anymore as he kept sexually harassing her when Jon was at work. As you can imagine this caused Jon to confront his uncle who then told them they were not welcome at his house any longer. At this point Michelle, their host, interjected, saying that she could not believe how "fucked up" some people are:

> She is fucking pregnant man, and has nowhere to stay and this fucker kicks them out. You don't do that, not to family not to no one. [To Anne-Marie]: You guys are always welcome here, you can stay here as long as you need to. [To all of us]: You've got to look after your mates, we look out for each other.

Luke, excited by the events going on in the house, joined in;

> They are like family man. I mean…fuck, you have to look after your mates. We're lucky enough to have this place and help others out. If you don't look after your friends then you've got nobody, nothing.

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

Anne-Marie and Jon sat and said nothing whilst the rest of the room went on about how important it was to look out for each other, the sacred bond between mates. If anything, Anne-Marie and Jon looked sheepish and embarrassed as they were the recipients of the professed generosity of Luke and Michelle, there was a sense of shame and indebtedness to being their guests.

Later that week when I was at Luke's place Anne-Marie was walking down to the shops to buy some food for the house and told Luke and Michelle that she was going to get the rent that she owed them. Anne-Marie clarified how much she owed. I was surprised at the amount that they discussed. Michelle and Luke nodded but seemed to rush her out of the door. When Anne-Marie left it became apparent that Luke and Michelle realised that I knew how much rent they were actually paying, a lot less than they told everyone that stayed with them. Michelle asked me not to tell anyone how much rent they paid as this would cause a conflict between them and their guests. I told her not to worry and I had no reason to tell people that I knew how much rent they paid. This reminded me of how guilty and ashamed Anne-Marie and Jon, amongst others, were for Michelle and Luke being so 'generous'. These kinds of debts can be recalled in the future when Michelle and Luke find themselves in need of something that they can get from a former guest who owed them.

Luke and Michelle felt very strongly about looking after their friends and family whenever possible. They were profoundly aware of how the support of others could be the difference between having or not having a roof over one's head and food to eat. Yet, undermining this drive for relatedness was their perceived need to look out for themselves and the strategy of

autonomy. Ultimately Luke and Michelle's relationships with all of the people mentioned above were subject to the dichotomous dynamics that the strategies of autonomy and relatedness bring about.

Formal Networks: The System

Lacking the support of family, homeless young people often rely on government and non-government services for support. There is a diverse range of services available to homeless young people. Some of these services, referred to here as 'the system,' have homeless young people as their target group. Although some young people do not enter the system, finding the support they need outside of formal support networks, the vast majority of young people who have experienced homelessness have accessed a service targeted at homeless young people. In fact, every young person that participated in the research had used at least one youth homelessness service. The system is used by homeless youth to access tangible supports such as accommodation, income support, and transport. However, many young people come to rely on their workers for emotional support. Youth workers and other service providers can become the only people who seem reliable and stable in the lives of homeless youth, providing the intangible support that other relationships in their lives lack.

I will begin by examining how the system's emphasis on transitioning homeless young people into independence reinforces the strategy of autonomy. I then identify how the negative experiences with services reinforce the strategies of autonomy and relatedness.

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

Finally I explore how homeless young people's interactions with formal support networks are a site where the strategies of autonomy and relatedness are mobilised.

Transition into Independence

Although youth homelessness services offer much-needed support they often contribute to and reinforce the strategy of autonomy. Whilst some services provide a great deal of support to homeless young people the majority adhere to a misguided idea that these young people need to learn to look after themselves. The prevailing approach by the service system is to encourage homeless young people to be self-sufficient. This approach is referred to as 'transitioning into independence'.

The 'transition into independence' encompasses the provision of a broad range of supports that are considered necessary for a young person to move into secure, safe and stable accommodation and independence. In effect, these services are providing the supports and access to valued resources that most young people acquire through their families. Homeless young people, unable to be supported by their families, often turn to the system to do what their families are unable to do. However, this support from the system encourages homeless young people to be more independent, founded on the assumption that it is not good for homeless young people to become dependent on services for support. Fears of creating welfare dependency and a culture of poverty are the tacit basis for this approach. Looking for support from the service system, homeless young people are then expected to become more self-sufficient. Services inadvertently encourage· the brand of independence that homeless young people have in abundance that is captured in the strategy of autonomy.

Services fail to see that this brand of independence actually contributes to reproducing the conditions of youth homelessness.

The 'transition to independence' approach, compounded by the lack of resources available to the service sector that limit the amount of support that workers can provide their clients, creates a feeling of being let down by services. Negative experiences at the hands of the service sector reinforce the habitus of instability, the strategy of autonomy and/or the strategy of relatedness.

Don't Let Me Down

Some young people engage with services more readily than others. For many homeless young people their hesitation and generalised lack of trust in the broader social world is extended to services. Interactions with the service system are underscored by the past negative experiences of young homeless people. Unfortunately services that are meant to support homeless young people are often considered by young people to let them down. Every young person that participated in my research talked of negative experiences at the hands of services. Their subjective experiences were underscored by the fact that for young homeless people issues of support and trust are paramount, as seen in the longing for relatedness evident in the 'sacred covenant of relationships.' Fiona's stories of dealing with different services echo the sentiments of the majority of homeless young people.

Since she was twelve years old Fiona had lived independently: sleeping on the streets, refuges, couch surfing and the occasional visit back to her parent's home. By eighteen years

of age she had become very sensitive to how services patronised her and asked her to relive

the abuse and trauma of her life in order to access support:

> Would you know [service provider]? Well I went for an interview with them
> when I was in the refuge, and I tell you what, oh my God...I had an interview
> with [one of the workers] and that was it, he decided then and there that he
> wasn't going to put me in [the housing complex] at all because I am a former
> drug addict, because he said I was going to, you know, start dealing and what
> not. He said it in a way that was like 'well, you know most of our places are at
> [specific housing complex] and I don't think it would be good for you with
> your past.' That is pretty much how he said it.

Fiona recounted another time when she felt unfairly judged by a service that she thought

would value her honesty:

> I think it was when I told [my worker] about my past and, you know, I thought
> I may as well tell them: I have been on drugs, lived on the streets, been to the
> psych unit, and all that shit. And I told [my worker] and it was just, yeah, her
> whole perception of me changed in about ten minutes.

Many services were considered by homeless youth to be quite judgmental of their personal

histories. Lying and deception about one's personal history becomes a strategy that is used

by homeless youth to avoid reliving their past and to provide a story that homeless youth

believe will result in them getting access to the support that they are looking for.

Autonomy/Relatedness and 'the system'

The strategies of autonomy and relatedness affect how homeless young people use services.

Moreover, as seen above, interactions with services can reinforce these strategies. The

strategy of autonomy can prompt homeless youth to avoid using services as their distrust

and suspicion of other people extends to the service sector. Other young people exploit

services for immediate gain but handicap their ability to continue to receive support. The

236

drive to autonomy can take the shape of abandoning supported accommodation, addressed in Chapter Three, as homeless youth fall back on the valued attribute of mobility that has proven effective in the past.

Many homeless young people present themselves to the support services with which they engage with the appearance of independence that they have become accustomed to presenting. This habitual presentation as capable and independent, and its affect on receiving support from services, was succinctly addressed by Kate who noted:

> At first glance I appear to be able to look after myself. I might say 'I'm fine' but inside I am freaking out. You just don't want people to see your weaknesses – you think people will pounce on your weakness.

This appearance of independence is often taken at face value by service providers, assuming that their clients may be either unwilling to receive or not needing support. However, the overwhelming response from young people in regards to service provision was that they wished they had more support. Moreover, it was not the tangible support that they wanted, it was the intangible support, such as just having someone to chat to, to pass time with and most significantly to trust.

Driven by the strategy of relatedness homeless young people often want their youth worker to provide them with much needed friendship and emotional support as workers can be one of the only reliable and trustworthy people in their lives. However, habitual patterns of defiant independence and struggling to trust others can prevent homeless young people from benefitting from support from services. Christine's distrust of ·services is representative of most homeless young people. Despite her distrust of services Christine

learnt that she could rely on a particular youth worker. Nonetheless her strongly ingrained self-reliance made it difficult for her to ask for help when she needed it.

Since being kicked out of her mother's home, Christine relied primarily on services that worked specifically with homeless young people. Not wanting to tell the truth about her circumstances and desperately needing accommodation, Christine told stories that she believed would help her achieve her goals. Not trusting anyone Christine had become fiercely independent. This resolve to look after herself was exacerbated by fears of reports to "Family Services" (Care and Protection) or being evicted, or judged and made to feel 'like shit.'

Christine recounted one experience with the service system in a crisis refuge. After telling a worker that she was pregnant in the hope of getting some help, Christine was abruptly lectured about how she could not have the child as she was too young and unable to support herself let alone her child, and told "that will teach you to use a condom next time." However, Christine wanted to keep the child and left the refuge, as she no longer felt welcome. She stayed in several other refuges until supported accommodation became available to her.

When Christine moved into her new supported accommodation, a two bedroom public housing flat in a notorious housing estate, her new worker helped her find furniture and moved it into the new place:

> I don't reckon other services would have given me furniture. When I was at
> [the housing complex] my worker moved a cabinet, a table, a couch, up the

whole set of stairs for me. You know like, I don't reckon I would have seen that in a lot of other workers. Like I have had other workers that have had to come and get me from refuges when I have been exited because of my little psychos and stuff like that and I have carried my shit, they haven't even bothered to help, you know. Even if it was just a small bag they wouldn't even bother. Yeah so that was pretty cool.

The symbolic gesture of carrying her furniture struck Christine as counter to the lack of support she had previously experienced. This counterexample was further supported when her worker provided other tangible assistance:

And like, the driving around. [The worker] picked me up and took me to Housing [public housing] and got it all done. I still wouldn't be on the list if he hadn't done that. That's huge. It's fuckin' hard to get that shit done. They tell you to get more ID or income statement and shit like that and you think 'fuck that' and just go home and then forget about it. He just drove us around and got it all done in a day and now I've had two places with ACT Housing. We could still be on the street you know. I probably couldn't have kept my kid if I didn't have a place. Fuck yeah. When I think about it that's the biggest difference for sure, the driving around and talking for you and that shit at Housing and Centrelink, doesn't happen anywhere else.

Despite feeling as though she could trust her worker and call on him if she needed help, she rarely did. It was hard for her to get used to the idea of letting down her guard, being vulnerable, and ask for help:

The thing is that you are always used to like doing it on your own. Like with hardly any support or no support at all. So sometimes it feels a bit weird that when shit went down, like, there are people there that are a phone call away…Sometimes that is hard to get used to.

Reflecting on her own experiences and her peers she further stated, "Sometimes people don't know that they need support or they just don't want to ask."

Chapter Four: social lives of homeless youth.

As Christine's story demonstrates, some young people come to trust their workers but this does not necessarily mean that they use them for support. Christine, like many other homeless young people, has become so habitually independent that she struggles to conceive of the idea of asking for help. Saving face, not letting anyone know that you are vulnerable or even admitting it to yourself become survival tactics that at the same time contribute to reproducing the conditions of homelessness, as homeless youth underutilise the support that is available to them.

The drive to autonomy and self-reliance that is seen in Christine is set against other young people's drive to relatedness. Unlike Christine, some young people engage with their youth worker(s) on a personal level. Counter to the extremely reserved and distrustful behaviour of many homeless young people are those that seem indiscriminate in whom they engage with in the hope of creating a close relationship. As discussed above, in an attempt at creating a relationship, longing to trust and be trusted by another person, many young people disclose personal information at the first glimpse of a potentially sympathetic ear. Hoping to form a bond and also get the support of the service/worker these young people perceive their story, their personal history, as the key currency that will provide them with what they need and want. Homeless young people who lie to their workers in order to receive support also support the idea that one's story is a potent means to receive support.

It is not uncommon for a young person to talk about abuse, rape, violence and other such personal issues within the first meeting with a new worker or potential friend. For some homeless young people this disclosing becomes almost habitual and they are unaware that

it is not always appropriate or even counterproductive. Cathy is one such example that is indicative of these young people who have learnt to disclose as a matter of course.

Cathy has moved in and out of homelessness since she was 17 years old. I first met her when she had just moved into her own supported accommodation, a two bedroom flat, with her boyfriend and two children. Since then she has broken up with her boyfriend who disappeared with the children. These events precipitated what Cathy called a 'breakdown' which led to a return to drug use and homelessness. After some time her life became more stable as she moved in with a new partner and she found stable employment. She had regained contact with her children however Care and Protection did not see her as a suitable parent and restricted her access to them.

After some time I saw Cathy at a conference as she had begun working in the community sector. We had not seen each other for about a year and she was happy to tell me about how she had "found her feet." Later in the day I was approached by a youth worker who had not met Cathy before but had just had Cathy retell her life history. The worker suggested that I tell Cathy that this was neither appropriate nor necessary in order to create a rapport with other people.

For young people who have been involved in the service system from an early age this disclosing of information has become a regular part of their lives. For some it may be the seemingly necessary recounting of events that is required to get access to support. For others it has become a means by which one enters the inner sanctum of sociality. However,

relationships with workers and particular services come to an end. There are time limits on how long homeless young people can access services and youth workers do not always stay in their jobs for long. Thus, the instability of their lives and the strategies of autonomy and relatedness are reinforced by the service sector.

Conclusion: "I am really proud of what I turned myself into"

The social lives of homeless youth are structured by two contrasting strategies. These two strategies are summed up by the dualism of autonomy / relatedness. The brand of defiant self-reliance and independence encapsulated in the strategy of autonomy has emerged from the personal histories of homeless youth and is the primary strategy that they know they can rely on to survive. The instability and chaos of their lives has led them to disproportionately invest in their ability to look after themselves, to take control of their lives. However, this self-interestedness, succinctly summed up in the quote "if you don't look out for yourself who will?" is set against its contrasting sentiment of interdependence "If you don't look after your friends then you've got nobody, nothing" (these quotes coming from the same person at different times). There is a complex interaction between these two strategies; the investment or over-emphasis in one of these strategies ultimately leads to the other.

The above title is a quote from a young woman called Erin. This quote speaks of Erin's sense of having survived homelessness since she was eight years old by learning to rely on

herself. Like other homeless youth Erin has become proud of her ability to look after herself. Referring to other homeless youth Erin noted:

> It is not fair to expect these kids to look after themselves. But, you know, it is not their fault but they kind of have to become more independent than other kids. It is not fair but that is the way it goes.

Here Erin encapsulates the difficult conundrum that underscores the reality of the conditions of youth homelessness: the unfortunate truth is that homeless young people are forced into an abrupt independence, having to learn to look after themselves in a way that most young people and adults in modern Western societies do not need to. Needing to become autonomous in this fashion seems unfair but is demanded by their conditions of existence. Nonetheless, regarding homeless young people, Erin went on to say:

> You have to have a strong sense of self-preservation. You learn to look out for yourself but you need to let your defences down. You can't do it by yourself.

Despite the necessity and the ensuing virtue made of her autonomy, Erin realised that it is not possible for anyone, even hardened people like herself, to live without the company and support of other people. As the interview progressed with Erin it was apparent that she was enjoying having a coffee with someone she had just met, divulging her personal history. Before the afternoon was over she had given me a phone number to contact her, as she wanted me to meet her new boyfriend. This experience with Erin reminds me that my fieldwork experience was made possible by the strategy of relatedness, as homeless young people saw me as a reliable person whom they could confide in. My relationships with homeless youth were explicitly framed by confidentiality and trust. Yet, just like everyone else, I left the field and perhaps reinforced the notion that people cannot be relied on.

Chapter Five

Dignity in Marginalisation

I arrived at Luke's house late one morning to find him out on the street looking in the back window of a car parked out the front of his flat. As I approached him he beckoned me over to him. He had a pair of small scissors in his hand, which he put into the lock of the car's front door.

"There's a cigarette sitting on the back seat", he explained.

Luke attempted to pick the lock but failed, destroying the lock in the process. I told him that if he really needed a smoke I would go and buy him some. Luke was on probation and such a public and unnecessary infringement seemed astoundingly counterproductive. Furthermore, Luke pointed out that he had cigarettes in his flat.

Moving onto the passenger side lock Luke was successful in opening the door and grabbed the bent cigarette off the back seat. As we walked inside, Luke told me that he had previously had a lot of success breaking into that particularly model of car back when he was a "young criminal." As usual, there were several guests inside Luke's flat, all of whom admired the ease with which he appeared to do something that most of them explicitly thought quite "crazy." Luke's partner Michelle appeared to feign concern over Luke's irresponsible actions. However, Michelle's apparent chastising became an opportunity for

her to boast about Luke's criminal past and other such improprieties that had come to underscore his significant reputation.

Introduction

This chapter explores how homeless young people find a sense of self-worth and dignity within the conditions of youth homelessness. I focus on the acts and practices of defiant independence exhibited by homeless young people, examining practices that appear counter-productive, self-destructive, and seemingly collude in reinforcing their marginalisation. These practices are examined through the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, in particular the ideas of cultural capital and social fields. Within the field of youth homelessness young people find a space where they do not feel marginalised and can attain social status that can be converted into other valued resources. Elaborating and extending the conceptual framework outlined by Bourdieu provides insight into homeless young peoples' struggles for valued resources, in the broadest sense, and how they create dignity, respect and self-respect, and a sense of empowerment. The case study of homeless young people in Canberra provides empirical grounds to further elaborate on the temporal construct that is Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

As has been demonstrated, homeless youth live in unstable and insecure conditions of existence. Homeless youth and others perceive their lives as being out of control. This lack of control in their lives brings about a heightened desire to exercise some control and agency, even if it is only a sense of control. This reflects the value placed on being independent, seen in the primary strategy of autonomy outlined in Chapter Four. There is a

very real need for homeless youth to become relatively independent, to assume some control of their lives – they need to take some initiative to get food, find a place to sleep and continue to survive. Having to fend for oneself is one of the most significant effects of homelessness. Yet there is a fine line, at best, between the acts of independence needed to survive, and the empowering symbolic acts of resistance of homeless youth. More precisely, the brand of autonomy of homeless youth is characterised by the conflation of these two needs or functions.

An extensive part of this chapter outlines and develops the theoretical tools of Bourdieu. The structure of the chapter is framed by the need to explicate theoretical concepts that are central to understanding the practices of homeless youth. However, the chapter, and the creation of the notion of 'negative cultural capital', is profoundly directed by my fieldwork experience. Moreover, the primacy of my ethnographic data required me to expand on the idea of cultural capital to account for the practices of homeless youth as existing theoretical insights fell short of capturing the dynamics of their lives.

Firstly, I explicate Bourdieu's concepts of field and field of power in order to explore the logic behind homeless young people's investment in their reputation through acts of resistance and defiant independence. A brand of cultural capital is the primary means by which homeless youth struggle for recognition, asserting their status on the street and simultaneously providing themselves with a sense of control and belief in their ability to cope with the conditions of their lives. Second, I introduce the idea of negative cultural capital that helps to account for why homeless youth act out many seemingly counter-

productive and resistant acts. Third, I outline the diverse forms that the cultural capital of homeless youth takes: embodied, objectified, and narratives or stories. Next, the instability of cultural capital is addressed. The generalised instability of cultural capital is exacerbated for homeless young people due to the instability of their lives. Finally, I examine the role symbolic capital plays in the vision one has of oneself, of one's value and social standing in the world.

Field, the Field of Power, and Street Capital

Little attention has been given to cultural capital within working-class, marginalised or dominated social groups other than to say that they have none (Swartz 1997: 175). Some theorists have suggested that Bourdieu discounts working class cultures that are considered to lack what is valued by the dominant social classes (Gorder 1980; Kingston 2001). However, it is useful to use the concept of cultural capital to include a wider range of relative cultural capital(s) specific to social fields.[45] Other theorists have extended Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital to address the symbolic struggles of marginalised social groups and subcultures (Bullen & Kenway 2005; Sandberg 2008; Thornton 1995). The case study of homeless youth acts as an example of how marginalised social groups can disproportionately invest in cultural capital, unable to readily acquire economic capital and marked by their social isolation. Furthermore, the capital that homeless young people invest in is stigmatised by broader society, it is a negative cultural capital, as they make the most

---

[45]My reading of Bourdieu takes him to value any cultural resource available to the fields that it exists within. Whilst Bourdieu's focus may have been on the symbolic domination of high culture in the arts and education, this does not preclude the inclusion of other valued cultural resources.

out of what others, people outside of their social milieu, nonetheless recognise as a legitimate demand for recognition, if only by its negative association.

Field and the field of power

Bourdieu conceptualises society as constituted by an ensemble of social fields. Bourdieu uses the concept of field to define the broadest possible range of factors that shape behaviour rather than delimit a precise area of activity. Fields can span or subsume formal institutions and extend to include such social arenas as the family, religion and artistic domain. The field allows him to break away from vague references to the social world through words such as 'context', 'milieu' and 'social background' (Bourdieu 1990b:140). Bourdieu's notion of the field is crucial to understanding the way in which he conceptualises relations between social structures and cultural practice (Swartz 1997:9). Fields connect the practices generated by habitus to the social arenas in which they occur.

A field is a structured social arena that is constituted of relations between social agents who struggle for access to a specific valued resource (capital). The unequal distribution of capital within social fields is the key to understanding the opportunities presented to agents who occupy different positions within the social world. The stratified social positions of agents within a given field is constituted by their differential access to the capitals that they are concerned to maintain or increase their access to (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:101). Thus, the dynamics of fields are structured by the asymmetry, the unequal distribution, of access to the specific capital that is at stake in a particular field (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:101; Jenkins 1992:85).

Individuals and groups draw upon and mobilise a variety of resources (capital) in order to improve their position within a field. The strategies that agents use depend on and are guided by their position in the field and the volume and structure of the capital they have at their disposal. Each agent or group derives its distinct dispositions, strategies, values and interests (tacitly inculcated into habitus) by their position in the field.

The value of a species of capital is dependent on the existence of a social field in which that capital is conferred as a valued and efficacious stake of struggle, something considered worth striving for, and, simultaneously, a weapon or means of struggle (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:98): "A capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:101.) According to Bourdieu there are as many fields as there are forms of capital that constitute the interest of agents (Jenkins 1992:84; Swartz 1997:122).

Fields are unified by a structural homology, of diversity within homogeneity. Though historically and socially specific all fields are structurally homologous in that they have "functionally invariant laws" – these are structural properties of all fields (Bourdieu 1990b:140-141; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:105; Calhoun 1995:136). In other words, though each of the characteristics and forms that the field takes on are irreducible there is a resemblance within their difference (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:106).

Bourdieu's 'field of power' is the primary source of the hierarchical power relations that structure all fields (Jenkins 1992:86). The field of power considers the homologies of positions among individuals and groups from different backgrounds and the homologous strategies that they use in order to maintain or improve their position within the broader social field (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:106-106; Swartz 1997:136). The field of power provides the structure of the dynamics between and within fields (Swartz 1997:140). Not situated at the same level as other fields, the field of power acts as a 'meta-field' that encompasses all others, a principle organising the specific properties within and across fields and their respective forms of capital (Bourdieu 1996:263; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:76n.16; Swartz 1997:136).

The study of a particular field gives a scope and relatively autonomous sphere of social concern and coherence. The field of power reminds us that agents who partake in any given field are also influenced by and influence other fields. The study of fields does not mark a distinct group or class of people as isolated from others. Rather, Bourdieu's notion of the field of power highlights the numerous overlapping diverse fields and stratified positions between these fields and within each field.

Bourdieu considers the fundamental oppositions of economic/cultural capital as axiomatic to the struggles for power in social arrangement, structuring most cultural, political and social contestation across all societies. Individuals and groups are considered to draw disproportionately from either cultural or economic resources in their struggles to maintain or improve their position in the field of power (Swartz 1997:137). However, the field of

power relies "at any given time on the forms of capital implemented in the struggles for domination and their relative weight in the social structure," which is historically and socially variant (Bourdieu 1996:226).

Within the broader field of power the field of homeless youth is profoundly characterised by their generalised lack of capital: lack of symbolic and material resources that are valued by the broader social world. Yet they do have within their grasp a cultural capital of homeless youth: street capital.[46] This cultural capital is most strikingly embodied in one's reputation which is acquired through various means and can function not only as a form of protection and a means to obtain social and economic capital, but is also central to homeless young people's sense of self, identity and place within their specific social sphere, or in Bourdieu's terms, field. Within the field of homeless young people cultural capital is the primary means by which they struggle to survive. Moreover, the cultural capital of homeless youth is inextricably tied to the importance of autonomy for homeless young people. As addressed previously, the strategy of autonomy is the primary response of homeless youth to the instability that characterises the conditions of their existence. The necessity of being autonomous and being able to cope with the instability of youth homelessness through enacting symbolic acts of control underpin the value attributed to the cultural capital of homeless youth. Furthermore, the cultural capital that is prized by homeless young people is recognised by other people within their field as a legitimate claim to power.

---

[46] The term 'street capital' is used for convenience, rather than writing the 'cultural capital of homeless young people.' However, this capital that is specific to homeless young people does have many similarities to a broader 'street capital' as examined by Sandberg (Sandberg 2008), who uses the same term. As addressed later, this street capital is recognised by other social fields. However, the specific logic and dynamics of the street capital of homeless young people do not extend to other forms of cultural capital that it may resemble.

This 'street capital' speaks of the ability of homeless youth to take control of their lives, to deal with the conditions of homelessness. The street capital available to homeless youth is based on acting in the world, or at least the perception that they have some control of their world. It speaks of, signifies and symbolises their ability to act in the world and to take charge of circumstances that seem out of their control. This 'acting in the world' covers a multiplicity of actions or practices that can vary from the miniscule act of refusing to meet the demands of a service provider to the more explosive one of assaulting someone to bolster one's reputation – an almost infinite range of actions all of which speak of an ability to assert oneself, to wilfully stand up to the challenges of life. They are symbolically powerful performances that represent the willingness, ability and attributes of an individual that are captured in their reputation. However, the diverse means by which homeless youth do this is not valued by the broader social world. Within the field of power the cultural capital of homeless youth, their 'street capital,' is stigmatised. But this cultural capital of the street is nonetheless recognised by the broader field of power. It is precisely the negative and anti-social nature of this capital that endows it with potency within the broad community.

Negative cultural capital

Symbolic capital plays a significant role in affirming or signposting one's position and value within a social field and broader social universe. Bourdieu notes that "the more that agents are endowed with a consecrated social identity, that of a husband, parent, etc., the more they are protected against a questioning of the sense of their existence" (Bourdieu

2000:240). The distribution of symbolic capital, of valued attributes and resources, is seen by Bourdieu as "[o]ne of the most unequal of all distributions, and probably, in any case, the most cruel" as the distribution of symbolic capital corresponds to social importance and reasons for living (Bourdieu 2000:241). Homeless youth have little to no symbolic capital that is valued within the broad social world. However, they have subverted the valued attributes of broader society within the social field within which they exist.

In the symbolic struggle for access to a socially prized position or to recognition, those who are accorded little to no symbolic capital are dispossessed of a validated existence in society. Moreover, people can have 'negative symbolic capital' which marks them as possessing negative attributes. The stigmatised pariah is seen to "bear the curse of a negative symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 2000:241). Thus, "symbolic capital rescues agents from insignificance, the absence of importance and meaning" (Bourdieu 2000:242). The symbolic capital particular to the social lives of homeless youth *is* a negative cultural capital. Homeless youth invest in a cultural capital that makes the most out their situation. Their negative capital affords them a reputation in their social field that has a power or potency that is also recognised by the broader community if only in negative terms.

The capital that is central to the field of homeless youth stands in an inverse relationship to the broader field of power or community at large. The capital that is prized in the social field of homeless youth is also recognised by the broader community, but negatively, hence the term 'negative cultural capital.' The capital of the street is recognised by others and

254

seen as antisocial which nonetheless positions homeless youth in a place of power, respect, fear or recognition.

This 'negative cultural capital' can in fact be seen as a 'counter-cultural capital' as it is embraced by homeless youth and valued within their social field. Their apparent lack of access to the cultural capital of the broader community is turned on its head as this 'negative cultural capital' nonetheless functions as a symbolic capital as it "obtains an explicit or practical recognition" (Bourdieu 2000:242). Their reputation is "misrecognised as capital, that is, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation, and therefore recognition as legitimate" (Bourdieu 2000:242). The potency of this negative cultural capital comes from its recognition by the broader community as a legitimate demand for recognition, even if only because it is anti-social and transgressive.

Despite seemingly embracing practices that are valued for being counter-cultural, this does not imply that homeless young people have a completely isolated and distinct set of values from the broader social world. In applying the conceptual tools of field and field of power it is easy to overemphasise the autonomy of social fields. Homeless young people do not live in a vacuum: they do not appear as a self-contained, self-generating system marked of as removed from the world that surrounds them. They do not transcend normative values of the broader culture. Rather, they are marked by their place within the prevailing normative values and goals; they know themselves, and are known by others, by their position in the social universe. In other words, homeless youth are aware of their position within the broader field of power. In some ways they are deviants who visibly emphasise and

highlight the central normative values of the broader society. Homeless young people are one of the poles or contrasting subclasses that comprise an underclass – those 'lacking' in comparison to a social fiction of a 'norm.' This lacking relates not only to a lack of material resources but also to a lack of symbolic resources, to low social standing. Homeless young people experienmce "positional suffering" that is not only the product of their own perception of their social reality but of the perceptions, and misrecognition, of others (Bourdieu 1999; Bullen & Kenway 2005:52).

Homeless young people, particularly those who invest strongly in the cultural capital of the street, express an acute remorse and regret regarding the behaviour and acts they commit in order to 'keep [their] heads above water.' The surprisingly common statements "I am a bad person" and "I've done some bad things" was given to me by homeless young people reflecting on things they had done, often for no other reason than to save face. Yet at other times they exhibited a pride in retelling their exploits and so describing their ability to impose their will and survive in the face of adversity. However, the prevailing sentiment was of deep sadness and regret at having, for example, "bashed an old lady," stolen from charity, done home-invasions, committed acts of violence and exploited other people. Frequently homeless young people expressed a longing to stop participating in these practices. Yet they frequently lack any viable alternatives, constrained by both their habitus and the external structures within which they exist. Those homeless young people who do not invest so strongly in this cultural capital of the street are usually young people who can see other alternatives.

Forms of 'street capital'

The forms or manifestations of the negative cultural capital of the street are social signifiers or indicators of who homeless youth are. These signs make them distinct from other social groups and broader society by sometimes subtle and at other times strikingly obvious cues. However, due to the nature of the cultural capital of homeless youth as negative cultural capital, these markers both marginalise them and afford them some respect or fear. These indicators of their social standing, of their cultural capital, are perceived as negative and subvert the norms of the broader social world. What makes these signs of homelessness potent as negative cultural capital is that they indicate that the person who bears these signs has little to lose and is the product of living on the street. However, homeless youth rarely go out of their way to construct these images with an eye to reinforcing their place in the world. Rather, the performances and signs of homelessness that can act as negative cultural capital often result from the demands of sheer necessity. In other words, homeless youth are, as Bourdieu puts it, making a virtue out of necessity (Bourdieu 1984:177).

The cultural capital of homeless youth comes in numerous forms but can be heuristically separated into three different categories/states: embodied, objectified, and reputation conveyed through stories.[47] Whilst some aspects of the cultural capital of homeless youth can be more easily assigned to one of these kinds of capital, other manifestations of their cultural capital do not so clearly fit into one of these categories, as will be seen.

---

[47] These categories align with those outlined by Bourdieu who conceived of cultural capital as existing in an embodied form, an objectified form and an institutionalised form (Bourdieu 1986). The last of these forms of cultural capital is not relevant to the cultural capital of homeless youth.

Embodied Cultural Capital

Embodied cultural capital refers to the array of dispositions and schemes of appreciation and understanding that are internalised in the habitus of individuals (Swartz 1997:76). Much of the cultural capital of homeless young people speaks of their ability and willingness to take control through physical acts. Whether it is violence, verbal abuse or intimidation through posturing, this form of cultural capital speaks of willingness to engage in practices that broader society deems anti-social and often illegal. Often it is this willingness to do what others shy away from due to risk of physical harm, imprisonment, or just because these practices are not culturally acceptable by the broader community (which is what makes them potent) that separates those young people with a strong reputation from those without. The acts of assertive defensiveness, defiance, resistance and wilfulness are the foundational performances that create and/or reinforce one's reputation. These acts are not consciously and rationally calculated to have a profitable return in the form of reputation and status. Rather, these actions are organised according to the practical logic based on the pride and honour of homeless youth. This practical logic has been inculcated under the temporal demands of their lives and acts as a practical 'sense' of what to do and when to do it. In effect, one's reputation indirectly refers to this embodied ability to deal with circumstances according to a street ethic that aims to make the most out of any given situation, not only dealing with any immanent demands but also using them to bolster one's reputation.

This aspect of cultural capital is a capacity, an organising generative schema (a disposition) which is embodied in these individuals. This is a corporeal state of cultural capital, an

ability or set of skills or cultural competence relevant to a specific field that is inculcated into the bodies of homeless young people to varying degrees: made visible in their gait, comportment, intimidating glares, ways of speaking, and the general manner in which they conduct themselves. This posturing or semiology of self is composed according to a street ethic, a cultural capital which is primarily based on intimidation and the ability to take control physically. Whether or not a homeless young person has "turned it on" (a term used by one young man that referred to consciously exacerbating the social signifiers of his readiness and ability to be violent), heightening these attributes and signs of one's reputation, he or she still bears at all times the unmistakable markings of someone who should not be taken lightly.

Those young people whose reputation is their credit on the street need to back up their 'big noting', their claims and presentations to being tough, with actions. The term 'big man'[48] (used to refer to women too) was used by some young people to refer to those who disproportionately invested in their reputation as tough, dangerous and volatile. The term 'big noter' referred to someone who thought him or herself as a 'tough guy' or someone who performed the role but did not back it up. Whilst several young people used the terms 'big man' and 'big noter' these terms are not a generalised folk category commonly used by homeless young people. The terms, as used in this thesis, refer to an analytical category that mobilises the insights of a few homeless young people to account for the behaviour and practices of homeless young people generally.

---

[48] This term has no direct relationship to that used in reference to communities in Papua New Guinea and the surrounding region. However, like that term it refers, in part, to people who are willing to be forceful through their wilfulness (Robbins 1998:487-489).

The line between a 'big man' and a 'big noter' is fine as they both posture and portray themselves as being the same thing. Those whose informal status as a 'big man' was not in doubt constantly backed up their posturing and presentation of self with physical acts that supported their claims. Recognising the physical and embodied, often subtle but potent, signifiers of people's reputations and the abilities that this speaks of, is an important skill for those who live on the street. However, it is these same indicators that contribute to these young people feeling as if the broader community treats them differently. The recognition of these physical symbols stigmatise these young people in the broader community, discriminating against and marginalising them as the physical signs of their life circumstances often work against them in negative stereotypes.

Embodied cultural capital should not be mistaken for solely corporeal symbols that identify homeless youth through the appearance of their bodies. This embodied hexis, as Bourdieu calls it, is linked to embodied capital as signs that indicate their street capital seen in their gait, spoken and body language, and use of space. Embodied cultural capital refers primarily to the a set of skills, sense making and action generating practical logical that is used by homeless youth to both acquire and exhibit their street capital. John and Tash's violent crimes are examined below to illustrate the capacity to assess and implement actions in the temporal demands of practice that generate the cultural capital of the street.

In the following section I focus on violence and crime as the staging ground for asserting and acting out the ability to control one's environment. Violence and criminal acts are events where the embodied cultural capital of homeless youth, their cultural competence

relative to their social field, is evident. These acts are not only the basis for the reputation of some 'big men' but are themselves potent symbolic moments of reclaiming power and control. These examples demonstrate the cultural competence, the schemas of understanding and acting that are used to assess a situation in the heat of the moment, to derive advantage according to the logic of street capital. However, these acts also provide a means to acquire economic capital for those with few other legitimate options.

Violence and crime

Many homeless youth have become profoundly self-sufficient, finding ways to cope outside of the institutionalised and formal services that are there to assist them. This resourcefulness can involve illegal practices. Yet in the circumstances in which homeless youth find themselves, the immanent demand to have food, drugs or accommodation could not be met so readily by any other means. If they are in need of money urgently it is hard to acquire it through legitimate channels.

Crime can offer a means to acquire material goods and resources; however, crime is at the same time a site for acting out defiant acts of rebellion, resistance and empowerment. Moreover, violent acts and other criminal practices often seem to provide little material gain but do significantly contribute to one's reputation and status. On the one hand, these crimes and other acts of rebellion often prove to be counterproductive, providing at best a short-term gain but often leading to problems with the police, suspensions of welfare payments, eviction, physical injuries and the possibility of new enemies and lost

friendships. On the other hand, these acts and the retelling of them through stories, provide a symbolic value in the form of street capital.

For homeless young people committing violent acts often seems to be more about reputation and empowerment than a means to acquire economic capital. With limited socially acceptable means to obtain a sense of self-respect or dignity, resorting to violence for homeless youth is an undeniable act of control, domination and agency, if only momentarily. Moreover, many homeless young people have been socialised in a climate of fear, where physical abuse and violence has been seen to have profound effects. Violence is often seen as a viable and legitimate means to achieve numerous goals. Ironically acts of violence are considered by many as a means to create security through establishing a reputation and gaining the knowledge that they can always fall back on this tool as a last resort. Whilst this strategy works to a degree, affording them some respect or fear that prevents other conflicts or inclines others to meet their demands, it also brings about further violence, exacerbating that which they are trying to avoid: instability and insecurity.

"What you looking at?" The street interview

Interactions with other people provide an opportunity to assess and assert one's position within the social world. For a 'big man' these interactions are a significant staging ground that provides them with a means to both test and prove the attributes that underscore their street capital. The 'street interview' refers to the tactic used by homeless youth to engage

other people in an interpersonal interaction.[49] These interactions can vary from a mere glance, or shoulder bump as two people walk past each other, a question, request or the clichéd "what you looking at?" The street interview can be the means to numerous ends. It may be: a genuine request for money; asking for a smoke, the time, directions; or just an attempt to start a conversation. These interactions can involve two or more people. However, what unifies these interactions is that they are a social barometer, the stage or scene for assessing how one is perceived by others and a means to impose one's vision of oneself. Street interviews often become a visible site for 'big noting,' posturing and promoting one's status to reinforce or improve one's reputation. Often these interviews become violent conflicts where one's embodied cultural capital becomes explicit. In the interaction of the street interview we can see the internalised ability to assess the situation and determine what course of action is possible, creating an opportunity to reinforce and acquire street capital. This is coupled with the evidently bodily skill set of physical violence.

The most notable and striking street interviews are those that are used as the set-up for a violent act. The street interview is used as a means to find out whether or not the interviewee is a viable target for a robbery, assault or the foil by which someone wishes to bolster their reputation. This tactic is used instead of surprising or ambushing a victim as it can provide the interviewer with numerous indicators as to whether the interviewee is scared, capable of defending themselves or, indeed, has anything of value.

---

[49] The 'street interview' is not a term used by my informants. Rather it is a term I use to refer to the encounters set up by homeless young people to interface or interact with other people.

Like many other homeless youths John sometimes resorted to asking people for money on the streets. Like every other young person I met who had to panhandle, beg or ask for money, John found this degrading and often came up with, as he admits, a lame excuse for asking for money, such as "I need money to catch the bus or some stupid shit like that." He knew this excuse was a thin veil that everyone saw through but it was important nonetheless.

The whole practice of asking for money had many purposes for John. The street interview had numerous possible outcomes, avenues or directions in which it could go. John was finding out three things: if he could get money; if the interviewee had anything worth stealing (e.g. money, watch, IPod); and, most importantly, whether the interviewee treated him with respect and dignity. If the interviewee gave him money and was friendly and respectful, John was unlikely to do anything else, even if the interviewee had an IPod, fancy watch or some cash. If the interviewee was indifferent but had things worth stealing then he may assault them if he felt they were a relatively easy target. However, being friendly and respectful was the primary deciding point whether John 'bashed them' or not: "I just bash the cunts. I don't like asking you for money – its degrading man. If you fucking treat me like shit I'll bash ya."

For John robbing or assaulting someone was often more of a symbolic gesture against someone who did not recognise or acknowledge him as a person. Not only did this act of violence contribute to John's reputation which helped him on the street, it was an act of creating self-respect. Rarely did this turn out to be a lucrative venture in material terms.

Moreover, John acknowledged that he would "rip earrings out and shit like that. I don't even wear earrings or want their shit. I just want to fuckin' bash the cunts for being an asshole. For being disrespectful, you know? I would take their shit and then dump it."

"Don't be fuckin' talking to me like that."

Despite the gendered term 'big man,' many homeless young women invest in creating and maintaining street capital. The same means are deployed by women as are by young men to increase their street capital. Violence, crime and boasting are practices just as common amongst homeless young women. For example Tash, like John, used to assault other young women, and sometimes other men, who disrespected her. The story told by Tash in the quote below, illustrates how she can turn a seemingly innocuous interaction into an opportunity to assert herself and acquire street capital.[50] Tash explains how she determines who will become a target for her violence:

> Teeny-boppers. Little fuckin' cunts that can't stick up for themselves, with lots of money. Oh, these two chicks that I accidentally bumped into and she was being a rude little cunt so I had her. She only had five bucks...I gave [my ex boyfriend] a royal flogging... more than a royal flogging. I gave him a fucking 'God bless his soul' floggin'. And the two little bitches in Civic that bumped into me...she dropped all her money and that and I went to pick it up for her and she went 'fuck you.' And I said like 'excuse me, don't be fuckin' talking to me like that. If I was bigger than what I am I would fucking knock you down, just like that.' And she goes 'no you fucking wouldn't.' So I cracked her in the head and got locked up for it...They [the police] showed me the photo of her with two big black eyes and broken nose and all that because she was rude to me.

Both Tash and John exhibit an embodied ability or set of skills that allow them to generate street capital – it is an internalised capital producing capacity. We can see here how this

---

[50] This is also an example of story telling as a means to maintain or improve one's social standing by signposting street capital, addressed in detail below.

cultural competence is embodied in two ways. Firstly, the sense making capacity is engrained in their bodies, sensing and feeling what to do and when to do it according to the practical logical of the street. Secondly, this aspect of cultural capital requires the use of their bodies. Like a boxer's ability to assess, act and react, these homeless young people use the skills that have become bodily to improve their position within the social field within which they compete for status.

Objectified Cultural Capital

Objectified cultural capital consists of physical, material objects that are symbolically recognised by others as signs of cultural capital – social signifiers that symbolically apprehend or speak of more than their immediate utility. Homeless young people have few material possessions. Moreover, they can treat what they have with a seemingly indifferent disregard. Yet on occasions seemingly worthless items such as empty bottles or a baseball cap can be prized possessions filled with meaning and value: the bottle indicating their ability to drink and perhaps reminding them of past 'good times,' a cue to talk of past adventures or social ties; the baseball cap taken from a renowned tough guy, thus providing an indicator of being a 'big man.'

Items that have been stolen or obtained in some other legally dubious manner are strategically offered or displayed. These items can not only be converted into economic capital, but are also symbolic of one's ability to control one's environment. I was frequently met with offers to buy stolen goods, despite the fact that homeless youth offering them to me knowing well that I could not buy their goods. But they were hoping to achieve

something else, to inform others of past actions and what they are capable of. Thus, these items are potent symbols of transgression, resistance and an ability to survive on the street.

Fashion – what one wears and how one wears it – problematises any clear distinction between embodied and objectified cultural capital. Clothing is objectified cultural capital: clothing is a material object that can be symbolically recognised. Yet the material object that is clothing interacts with social agents and is set within the context of the individual and their habitus. Clothing frames and is framed by the individual that renders them significant social signifiers/symbols. The same items of clothing on two different people can present divergent symbolic values and meanings. Fashion is a notable form of negative cultural capital available to homeless youth that is made most obvious in particular contexts.

Whilst street fashions have been popularised and are worn or copied by young people of all social classes and backgrounds, there is still a distinction that can readily be made between homeless young people and other young people cashing in on the symbolic value of this objectified form of street capital. The central indicator that distinguishes homeless youth from others is the state of their appearance, including their clothes. Many homeless youth, for instance, will have baggy jeans that are dirty and unwashed as they have been worn every day for weeks, since they lack a place to clean them let alone an alternate pair of pants to wear whilst they dry. Moreover, the smell of these clothes provides a strong clue as to whether the person you are talking to is homeless or is re-coding this fashion in order to appear rough.

There are pertinent moments or events where the fashion sense of homeless youth becomes a more striking indicator of their circumstances – more obviously signalling both their living conditions and their lack of alternatives or choices. Appearances in the magistrate's court and job interviews are recognised by homeless youth as moments where it is good to look your best. However, even if they wear clothes that differ from their everyday attire (and often they do not), they still stand out. In these contexts the 'negative' aspect of homeless young people's cultural capital is rarely subtly apprehended. Rather, homeless youth stand out as dressed inappropriately, either unaware of conventions and expectations or defiantly refusing to dress up as someone they are not.

The attire that he or she wears together with his or her posture and presentation of self, all work together as factors that contribute to identifying a social agent as a homeless young person. There are, of course, homeless youth that are aware of the impact that these indicators have on how others view them. However, many homeless youth are seemingly unaware of the impact that their appearance has, that it signals to others that they are a potential threat. Even those homeless youth that knowingly construct a 'big man' image show surprise and shock at how they are marginalised based on first impressions. Thus, these signs of their street capital work for homeless young people through intimidation and according them respect or deference. But at the same time homeless youth are marginalised, most notably by police and security guards, based on the visual cues and indicators provided by their appearance.

Narratives and Stories

The most enduring of these forms of cultural capital for homeless youth is stories: stories of past actions and practices that signal their capacity to take control. Stories last longer and can be embellished and altered according to the audience and the desired effect. Often the same story is retold, highlighting different aspects to draw out varying meanings. The protagonist, onlookers or audience of the events in question, as well as other interested associates or acquaintances, all use stories to some benefit.

This form of cultural capital is intimately linked to social capital. The protagonist can use these stories to influence people often hoping not only to improve his or her social standing but also to gain friends. Other people, whether involved in the events central to the story or not, tell stories to signpost their relations with others and to get cultural capital by association. Here we are reminded that social capital is a significant part of one's reputation. Telling stories that involve significant others and 'name dropping' are indicators of one's associates. Being associated with other tough guys or 'big men' gains the storyteller a degree of cultural capital. Dropping people's names and knowing a few key figures on the streets of Canberra not only allowed me entry into certain social circles – constituting a 'pass card' of sorts – but by associating with these people a mysterious reputation of my own grew, based on nothing other than my relationships with certain people.

Whilst retelling stories of past deeds can confer both cultural capital and social capital on the storyteller and other relevant parties, it can similarly be used to undermine someone's

reputation. The reframing of a story can portray the self-proclaimed 'big man' as a 'big noter.' The precarious nature of one's reputation, the instability of the cultural capital of the street, requires the 'big man' to be constantly vigilant, reasserting and reinforcing his reputation through actions.

Stories of criminal, violent or brave acts give the storyteller negative cultural capital and link them to other people of repute, signposting their social capital. Stephan, like John and Tash in the section above, was a big man whose use of story telling is representative of the potency of this method of attaining and sustaining one's social standing.[51]

"A Thorough shit-kicking"

I heard about Stephan's reputation before I ever met him. He seemed to know everyone I knew on the street. Many stories circulated about Stephan, as they did with other homeless young people who invested in their reputation. In fact, the first time I saw Stephan I was in my car outside a block of flats when he and another man I knew spilled out of a flat onto a patch of lawn. Stephan was standing calmly striking the drunken man in the face with straight punches, his opponent haplessly swinging at Stephan in unrestrained anger. Onlookers tried to talk the drunkard out of fighting Stephan. Seeing this event transpire was enough to give credence to the stories that preceded getting to know Stephan.

Weeks after first seeing Stephan we were having lunch and he was telling me a story about a spiraling violent conflict between himself, a dope dealer, and the dealer's 'gang' (for lack

---

[51] The example below problematises any clear distinction between cultural and social capital as we see how one's social network at the same time speaks of one's reputation.

of a better term). Stephan recounted these events with a nonchalant ease that made him appear somewhat of an enigmatic antihero of sorts. This antihero subtext which imbued his story was told with the charm of a well-practiced story teller whose story presents, as much as possible, a realistic portrayal of him as the fallible but likeable rogue.

Stephan told me about an (anonymous) drug dealer who had ripped off a friend of Stephan's – Stephan himself never gets ripped off. Stephan bumped into the dealer who then "amped up" and started taunting Stephan about having ripped off his friend. Unwilling to put up with the dealer's big noting Stephan gave him a "flogging," beating him up and mocking him: "I'm not tuff or nothin' but he's a skinny little fucker. Bigger than me but weak."

At a later date Stephan was by himself and was tracked down by the drug dealer who was with a car loaded with friends. They got out of the car and "beat the crap" out of Stephan. Knowing that he could not escape this group of young men Stephan proudly recounted how he taunted them and stood his ground, not wanting to look cowardly and attempt to escape. According to Stephan, he kept provoking his attackers whilst they beat him. Now, of course, Stephan did not leave it there. He knew he had to up the stakes so he contacted some "biker mates" – slipped into the conversation like it was no big deal – to give the dealer a "thorough shit kicking."

After Stephan's "biker mates" had avenged Stephan, almost inevitably, the drug dealer returned to retaliate. The dealer turned up at Stephan's flat with two carloads of "mates,"

armed with makeshift weapons. According to Stephan he, again, knew that they would "get him" sooner or later so he went out and sat on the front steps of his flat and smoked a cigarette, waiting for them. Cool as can be, Stephan tells of how he negotiated with the dealer, avoiding another beating and ultimately putting an end to the conflict. Stephan told the dealer that the bikers would have to "get back at him" again and it would go on and on until it was all-out war. The conflict has since ceased. Stephan's reputation, backed up by a proven ability to stand up for himself, his negotiation skills and the social network (specifically "the bikers") that he could draw upon all worked together to convince his potential assailants to leave him alone.

This story, when told by Stephan, was presented with sufficient self-effacing humour and realism to make it clear that, as another person had previously informed me, "you don't want to fuck with Stephan." I have little doubt that there are elements of truth to Stephan's story. The story conveyed quite clearly messages about Stephan that I am sure were the purpose of the story. I learned that Stephan might be connected to some dangerous associates. I also learnt that he is not scared of anyone and that, despite not being a big bloke, he can hold his own. Here we see the intimate link between cultural capital and social capital, social ties and networks. The people that one can count on to support one's reputation (in this instance the mysterious 'bikers') are valuable to one's reputation and function as a means to protect someone on the streets. The combination of seeing Stephan in a fight and the stories that both he and others told that conveyed his street capital, made it difficult to doubt Stephan's reputation and social standing within the field of homeless youth and other overlapping and intersecting social fields.

Instability of Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is considered by Bourdieu to be not as stable as economic capital. Economic capital is relatively easy to convert into other forms, to quantify, and to transmit to others. The relative instability of cultural capital is more extreme for homeless youth as their brand of cultural capital is more action based, able to be undermined by suspicion and most notably affected by their mobility and transience which entails a constant need to reassert their status and reputation.

Homeless youth lack a stable, ongoing primary social group that is the basis for a less volatile and more codified, secure and stable social identity and self-conception. The transience of homeless youth entails constant negotiations in new places, with their status and sense of self being negotiated and re-presented in different settings. They do not take their 'street cred' or capital with them to other settings in an institutionalised or codified form like credentials or a title. Their status and reputation may precede them in the form of stories and rumours, but this cannot be guaranteed in their ever-changing and mobile social lives. Their gait and comportment act as indicators of their status and ability, their actions or presentation of self in interactions with other people who do not know their reputations are important in the jostle for a sense of place, value and recognition. Their personal sense of rank and identity is precariously founded on action and is based on what others are willing to attribute to them through deference, respect or subservience.

The reputation of a homeless young person is based largely on their apparent or real ability to take action, to impose their will through force. This reputation is easily undermined by failures to act, such as backing down from a conflict or being seen to not act according to the image that one has fostered. One's reputation can quickly slip from 'big man' to 'big noter.'

The ironic use of the term 'big man' by some young people speaks of the fickle nature of one's reputation on the street. This term was sometimes used to parody or mock someone's claims to being a tough guy. The tone in someone's voice can change this term from referring to someone in a positive or negative way. There are a "multiplicity of strategies designed to belie or belittle" other's symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1990b: 121). Suspicion of someone's reputation, or the truth of a story, can undermine his or her cultural capital, quickly turning someone's reputation into the parody of a 'big man.' It is this intangible, unquantifiable and fluid nature of the cultural capital of homeless youth that requires a constant vigilance to reinforce and assert one's reputation.

The instability of the cultural capital of homeless youth is intimately tied to the instability of their lives. On the one hand, the reputation of a homeless young person is easily shaken or disrupted by often subtle and minor aspersions cast by friends and associates. Undermining someone's social standing, their street capital, can be achieved by a range of simple acts, such as: a poorly timed laugh, a rumour of someone 'bad mouthing' another person, or a look that is perceived to undermine one's claims to being threatening. These simple gestures or acts can all lead to potentially explosive confrontations as an individual

needs to reinforce or prove his or her reputation. Perceived threats to one's reputation must be met with action. Thus, the fragile reputation of homeless youth, of their cultural capital, is a significant contributor to the instability of their social lives and living conditions more generally.

Conclusion: Sense of control, empowerment and agency

> Symbolic capital is power, and provides both self-respect and respect from others (Sandberg 2008:166).

The performances and actions that are central to gaining the cultural capital of youth homelessness are not only for the audiences of these events and those who hear the stories. These practices are done to improve one's standing in the social universe and also to provide a sense of value and identity. Most importantly in the case of homeless youth, these performances and practices provide a sense of belief in the role they are playing – belief that they can cope with the conditions of their lives.

Erving Goffman notes that there is a popular belief that the performances that people put on, their presentations of self, are done for the benefit of others, their audience, with the actor convinced of the truth of his claims (Goffman 1958:28). However, Goffman contends that there is a spectrum framed between the extremes of: the performer who is "fully taken in by his act," or sincere about the impression he is giving being 'real'; and, the other extreme, those performers who are not convinced of their routine at all, the cynical performer (Goffman 1958:28). The posturing, performances and stories of homeless youth fall into this continuum of conviction about the 'truth' of the roles they are enacting. The

more that these roles are played out the more the actor becomes convinced of his or her performance. Acting out the role of a 'big man' plays an important role in forming a vision of oneself as resilient and able to cope on the street. As Nietzsche writes: "You invite in a witness when you want to speak well of yourself; and when you have misled him into thinking well of you, you then think well of yourselves" (Nietzsche 1961: 87). Nietzsche goes on to say: "And thus you speak of yourselves in your dealings with others and deceive your neighbour with yourselves." However, for homeless youth, the act of performing a role in order to convince oneself cannot be called deception. Rather, each act that works towards bolstering their symbolic capital is at the same time another act that contributes to the sincere vision of themselves as having the social standing that they are aspiring to. In other words, the 'truth' of their claims is somewhat dependent on other people being convinced of their performance, convinced of the legitimacy of their claims, in this case claims to cultural capital. Thus, performing the role of being able to cope on the streets is central to being able to cope on the streets.

There is a plethora of acts of resistance and defiant independence that are not public displays, but rather done for the benefit of oneself, such as the seemingly miniscule acts of refusing support or not complying with the demands of social welfare. Acting out these defiant practices work to convince homeless young people of their ability to cope, convincing him/herself through these symbolic gestures that he or she is in control – or at least not impotent. These are symbolic acts or rituals that perform a tangible expression of homeless young people's ability or desire to have control in their lives. The symbolic acts have the simultaneous affect of denying or escaping from the demands of their

homelessness, ironically further marginalising or exacerbating the conditions that contribute to their homelessness. Cultural capital of homeless youth, their street capital, is acquired not only in order that others recognise an actor's position in the world, but also in order for the actor to know his or her own place.

The majority of homeless young people do not use such violent, public and exciting displays of resistance, agency and empowerment as exhibited by those that invest so strongly in street capital. The 'big man' usually stands out, which is part of the goal of being a figure with such well-known status. These individuals are often very charismatic and present an image of youth homelessness that suits some simplistic representations. Stereotypes of problematic street youth are mobilised by the 'big man' and 'big noter,' both reinforcing the stereotype and somewhat relying on its salience and recognition. It is because of their striking, exciting and dangerous displays that big men become the most obvious examples of homeless young people. However, most homeless youth find more subtle displays of resistance and self-respect.

Some of these displays of resistance are simple practices that run counter to broader social norms. Yelling, swearing or just talking loudly about things that many people would find offensive or confronting (such as drug taking, and sexual practices), form a readily available and shocking way to disrupt or intimidate bystanders and assert one's claims to the negative cultural capital of homeless youth. The seemingly mundane and less exciting everyday acts have ongoing and substantial affects on the vision one has of oneself, such as exploiting other people, vandalism, or not complying with the demands made by others.

The rules, expectations and structures of youth services, as well as of the legal system, Care and Protection and other structures that impact on their lives, provide a fertile ground for asserting oneself and one's sense of agency.

Many young people resist the support of services. Moreover, homeless youth have been seen to exploit those that are trying to help them. This happens in part as many homeless young people have learnt not to trust other people and not to expect others to be reliable. Interactions with support services are a site where one's impotence and lack of control become evident, needing to admit they need support in order to receive assistance. Having to admit you need support, recounting the troubles you have encountered in order to receive assistance, and the very act of using a support service speaks of not being in control. A homeless young person's vision of himself or herself as independent, able to cope on their own, is often not consistent with asking for help. Within these services and their structures it is important to be seen to preserve some dignity, to save face.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates how the lives of homeless youth are structured by instability. This is not merely referring to the external instability seen in the material conditions of the accommodation options that are included in definitions of homelessness. Rather, it is the pervasive instability inculcated into the habitus of homeless youth that shapes their lives. The habitus of youth homelessness is a habitus built on instability, insecurity and uncertainty. There is a mutual interdependence between the external conditions of youth homelessness and the lifestyle, practices and perceptions of homeless youth that is encapsulated in the notion of habitus. The analysis in this thesis moves beyond simplified presentations of youth homelessness. The language and conceptual tools used in my research creates a way of discussing youth homelessness that acknowledges the complexity of this social issue without romanticising or censoring the reality of the conditions of youth homelessness.

Oversimplified understandings of youth homelessness underscore the naïve assumption that a seemingly prosperous city such as Canberra could not possibly be affected by youth homelessness. As seen in Chapter One, discussions of youth homelessness continue to be framed by tacit conceptual frameworks that fall short of capturing the complex nature of this social issue. Definitions of youth homelessness continue to refer to the external living conditions that qualify people as homeless. The continued references to the visible indicators that are associated with youth homelessness prevent further insights into this

issue. This thesis provides a presentation of youth homelessness that transcends the limited parameters of the prevailing discourse.

The concept of habitus and the conceptual framework of Pierre Bourdieu provide the theoretical foundations of this thesis which ultimately presents an understanding of youth homelessness that moves beyond conceptual demarcations of choice and constraint, resistance and submission, external and internal, cause and effect, structure and agency. These divisions have more than theoretical implications as discussions on homeless youth are imbued with oversimplifications that impact on how homeless youth are perceived and how government and non-government organisations work with them.

The habitus of homeless youth is a habitus shaped by instability, insecurity and uncertainty. Chapter Two introduced the habitus of homeless youth. Homeless youth are unified by the generalised organising, or *dis*organising, theme of instability. I argued that a lack of social capital, most notably the inability of family to function as social capital, forms the foundations of this habitus. The practices and responses generated by the habitus of youth homelessness are structured in terms of a logic derived from past experiences, and reinforced by the demands of youth homelessness.

Chapter Three provides exploration of the conditions of youth homelessness in Canberra. In this chapter we saw how homeless youth encounter a range of conditions all of which reinforce the instability of their lives. The complex interaction between one's habitat, the external conditions of existence, and one's habitus becomes apparent in the "circular

relations that unite structures and practices; objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn, tend to reproduce objective structures" (Bourdieu 1977: 203). This does not suggest that the habitus of homelessness, or habitus more generally, is unable to change and is deterministic. Rather, it is just that practices are generated according to the limits of the regularities that shaped them, tending to exclude the creation of extravagant practices. Unfortunately, homeless young people are exposed to a range of conditions where "opportunities and constraints are quite similar to the situation in which the dispositions of [their] habitus were first internalized" (Swartz 1997:213). The habitus of homeless young people can appear deterministic given that it "protects itself from crisis and critical challenge by providing itself with a milieu to which it is preadapted" (Bourdieu 1990b:61). Homeless young people have a limited number of options available to them. Consequently they will often encounter accommodation options that reinforce the conditions that originally fashioned their habitus of homelessness.

The instability of youth homelessness underscores all facets of their living conditions. As a reaction to the pervasive instability and uncertainty of their lives, homeless youth oscillate between the strategies of autonomy and relatedness, the centrepiece of Chapter Four. The strategy of autonomy is the prevailing modus operandi of homeless youth. Reacting to the uncertainty of their lives and their perceived lack of stability and control, homeless youth endeavor to take control of their lives. However, their drive to self-interested autonomy exacerbates a sense of isolation, alienation and loneliness that leads to the strategy of relatedness. Longing for the support and companionship of others, homeless youth invest in

social relationships with high expectations and hopes that are unable to be met, especially

by other homeless youth. The almost self-fulfilling prophecy of feeling let down by other

people results in a return to the self-reliance of the strategy of autonomy. Thus, with the

dynamics reminiscent of the Möbius strip (see Introduction), homeless youth cycle between

the two strategies of autonomy and relatedness yet one strategy is never clearly removed

from the other.

The image of the Möbius strip is salient in light of the dynamics of negative cultural capital

outlined in Chapter Five. In this chapter we see how homeless youth invest in a form of

capital that is valued for its role in helping them cope with the conditions of their lives.

However, it is precisely homeless young people's investment in this street capital, that is

inextricably tied to the value placed on autonomy and defiant independence, which

reinforces their position in the broader social world. The ironic twist and ricochet of their

actions, like the twist in the Möbius strip, can be hidden from sight, as outsiders and the

services that support them are bewildered at their seemingly self-destructive patterns of

behaviour.

The concept of negative cultural capital helps to account for why homeless youth are seen

to invest in and value practices that, to the outsider, seem counterproductive or destructive.

The introduction of the concept of negative cultural capital situates the practices of

homeless young people (the field of youth homelessness) within the broader social world

(field of power) highlighting the interrelationship between economic conditions/social

structures on the one hand and cognitive structures/habitus on the other, but not in a direct

and unproblematic way. Homeless youth create cultural practices that help them to cope with their circumstances and conditions. However, these practices also bind them to those very conditions. Here we come across the 'paradox of the marginalised,' where the dignity marginalised people find in their marginalisation or economic/class oppression through acts of resistance and agency are those same practices that reproduce their position; where the organising themes and dispositions of people's lives are both structured by conditions of existence and structure their conditions of existence.

The theoretical framework of Bourdieu that I use in this thesis has been criticised for being deterministic. Below, I address how change is accounted for within it. Following on from the issue of determinism is the logical question of: what happens to homeless youth? Do they grow up to be homeless adults? This is a question that needs further research to be answered with any rigor. Nonetheless, I will briefly discuss this issue, raising questions that this thesis leaves open, as grounds for future research.

Accounting for Change

Many readers of Bourdieu contend that his theoretical framework is unable to account for change. Bourdieu rejected these claims of determinism on the basis that they are founded on a superficial and partial acquaintance with his oeuvre (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 79). Swartz (Swartz 1997) and Wacquant (Wacquant 1992) have both noted that Bourdieu's framework is open to addressing change.

Conclusion

As habitus is the product of history, operating though time and across diverse situations and conditions, it is thereby an open system of dispositions that is subject to experience (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 133). A product of social conditioning, of history, habitus is in a perpetual state of transformation either in a direction that reinforces its structure – "where opportunities and constraints are quite similar to the situation in which the dispositions were first internalized" (Swartz 1997:213) – or in a direction that challenges and transforms it (Bourdieu 1990a:116).

A source of change and adaptation of a habitus can be derived from a structural dislocation between habitus and the conditions of existence. When the discrepancy between new situations and those in which the habitus was formed are slight, only a gradual modification, if any, occurs. Change is most likely to occur when there is a sharp disjuncture between opportunities presented by external determinations and the expectations of habitus (Swartz 1997: 213-214).

Changed conditions – external determinations – are the primary factor behind change in Bourdieu's framework. However, he does leave room for the transformation of habitus via conscious deliberation (Bourdieu 1990b: 116; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:131; Jenkins 1992:82-83). Yet the likelihood and efficacy of conscious manipulations or control of habitus is determined by the structures of the habitus in question: only certain social agents are inclined and capable of "getting a handle on their dispositions" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:133n.86). Thus, only a habitus that is the product of particular conditions of existence

is capable of the self-conscious reflection and action necessary for knowingly altering itself.

The concept of habitus appears deterministic as people are generally bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned the habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:133):

> Early experiences have particular weight because the *habitus* tends to ensure its own constancy and its defence against change through the selection it makes within new information by rejecting information capable of calling into question its accumulated information, if exposed to it accidentally or by force, and especially by avoiding exposure to such information (Bourdieu 1990b:60).

The "avoidance strategies" of habitus are non-conscious and can be the result of the conditions of existence (such as geographic segregation) and of the avoidance of "bad company," or in the case of homeless youth 'good company' (Bourdieu 1990b:61). Thus, habitus is durable, addressing new situations in habituated ways, although it is not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:133).

At home with Homelessness? What becomes of homeless youth?

In my ten years of experience with homeless young people it has become apparent that homeless youth generally do not become homeless adults. Whilst there are exceptions to this, there is by no means a correlation between 'youth homelessness' and 'homelessness.' Tom Hall notes:

Conclusion

> Homelessness is – usually, thankfully – a temporary problem. It is temporary, first and foremost, because homeless is something most young people would rather not be, and where they see their way clear to doing so they put it behind them. Some take longer to do so than others, and have a harder time of it until they do (Hall 2003: 141).

In line with Bourdieu's account of change, many homeless youth start to experience changes in their conditions of existence that bring about a change in their habitat and/or habitus. Some homeless youth experience an abrupt change in the living conditions as they are welcomed back into the family home, obtain sustainable housing and support. For some, homelessness is a brief moment in their lives – usually young people whose habitus is not so profoundly affected by instability. Many homeless youth slowly experience an increase in the stability of their conditions of existence as they learn from past experiences and move out of their 'youth.'

Although homeless youth do not become homeless adults, in my experience nearly all of them have a habitus that is indelibly marked, to varying degrees, by their experiences as homeless youth, marked by instability and insecurity. A large number of homeless youth become the 'poor but housed,' maintaining enough stability to not be seen as a problematic population group worthy of a label. Some are unable to escape the patterns of sociality inculcated in their habitus. Others repeat the model of the family set for them by their parents as their children are brought up into similar environments as they were.

During my time working with homeless young people, visiting them in their attempts at independent living, I met a large number of older people whose living conditions are very similar to those of homeless youth living independently. These people are no longer

homeless youth and do not fit the profile of homeless adults. Many of the homeless youth that I have known for numerous years, now in the mid to late twenties, seem to be turning into these adults. Glasser and Bridgman noted that : "[t]here is a great need for further research regarding homeless youth" (Glasser & Bridgman 1999:23). Examining the long term effects and outcomes of youth homelessness is an area that needs more investigation.

Bibliography

AIHW. 2003. *Young Homeless People in Australia 2001-2002: A Report From the SAAP NDCA*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

—. 2007a. *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2005-2006, Australia*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

—. 2007b. *Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2005-2006, Australian Capital Territory Supplementary Tables*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

—. 2008. *SAAP National Data Collection National annual report 2006-07: Australian Capital Territory Suplmentary Table*. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Anderson, E. 1976. *A Place on the Corner*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—. 1999. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence, and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York/London: Norton & Company.

—. 2002. The Ideologically Driven Critique. *American Journal of Sociology* 107, 1533-1550.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2002. Australians on the Move.

—. 2005a. 1344.8.55.001 - ACT Stats, 2005.

—. 2005b. ACT most qualified in the nation, says ABS.

—. 2005c. Canberrans have equal highest household income. Canberra.

—. 2007a. 3235.0 - Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2007

—. 2007b. Rents and housing loans: What people are paying ACT, Queanbeyan and Yass.

—. 2009a. In fACT - Statistical Information on the ACT and Region. Canberra: ABS.

—. 2009b. Regional Population Growth, Australia, 2007-08 Canberra.

ACT Government. 2009. Media release: new initiative for homeless Canberrans: ACT Government.

Becker, H. 1963. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

Beresford, P. 1979. The public presentation of vagrancy. In *Vagrancy: Some New Perspectives* (ed.) T. Cook. London: Academic Press.

Berger, B. 1989. Structuralisme et volontarisme dans la sociologie de la culture. *Sociologie et societes* 21, 177-94.

Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (trans.) R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bibliography.

—. 1979. *Algeria 1960 : The Disenchantment of the World: The Sense of Honour: The Kabyle House or the World Reversed* (trans.) R. Nice. Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press.

—. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (trans.) R. Nice. London: Routledge.

—. 1985. The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups. *Theory and Society* 12, 723-744.

—. 1986. Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for Sociology of Education* (ed.) J.G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.

—. 1987. What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32, 1-17.

—. 1990a. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (trans.) M. Adamson. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

—. 1990b. *The Logic of Practice* (trans.) R. Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press.

—. 1993. *Sociology In Question* (trans.) R. Nice. Sage: London.

—. 1999. *Weight of the World* (trans.) P. Ferguson, S. Emanuel, J. Johnson & S. Waryn. Cambridge: Polity Press.

—. 2000. *Pascalian Meditations* (trans.) R. Nice. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. & L.J.D. Wacquant. 1992. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourgois, P. 1995. *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Brandon, D. & K. Wells. 1980. *The Survivors: A Study of Homeless Young Newcomers to London and the Responses Made to Them*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Bullen, E. & J. Kenway. 2005. Bourdieu, subcultural capital and risky girlhood. *Theory and Research in Education* 3, 47-61.

Burdekin, B. & J. Carter. 1989. *Our Homeless Children: The Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*. AGPS.

Calhoun, C. 1995. *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Twentieth Century Social Theory. Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.

Chamberlain, C. & D. Mackenzie. 1992. Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 27, 274-297.

—. 1994. Temporal Dimensions of Youth Homelessness. *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 29, 1-25.

—. 2002. *Youth Homelessness 2001*. RMIT University.

—. 2003. *Counting the Homeless 2001*. ABS.

Coleman, J. 1990. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Cordray, D.S. & G.M. Pion. 1997. What's Behind the Numbers? Definitional Issues in Counting the Homeless. In *Understanding Homelessness: New Policy and Research Perspectives*.

Desjarlais, R. 1994. Struggling Along: The Possibilities for Experience Among the Homeless Mentally Ill. *American Anthropologist* 96, 886-901.

—. 1996a. Office of Reason: On the Politics of Language and Agency in a Shelter for "The Homeless Mentally Ill". *American Ethnologist* 23, 880-900.

—. 1996b. Some Causes and Cultures of Homelessness. *American Anthropologist* 98, 420-5.

—. 1996c. Struggling Along. In *Things as They Are* (ed.) M. Jackson. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

—. 1999. The Makings of Personhood in a Shelter for People Considered Homeless and Mentally Ill. *Ethos* 27, 466-89.

DHCS. 2003. Breaking the cycle - the ACT homelessness strategy. Canberra: ACT Government.

—. 2007. Evaluation of 'Breaking the cycle' - the ACT homelessness strategy. Canberra: ACT Government.

—. 2008a. ACT Homelessness Charter. Canberra: ACT Government.

—. 2008b. SAAP Service Guarantee. Canberra: ACT Government.

Doherty, M. 2009. Diddly-squat at Flynn, Stanhope says. In *Canberra Times*. Canberra.

Duneier, M. 1999. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

—. 2002. What Kind of Combat Sport is Sociology? *American Journal of Sociology* 107, 1551-1576.

Fajans, J. 2006. Autonomy and Relatedness: Emotions and the Tension between Individuality and Sociality. *Critique of Anthropology* 26, 103-119.

Fopp, R. 1989. Homeless Young People in Australia: Estimating Numbers and Incidence. In *Our Homeless Children* (ed.) HREOC.

—. 1993a. The Dilemmas of Youth Homelessness. In *Youth Homelessness: Courage and Hope* (ed.) H. Sykes. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

—. 1993b. Is it a Case of Chalk and Cheese, Apples and Oranges, A Response to David Mackenzie and Chris Chamberlain. *Shelter - National Housing Action* 9, 33-37.

—. 1993c. More Heat Than Houses: Housing and Young People. The Debate to Date. *Youth Studies Australia* 12, 45-50.

—. 2003. After Burdekin - A Brief Evaluation 14 Years On. *Parity* 16, 13-14.

Forsyth, A. 2007. *Fact Sheet: Youth Homelessness*. Council to Homeless Persons.

Fukuyama, F. 1999. *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*. New York: Free Press.

Bibliography.

Glasser, I. 1988. *More Than Bread: Ethnography of a Soup Kitchen*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press.

Glasser, I. & R. Bridgman. 1999. *Braving the Street: The Anthropology of Homelessness*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Goffman, E. 1958. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University.

Gorder, K. 1980. Understand School Knowledge: a critical appraisal of Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu. In *Pierre Bourdieu Volume 2* (ed.) D. Robbins. London Sage Publications.

Gupta, A. & J. Ferguson. 1997. Discipline and Practice: "The Field" as site, Method, and Location in Anthropology. In *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (eds) A. Gupta & J. Ferguson. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hall, S. & T. Jefferson (eds) 1975. *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London: Routledge.

Hall, T. 2003. *Better Times Than This: Youth Homelessness in Britain*. London: Pluto Press.

Homelessness Taskforce. 2008. The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (ed.) H. Department of Families, Community Services and Indigneous Affairs: Commonwealth of Australia.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs. 1995. *A Report on Apsects of Youth Homelessness*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Hutson, S. & R. Jenkins. 1989. *Taking the strain: Families, Unemployment, and the Transition to Adulthood*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Hutson, S. & M. Liddiard. 1994. *Youth Homelessness: The Construction of a Social Issue*. London: Macmillan.

Jenkins, R. 1992. *Pierre Bourdieu* (Key Sociologists. London: Routledge.

Kingston, P. 2001. The Unfulfilled Promise of Cultural Capital Theory. *Sociology of Education* Extra Issue, 88-99.

Leacock, E.B. (ed.) 1971. *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Lewis, O. 1959. *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*. New York: Basic Books.

—. 1966. The Culture of Poverty. *Scientific American* 215, 19-25.

Liebow, E. 1967. *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Lin, N. 2001. Building a Network Theory of Social Capital. In *Social Capital: Theory and Research* (eds) N. Lin, K. Cook & R.S. Burt. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Mackenzie, D. & C. Chamberlain. 1998. *Youth Homelessness: Early Intervention and Prevention*. Sydney: Australian Centre for Equity Through Education.

292

McCarthy, B., J. Hagan & M.J. Martin. 2002. In and Out of Harm's Way: Violent Victimization and the Social Capital of Fictive Street Families. *Criminology* 40, 831-865.

Miller, D. & J. Branson. 1987. Pierre Bourdieu: Culture and Praxis. In *Creating Culture: Profiles in the Study of Culture* (ed.) D.J.A. Broos. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Morgan, E. & D. Vincent. 1987. Youth Housing Needs: Housing Questions? *Youth Studies and Abstracts* 6, 21-3.

Myers, F. 1986. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

National Youth Commission. 2008. Australia's Homeless Youth: a report of the National Youth Inquiry into Youth Homelessness. Melbourne: National Youth Commission.

Newman, K. 1999. *No Shame in My Game*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Knopf.

—. 2002. No Shame: The View from the Left Bank. *American Journal of Sociology* 107, 1577-1599.

Newton, K. 1997. Social Capital and Democracy. *American Behavioural Scientist* 40, 575-586.

Nietzsche, F. 1961. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a book for everyone and no one* (trans.) R.J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books.

Peterson, N. 1993. Demand Sharing: Reciprocity and the Pressure for Generosity among Foragers. *American Anthropologist* 95, 860-874.

Portes, A. 1998. Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, 1-24.

Propp, J., D. Ortega & F. NewHeart. 2003. Independence or Interdependence: Rethinking the Transition From "Ward of the Court" to Adulthood. *Families in Society* 84, 259-266.

Putnam, R. 1995. Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy* 6, 65-78.

Putzel, J. 1997. Accounting for the 'Dark Side' of Social Capital: Reading Robert Putnam on Democracy. *Journal of International Development* 9, 939-949.

Robbins, J. 1998. *Becoming Sinners: Christian Transformations of Morality and Culture in Papua New Guinea Society*. Virginia: University of Virginia.

Roberston, M.J., P. Koegel & L. Ferguson. 1989. Alcohol Use and Abuse Among Homeless Adolescents in Hollywood. *Contemporary Drug Problems* 16, 415-452.

Rossi, P.H. 1989. *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rossi, P.H., J.D. Wright, G.A. Fisher & G. Willis. 1987. The Urban Homeless: Estimating Composition and Size. *Science*, 1336-1341.

Rudra, N. 2009. Family conflict, pessimism on the rise as crisis takes toll, Salvos say. In *Canberra Times*. Canberra.

Bibliography.

Sandberg, S. 2008. Street capital: Ethnicity and violence on the streets of Oslo. *Theoretical Criminology* 12, 153-171.

Scheper-Hughes, N. 1992. *Death without Weeping : the violence of everyday life in Brazil.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Seymour-Smith, C. 1986. *Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology*. London, England: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Spradley, J. 1970. *You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Stack, C.B. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* New York: Harper & Row

Steinberg, S. 1981. *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*. New York: Atheneum.

Swartz, D. 1997. *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Thornton, S. 1995. *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Valentine, C.A. 1968. *Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter Proposals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Valentine, C.A., C.H. Berndt, J.H. Bushnell, P. Carsten, T. Gladwin, U. Hannerz, O. Lewis, E.B. Leacock & V.K. Kochar. 1969. Culture and Poverty: Critique and Counter-Proposals (Book Review). *Current Anthropology* 10, 181-201.

Wacquant, L.J.D. 1992. Toward a Social Praxeology: The Structure and Logic of Bourdieu's Sociology. In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: Polity Press.

—. 2002. Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography. *American Journal of Sociology* 107, 1468-1532.

Watson, S. & H. Austerberry. 1986. *Housing and Homelessness: A Feminist Perspective.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Whyte, W.F. 1943. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Willis, P. 1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs.* New York: Columbia University Press.

—. 1984. Youth Unemployment: Thinking the Unthinkable. *Youth and Policy* 2, 17-24.

Winter, I. 2000. Towards a Theorised Understanding of Family Life and Social Capital. *Working Paper* 21.

Wood, E. 2003. The National Homelessness Strategy. *Parity: Comparative Homelessness Strategies* 16, 4-6.

Youth Coalition of the ACT. 2008. Accommodation and Accommodation Support. In *The Big Red Book: a handbook and directory for people who work with young people in the ACT* Canberra.