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TENTATIVE TRANSITIONS AND GENDERED PATHWAYS: EXPLORING THE
REVOLVING DOOR OF YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS

by

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TENTATIVE TRANSITIONS AND GENDERED PATHWAYS: EXPLORING THE
REVOLVING DOOR OF YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS

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University of Nebraska, 2013

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The number of homeless young adults living in unstable conditions is a growing social problem. However, less is known about the multiple transitions young people experience as they enter into street life and how these pathways differ for males and females. While some young people may run away from home never to return, others may move between housed environments and homelessness, creating a revolving door effect. The homeless experience for young adults can also potentially lead to developmental problems in later life such as the lack of stable employment due to criminal activity and an overall cycle of homelessness that is difficult to escape. As such, this study explores the unique, gendered pathways young people experience as they exit their homes using qualitative interviews with 40 homeless young adults (16 males; 24 females) 19 to 21 years of age. Narrative analysis is used to illustrate the incremental process of youths' exits from their homes as well as a focus on specific events that shape a young person's life. The overarching theme of the revolving door also includes processes of early adultification and rejection from one's family of origin. All of the themes are further elaborated using a gendered lens to examine how young men and women experience differential pathways into homelessness, which will allow researchers to expound on the gendered components of this at-risk population.

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Introduction

With more than approximately 1.6 million adolescents experiencing homelessness on a yearly basis, young adults entering into and living in homeless conditions is a growing concern in the United States (The National Center on Family Homelessness 2011). Though estimates are tentative and in constant flux, they remain a constant reminder of an issue that is broadening in scope. Homeless young adults, typically those 19 to 25 years of age (Tyler and Whitbeck 2004), are often at increased risk for victimization (Tyler et al. 2004), substance use (Mallett, Rosenthal and Keys 2005; Thompson et al. 2010) and psychological disorders (MacLean, Embry and Cauce 1999; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004) based on their current unstable and exposed living conditions. The homeless experience for young adults can also potentially lead to developmental problems in later life such as the lack of stable employment due to criminal activity and an overall cycle of homelessness that is difficult to escape (Auerswald and Eyre 2002; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004).

The origins of homelessness, though, vary across gender, resulting in differential street experiences for females that can lead to increased risk for victimization and greater health disparities (Ensign and Panke 2002; Oliver and Cheff 2012; Tyler et al. 2004). Research has repeatedly shown that female homeless adolescents experience much higher rates of victimization on the street compared to males (Hoyt, Ryan and Cauce 1999; Tyler et al. 2004). Additionally, prominent research agrees that females also undergo higher rates of childhood sexual abuse within their families, which is often viewed as a precursor to youth homelessness (Chen et al. 2004; Thrane et al. 2006; Tyler 2002; Tyler, Whitbeck and Cauce 2001). Sexually abused young adults are then more likely to

participate in risky sexual behaviors once enmeshed in the street context, such as trading sex for food and shelter (Johnson, Rew and Sternglanz 2006). Concerning young women's health, risk of pregnancy also dramatically increases along with youths' attempts at running away (Thrane and Chen 2012). In the face of these issues that adversely affect females, more in-depth research is needed to explore young women's exits from their homes. Through an examination of the pathways into youth homelessness, this study will contribute to the literature by providing insight into how transitions into street life differ by gender.

As such, the study of homeless youth is crucial within the field of sociology to better understand the nuances of the homeless condition both prior to and during the street context. Few studies have fully investigated the differences of youth homelessness along the lines of gender. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to explore the multifaceted dynamics of youth homelessness through a gendered lens to more fully understand the economic barriers that may thrust a youth into street life as well as familial contexts that play an influential role in a youth's path to the street. In turn, the gendered aspect of youth homelessness is vital to understanding the unique experiences of females and males as they enter into the street context.

The majority of previous research on young adult homelessness has focused on the experiences of these youth while living on the streets, with few studies highlighting the origins of a youth's homeless status (Kennedy et al. 2010; MacLean et al. 1999; Mallett et al. 2005; Tyler 2006; Tyler and Melander 2010a; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). Consequently, there is a paucity of research that has addressed the experiential nature of homelessness for young people (Auerswald and Eyre 2002; Stablein 2011). For example,

Stablein (2011) concluded the following in his study of the interactions between housed and homeless youth: “The street experience acted as a training ground for youth contemplating whether to leave home” (p. 305). Through their interactions with homeless young adults, housed youth accumulated a wealth of social and cultural capital from which they could draw if they decided to exit their current residences. In this way, young adults tentatively explored homelessness in an experimental transition before they completed their housed exoduses (Stablein 2011).

In a similar vein, the current study contributes to and expands the existing literature by framing youth homelessness as a dynamic process through a revolving door effect (Auerswald and Eyre 2002; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). The following research questions will be addressed: In what ways do youth initially exit their familial residences? How does homelessness represent a revolving door of experiences for young people? Furthermore, gender differences will be explored to understand how young people come to identify as homeless. The present study is necessary to highlight the varied origins of youth homelessness and show that street youth cannot be viewed through a single sociological lens. For example, the process of becoming homeless could occur in stages that begins with running away from home, returning again and finally moving to a group home or foster living environment only to exit that residence at some point. As such, many of the young adults interviewed in this qualitative study present their entrance into homelessness as an incremental progression that ultimately culminates in unstable living conditions on the street. Transitioning between homeless and housed statuses creates the dynamic effect of a revolving door of homelessness for many youth. Exploring young adults’ multifaceted origins of homelessness is vital to a more

comprehensive understanding of the stages of homelessness as existing on a continuum (Auerswald and Eyre 2002; Stablein 2011).

To aid in the prevention of increased numbers of homeless youth, it is necessary to examine the youths' complex living situations and kinship relationships leading up to their entrance into homelessness. Therefore, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the origins of young adult homelessness as a revolving door effect and how youth perceive their entrances into homelessness. Qualitative methods are employed to best capture the intricate processes resulting in youth's leaving home as interviews allow young adults to personally recount their life stories in their own words. Consistent with past and contemporary research, this paper uses the terms "youth" and "young adult" interchangeably to highlight the varied perceptions and definitions of youth living in homelessness (Wright 1989). As such, youth homelessness is dynamic in nature where young people experience multiple and discrete transitions into and out of homelessness rather than static pathways into street life.

Consequently, by studying the revolving door of youth homelessness in tandem with variations across gender, a more complete understanding of this pressing issue will emerge. Identifying the contexts that surround young people's transitory entrances into homelessness is crucial in not only preventing the growth of youth homelessness, but also in alleviating the unique stresses that female and male street youth experience through an understanding of their individual lives and histories. A gendered sociological examination of youths' emergences into street life will allow researchers to expound on the study of both youth homelessness in general and the gendered components of this at-risk population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has concluded that certain youth are at higher risk of becoming homeless based on a number of key characteristics. For example, youth living in low-income, high-crime communities may be more likely to run away to escape familial discord and violent neighborhood situations (Kennedy et al. 2010; Mallett and Rosenthal 2009; Mallett et al. 2005; Tyler and Bersani 2008; Tyler, Hagewen and Melander 2011). Additionally, some young people may experience peer pressure to enter into street life as a means of developing alternative, supportive social networks to fill the void left by estranged or conflicted familial relations (Stablein 2011). Psychological issues stemming from depression and anxiety, which are in turn influenced by high rates of childhood abuse and neglect, have also been identified as precursors to homelessness (MacLean et al. 1999; Thompson 2010; Tucker et al. 2011; Tyler 2006; Tyler and Melander 2010a).

Because of these identified risk factors (e.g., impoverished neighborhoods, familial discord, mental health problems), it is important to assess these shared traits early on in an adolescent's life in hopes of preventing homelessness. While it is necessary to identify general catalysts that prompt youth to leave home, pathways into homelessness are often comprised of a combination of several influential factors that create unique circumstances. The revolving door of youth homelessness is often a result of multiple transitions into and out of housed environments. Additionally, gender plays an important role in helping to shape the contexts that propel youth into homelessness as well as their street experiences. Throughout this review of the literature, it must be noted that though many young people living on the street share similar characteristics of family background, social characteristics and mental health issues, homeless youth cannot be

generalized as a monolithic social group. Oftentimes, the terms “homeless” and “runaway” are used interchangeably in research studies, which represents the fluid and complex nature of youth homelessness. As prominent homelessness scholar James D. Wright (1989) has stated, “homelessness is not and cannot be a precisely defined condition” (46).

Pathways into Homelessness

The Runaway. While it is necessary to identify the primary contributing factors to youth homelessness, it remains equally important to recognize that youth experience their entrance into homelessness in a variety of ways. Moreover, the decision for a youth to exit the home can fall within the hands of a parent, peer network member or legal official if it is not a personal choice of the youth. Existing research defines several generalized pathways into homelessness for young adults. The most prevalent type of homeless youth classified in the literature is known as the runaway. In the case of the runaway, the choice of becoming homeless appears to rest with the individual, though external forces such as familial conflict and a disadvantaged home life could leave the youth with no alternative (MacLean et al. 1999; Thompson 2010; Tyler 2006; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004).

Researchers agree that the majority of runaway youth are seeking to escape a troubled home life rather than running to find adventure (Tyler and Whitbeck 2004).

The Throwaway. Another type of homeless youth, with many parallels to the runaway, is literally pushed out of the home because of familial conflict and estrangement (Zide and Cherry 1992). Dubbed “throwaway youth” in the literature, these youths are often “abandoned by parents or subjected to neglect or maltreatment”

(Thompson et al. 2010:194). This type of youth may be at the greatest risk for entering into and remaining in homelessness because of a loss of stable support networks from family members and non-kin relations. A study of homeless, adolescent mothers reported that a neglectful, abusive maternal figure adversely shaped the youths' abilities to make a healthy transition into adulthood (Kennedy et al. 2010). As a result, the throwaway youth may experience feelings of extreme hopelessness and desertion if the choice to become homeless was thrust upon them. The condition of the throwaway youth is worsened when parental figures blatantly reject the youth by kicking them out of the home and they express no desire for the youth to return home (MacLean et al. 1999). Specifically, studies show that LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) youth are more likely to be pushed out of their homes than their heterosexual counterparts as a result of physical abuse, alcohol consumption as well as parental conflict concerning the youth's sexual orientation (Cochran et al. 2002; Corliss et al. 2011; Whitbeck et al. 2004).

The Forsaken. The final category of homeless youth cited in the literature falls under several different terms. Initially identified as "forsaken," this group of homeless youth is typically separated from impoverished families who are unable to provide financial stability for the youth (Zide and Cherry 1992). However, young adults can also be forcibly removed from their homes if a household or caregiver is deemed unfit to care for the youth. In this case, the youths are identified as "system youths" because they may enter into foster care or other government-mandated group living situations (MacLean et al. 1999). Within this group of homeless youth, the choice of leaving the home lies with external forces that are outside of the youth's control.

Catalysts of Youth Homelessness

Family Background

Family Background. A few select contributing factors driving youth homelessness are strongly highlighted within the empirical literature. Families are frequently viewed as the most influential socializing agent in an individual's life, especially in the developmental stages of childhood and adolescence (Parke and Buriel 1998). Because families play such an instrumental role in early human development, their composition and dynamics must be closely examined to help explain youth outcomes. Stemming from this knowledge, familial conflict and discord is often cited as a primary factor in determining a youth's entrance into homelessness (Hyde 2005; Kennedy et al. 2010; MacLean et al. 1999; Thompson et al. 2010; Tyler 2006; Tyler et al. 2011).

Specifically, mixed, or blended families that include stepparents, extended family members and non-blood related kin have been shown to place youth at higher risk for homelessness by increasing household stress levels as family members adapt to each other (Hyde 2005; Mallett and Rosenthal 2009; Tyler 2006). Also, single-parent homes experience higher rates of financial distress and limited parental monitoring which can drive youth to homelessness (Finkelstein 2005). Hyde (2005) found that 60% of youth reported residing in a single parent household when they entered into homelessness. Young people living in unstable, conflict-laden foster care and group home situations are also more likely to experience homelessness at some point in their lives compared to their counterparts living in a nuclear family, domiciled environment (Mallett et al. 2005; Thompson et al. 2010; Tyler and Melander 2010a). Disruptions in family living situations

such as divorce or death of a parental figure can also create pathways into homelessness for young adults (Kennedy et al. 2010).

Child Maltreatment. Youth may also be pushed to homelessness if they are repeated victims of physical, sexual or emotional abuse (Finkelstein 2005; MacLean et al. 1999; Mallett and Rosenthal 2009; Tyler 2006; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). One study found that 95% of homeless youth had suffered some form of physical abuse at the hands of a primary caregiver prior to leaving home (Tyler and Melander 2010a). Specifically, Tyler and Cauce (2002) concluded that 69% of abusive perpetrators of homeless youth consisted of a biological mother and/or father. Chronic child abuse creates unhealthy living conditions from which a youth may be inclined to escape, even if street conditions do not guarantee well-being and safety. Youth are also at increased risk of running away at an earlier age if they experienced neglect or sexual abuse in their household (Ferguson 2009; Thrane et al. 2006). Tyler and Bersani (2008) established that experiences of personal maltreatment and victimization were positively correlated with the number of instances a youth initiated running away.

Additionally, this abuse can stem from a variety of sources ranging from family members while at home to peer network members once youth are living on the street (Tyler et al. 2004). Psychological issues such as depression and suicidal ideation may develop over time as a result of repeated familial abuse and maltreatment, thus diminishing the youth's capacity to cope with life struggles (Ryan et al. 2000; Thompson et al. 2010). Specifically, it has been shown that familial sexual abuse is highly correlated to suicidal ideation among homeless youth (Yoder, Hoyt and Whitbeck 1998). Consequently, physical and sexual abuse in early childhood can lead a youth to utilize

violence-laden survival strategies once on the street, thereby replicating a form of socialized violence (Kennedy et al. 2010). Additionally, young women who experience early childhood sexual abuse are more at risk of developing depressive symptoms, which can in turn make them more vulnerable to victimization within the street context (Chen et al. 2004; Meyerson et al. 2002; Tyler et al. 2001b). Witnessing domestic violence can also damage a youth's sense of efficacy even if he or she is not the target of violence, thereby solidifying the path to homelessness (Tyler 2006).

Family Substance Misuse. Closely tied with familial situations as a contributing factor to youth homelessness is the issue of substance misuse. Contemporary research often emphasizes drug and alcohol use as a primary characteristic of homeless youth populations (Chen et al. 2004; Johnson, Whitbeck and Hoyt 2005; Maccio and Schuler 2012; Mallett et al. 2005; Salomonsen-Sautel et al. 2008; Thompson et al. 2010; Tyler and Johnson 2006a). Research has also highlighted substance use by youth and their family members as a major pathway into youth homelessness (Lee et al. 2010; Mallett et al. 2005; Martijn and Sharpe 2006). Mallett and colleagues (2005) found that 35% of their homeless young adult sample identified personal or familial substance use as a catalyst for entering into street life. In another study, 56% of homeless youth reported parental drug and alcohol abuse and cited this as the primary reason for their current situation living on the street (Finkelstein 2005). Parental substance misuse may exacerbate already difficult family and home situations by fueling stress and anger directed at children, thus driving a youth to homelessness as a means of escaping parental neglect and abuse (Ferguson 2009; Hyde 2005; Mallett and Rosenthal 2009; McMorris et al. 2002). A sizeable number of youth also cite being initiated into substance use by their

parents or caregivers, a trajectory that then paves the way for continued drug use once living on the street (Tyler and Johnson 2006a). Conversely, young adults may also view homelessness as an opportunity to establish their independence and freely pursue drug and alcohol use without familial constraints, especially if youth substance use is a matter of contention among family members (Mallett et al. 2005; Stablein 2011).

Environmental Factors

Socioeconomic Disadvantage. Young adults may also be pushed into homeless living conditions as a result of adverse environmental conditions such as poverty, neighborhood violence and lack of community ties (Kennedy et al. 2010). For example, if youth are unable to develop a sense of community cohesion, they may feel less integrated with their surrounding social networks (Thompson et al. 2010). Many homeless youth are thrust into street life as a result of economically impoverished backgrounds. Living in poverty, many homeless young adults were raised in harsh communities in which violence was a common occurrence (Kennedy et al. 2010). As a result, increased exposure to communal criminal activity and victimization may lead young adults to view street life as a normative lifestyle, and thereby come to accept its expectations of stigmatizing behavior such as substance use and crime (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). Impoverished living conditions may drive youth to their first instance of running away, which then severely augments their risk of experiencing long-term homelessness (Tyler and Whitbeck 2004; Tyler et al. 2011). Therefore, youth living in poverty, lacking the social and financial resources which allow one to overcome adversity, are thus lead to life on the streets.

Education. Youth living in socioeconomically disadvantaged families are also at higher risk for experiencing educational barriers and ensuing stagnant or downward social mobility. Issues concerning maladaptive behavior and poor academic performance at school are also closely linked with youth homelessness (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). Specifically, dropping out of high school can spur young adults onto a downward slope of compounding “risk chains” that ultimately culminate in exiting the home (Kennedy et al. 2010). Failing to graduate from high school, and lacking the opportunity to pursue higher education, places youth at a greater disadvantage for social mobility in mainstream society. According to Hagan and McCarthy (1997), underprivileged youth’s aversion to school and propensity to conflict with authority figures reduces “the likelihood of their acquiring the social and human capital that derives from schooling” (p. 231).

Mental Health

Depression. Because of the stressful nature of the street context, it is difficult to pinpoint the causal order of depressive symptoms and entrances into homelessness (Tyler et al. 2011). However, young adults with poor mental health are undoubtedly at heightened risk for experiencing homelessness at some point in their lives. Tucker et al. (2011) concluded that depressive affect significantly predicted the risk of a youth running away. Symptoms of depression and anxiety can originate from a number of sources including individual traits, family background and environmental factors. In one study, researchers found that homeless youth who had experienced some form of abuse in their past were more likely to develop depressive symptoms (Ryan et al. 2000). If youth are unhappy or discontent with their lives at home, they may flee to the street as a means of

escape. As a result, Ayerst (1999) concluded that 48% of street youth reported lower levels of depression after they exited their homes. So, actually leaving adverse home environments may allow young people to initially improve their mental health statuses. Low levels of mental health, however, can lead youth to enter into homelessness and potentially exacerbate their situation once living on the street by increasing their susceptibility to victimization (Tyler and Whitbeck 2004).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many homeless youth are also more at risk of experiencing PTSD as a result of the high-tension, unstable nature of street life (Bender et al. 2005; Stewart et al. 2004; Thompson 2005). The origins of PTSD for homeless youth may be found in their discordant housed environments. Studies have highlighted the correlation between parental drug use and child abuse and symptoms of PTSD among homeless youth, showing that youth fleeing to the street are often burdened with psychological issues as a result of familial conflict (Thompson 2005). Bender et al. (2010) reported that 24% of homeless young adults exhibited signs of PTSD once living on the street. The high rates of PTSD among homeless youth also exemplify the stressful, dangerous nature of street life. Accordingly, Stewart et al. (2004) concluded that 17.7% of victimized homeless youth in their sample exhibited characteristics of PTSD such as being excessively watchful of one's surroundings as well as numbing of emotions.

While it is clear that youth experience varied pathways into homelessness depending on their familial, social and environmental backgrounds, the role of gender must also be taken into consideration as a determining force. As a result of gender socialization, male and female children are encouraged to develop in different way, which in turn shapes their future life trajectories. Additionally, young women and men

may experience specific pathways into homelessness in very different ways as a result of their respective genders and the overarching expectation of adherence to gender norms. Finally, patterns emerge from the literature showing that many homeless youth cite reasons for entering into homelessness that vary across gender. Therefore, gender is first discussed as a broad theme capable of shaping social categories. Following, the specifics of gender and youth homelessness are discussed in relation to contemporary research.

Gender

Gender Socialization

Gender Norms. The stages of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood are recognized as key developmental periods of human growth and change (Arnett 2000). Within this period, young people hone personal skills, create a sense of self and work to establish their role within society. The installation of gendered behavioral norms often becomes more salient for young people as they navigate their lives into adulthood and develop their personal and social identities (Epstein and Ward 2011). For example, the theory of gender intensification holds that the expectation of distinct gender roles for males and females strengthens throughout adolescence (Barrett and Raskin White 2002; Bumpus, Crouter and McHale 2001; Galambos, Almeida and Petersen 1990; Hill and Lynch 1983; Obeidallah, McHale and Silbereisen 1996). A qualitative study exploring tomboyism in adolescence concluded that parental and peer pressure to conform to femininity altered women's gender trajectories early in their lives (Carr 2007). As such, differential adolescent and early adulthood experiences can create disparities between females and males that form the foundations of gender inequality.

Adherence to dichotomous masculine or feminine roles will inevitably shape a young person's self-concept and their ensuing cognitive and emotional development, often resulting in more adverse effects for females (Obeidallah 1996; Witt 1997). Barrett and Raskin White (2002) explored the ways in which binary gender ideologies and behaviors affected adolescents' reported levels of mental health. They found that adolescents, both male and female, exhibiting higher degrees of masculine traits (e.g. personal autonomy, decision making, assertiveness) and expressed lower rates of depressive symptoms overall (p. 464). Institutional settings are also prone to enact more restrictive, controlling processes aimed at female behavior. In a study of gendered practices present in preschools, Martin (1998) observed that teachers encouraged more structured play among female students and encouraged feminine docility through the insistence of young girls using soft voices and polite behavior such as hand-raising. In this way, a greater emphasis and sense of control was placed on females' outward appearances and actions compared to their male counterparts.

Parental Influences. While young people experience much gender socialization in the public realm, many scholars agree that the familial environment acts as the primary mechanism of shaping gender identities (Epstein and Ward 2011; McHale, Crouter and Whiteman 2003; Witt 1997). Parental gender socialization, however, can also lead to differential treatment and consequences between daughters and sons. Specifically, sex-typing is often cited as an integral means through which parents encourage strict masculine and feminine behavior in their children (Leaper and Gleason 1996; Letendre 2007). One study revealed that young girls spent more time focused on feminine household tasks, such as cleaning and cooking, compared to their male siblings,

suggesting early gender socialization in the family environment (Crouter, Manke and McHale 1995). Through a meta-analysis of major parental gender socialization studies, Lytton and Romney (1991) concluded that the effect of both mothers' and fathers' reinforcement of sex-typed activities (e.g. playing with dolls for girls or wrestling for boys) was significant across findings. By reinforcing traditional gender roles such as housewife and breadwinner, parental sex-typing of activities and reinforcement of gender norms can effectively shape a child's future attitudes towards and displays of gender.

Additionally, studies have found that female sexuality, especially among adolescents and young adults, is perceived as something to be avoided and passivity is encouraged, thus resulting in a form of feminine social control (Averett, Benson and Vaillancourt 2008; Hartley and Drew 2001). For example, Averett et al. (2008) concluded through qualitative research that young women's sexual agency was not reinforced by parental figures and the majority of their sample reported being raised to fear sex. Mothers have been found to be more instrumental in constructing their daughters' gender and sexuality by demanding that they act more feminine and adhere to more mainstream concepts of what it is to be female (Carr 2007). Overall, young girls face increased pressures from both public and private spheres that seek to influence and control their gender development in critical life stages. Differential treatment of male and female children is not confined to the facets of gender socialization, but also extends to different experiences of the more deleterious effects of child abuse.

Child Abuse

Physical Abuse. Rates of childhood abuse are vast, with debilitating effects that extend into adulthood (Thompson, Kingree and Desai 2004). Additionally, gender disparities can create differential experiences and consequences of childhood maltreatment between males and females. While the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2010) reported that slightly more girls (51.2%) were reported as victims of child maltreatment, physical abuse (17.6%) was cited as the more prevalent form of child abuse following neglect (78.3%). Studies have shown that male children consistently suffer higher instances of physical abuse throughout their childhood and adolescent years (Amstadter et al. 2011; MacMillan et al. 2001; Simmel 2011; Thompson et al. 2004). Using data from the National Violence Against Women Survey, Thompson et al. (2004) concluded that 53.8% of male respondents reported experiencing various forms of physical violence in childhood compared to 40% of female participants. Despite men having higher overall rates of childhood physical abuse, research has shown that more adult women suffer from adverse effects such as depression or substance dependence as a result of child abuse (MacMillan et al. 2001; Thompson et al. 2004).

Sexual Abuse. National reports show that 9.2% of maltreatment cases involve some form of childhood sexual abuse (United States Department of Health and Human Services 2010). Female children and adolescents are disproportionately represented in reported rates of sexual abuse (Chesney-Lind 2001; Maikovich-Fong and Jaffee 2010; Tyler 2002; Meyerson et al. 2002; Walker et al. 2004). Analyses from the National Comorbidity Survey found that 13.5% of women reported childhood sexual abuse compared to only 2.5% of men (Molnar, Buka and Kessler 2001). Furthermore, Maikovich-Fong and Jaffee (2010) concluded that the odds of experiencing penetrative

sexual abuse were 2 times greater for young girls than their male peers. The effects of childhood sexual abuse may be exacerbated for females if they feel responsible for the abuse or fear they will be blamed for the assault, and thus do not disclose the abuse to a trusted adult (Alaggia 2005).

The list of emotional, behavioral and psychological issues resulting from childhood sexual abuse is extensive, which include physical and relational aggression, substance abuse and depression (Cullerton-Sen et al. 2008; Meyerson et al. 2002; Tyler 2002). Through a comprehensive literature review, Walker et al. (2004) concluded that research findings agree that female victims of childhood sexual abuse are at increased risk for PTSD in the future. Despite this conclusion, one study found that male adolescents were more likely than females to experience an internalizing disorder following sexual abuse (Coohey 2010). Meyerson et al. (2002), however, established that childhood sexual, rather than physical, abuse was a stronger predictor of depression and distress for females. Overall, an examination of the gendered aspects of both physical and sexual childhood abuse show that not all children and adolescents experience developmental stages in the same manner and these differences have been shown to contribute to the variety of entrances into youth homelessness as well as the contexts surrounding street life.

Gender and Youth Homelessness

Gender and Leaving Home

Pathways into Homelessness. Males and females typically undergo different pathways and trajectories into homelessness. As such, the dominant literature is in

consensus that female adolescents are more likely to run away from their homes, while their male counterparts are at increased risk for being kicked out (MacLean et al. 1999; Tyler and Bersani 2008). Hagan and McCarthy's (1997) study revealed that male adolescents were significantly more likely to exit housed environments and enter into street life in relation to their female peers. These differences may stem from issues relating to gender norms and socialization as well as individual family dynamics. Moreover, Thrane et al. (2006) found that female youth were more likely to run away from home at an earlier age when compared to males in the research sample. Leaving home at a younger age could place females at a more disadvantaged position on the street if they are ill equipped to cope with the stressors of the street because of a lack of life experiences.

Reasons for Leaving Home. Research shows that the majority of homeless youth report that they ran away to escape a conflicted home life rather than to seek excitement or freedom (Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). However, gender comes to the forefront of concern as major reasons for exiting a housed environment differ between males and females. Family discord appears to be a more salient factor for leaving the home for the streets in the case of homeless female youth. Research has shown that young girls tend to report greater levels of familial conflict, which was presented to be positively correlated with both deviant behavior as well as running away (Tyler, Hagen and Melander 2011). Concerning blended families, a qualitative study showed that 16% of females were victims of physical abuse from their stepmothers compared to only 8% of males (Mallett and Rosenthal 2009).

Studies reveal that many more female homeless youth recount experiences of sexual abuse prior to becoming homeless compared to males (Johnson, Rew and Sternglanz 2006). For example, Chen et al. (2004) found that 32% of the sample of female homeless and runaway youth cited having experienced sexual abuse in their familial, housed environment and that youth with this abuse history were at increased risk of running away at a younger age. Sexual abuse at the hands of a trusted caregiver may leave young women with no alternative but to run away from home if they feel they have no one whom they can trust. Consequently, females' experiences of abuse can lay the foundation for further victimization within the homeless context (Tyler et al. 2001b).

Gender and Life on the Street

Victimization. In addition to experiencing distinctive trajectories into homelessness, males and females are also likely to describe differential accounts of street life dependent on their gender. Research is in agreement that young men and women face dissimilar risks through their lack of stable housing and exposure to street contexts. In general, female homeless youth suffer higher rates of conclusive PTSD as a consequence of street life (Gwadz et al. 2007; Stewart et al. 2004). In the same vein, Tyler et al. (2004) found that rates of sexual victimization of homeless female youth was double that of male sexual victimization. Additionally, newly homeless young females may be drawn into intimate relationships with older, more experienced homeless males as a source of protection, thereby increasing their risk of sexual exploitation (Stablein 2011). Therefore, young women must maintain constant vigilance for risks of both physical and sexual

victimization once living on the streets through their survival strategies and interpersonal relationships.

Subsistence Strategies. In general, it has been found that female homeless youth who engage in “deviant subsistence strategies” are then also more likely to experience some form of sexual victimization on the street (Tyler et al. 2001a:448). Specifically, the practice of survival sex or trading sex is often conceptualized as participating in sexual acts in exchange for food, shelter or other necessities (Tyler and Johnson 2006b) and is closely tied to increased risk of sexual victimization (Chen et al. 2004; Tyler and Johnson 2006b). Trading sex is also viewed as a subsistence strategy rather than a commercialized source of income (Tyler and Johnson 2006b). While some studies show that male and female homeless youth participate in similar rates of survival sex (Halcón and Lifson 2004; Walls and Bell 2011), other research has found that more females engage in some form of sex-related work on a regular basis when compared to males (Hagan and McCarthy 1997; O’Grady and Gaetz 2004; Tyler and Johnson 2006b; Tyler et al. 2001b). While Tyler (2009) found that gender was not a significant predictor of trading sex among homeless young adults, the study revealed that associating with peer network members involved in the sex trade increased a youth’s chances of mimicking this behavior by five times. Therefore, because of their propensity to associate with tight-knit street families (Hagan and McCarthy 1997), female homeless youth may be more at risk of trading sex and sexual victimization if their social networks engage in such practices.

Health Concerns. Based on biological characteristics, female youth face a greater number of risks associated with their health once living on the street. As a result, female homeless youth are victims to a variety of health disparities. A primary concern is the

possibility of pregnancy among homeless female young adults and the lack of access to proper prenatal care and health care for a newborn baby. For example, one study found the odds of pregnancy to increase by two times for runaway homeless youth compared to domiciled youth (Thrane and Chen 2012). Furthermore, the longer a female youth identifies as homeless, the higher the risk of her becoming pregnant (Thompson et al. 2008). This issue may be exacerbated by the fact that some studies found female homeless young adults to be less likely to use contraceptives during intercourse, thus increasing their overall chances of pregnancy and contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Halcón and Lifson 2004). Overall, however, both homeless male and female young adults still engage in very high rates of risky sexual practices compared to housed youth (Johnson et al. 2006; Rew et al. 2008).

The barriers to proper reproductive and sexual health care may also appear insurmountable to young women living on the street. In addition to financial constraints due to their homeless condition, many female youths also cite a lack of respect and understanding from available service providers as an obstacle to accessing quality health services (Ensign and Panke 2001; Kennedy et al. 2010; Oliver and Cheff 2012). For example, Oliver and Cheff (2012) reveal through a qualitative study that young women are averse to clinics because they feel health care providers will negatively judge them for their homeless condition and nonmainstream lifestyle. Although studies show that male homeless young adults engage in higher rates of sexual intercourse when compared to females (Halcón and Lifson 2004), access to quality knowledge and services about sexual health is vital for both genders' senses of well-being. Though young women living on the street face more health barriers and associated risks, scholars agree that, in relation

to males, overall females exhibit higher levels of sexual self-awareness and care as well as assertiveness regarding their health needs (Johnson et al. 2006; Rew et al. 2008).

Gender disparities also exist concerning rates of sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs/STIs) among youth living on the streets. For example, Whitbeck and Hoyt (1999) found that, among homeless youth, more females (23%) reported having an STD in their lives in relation to their male counterparts (12%). Specifically, one study found higher rates of chlamydia among younger female homeless youth aged 15-19 compared to their male counterparts (Shields et al. 2004). Gender differences in rates may be related to the fact that some studies show that female heterosexual homeless youth engage in higher rates of STD testing compared to males and sexual minorities (Solorio et al. 2006; Tyler and Melander 2010b). However, Tyler et al. (2000) concluded that females are not only more likely to self-report the incidence of an STD, but they also are more likely to participate in high-risk sexual behavior, which was shown to predict the former. Female sexual minorities, such as those identifying as lesbian or bisexual, living on the street are even more at risk as they may contract an STD at an earlier age (Moon et al. 2000).

Criminal Activity. Males and females also engage in differential levels and types of deviant activity once they are enmeshed in street life. Much research is in agreement that male homeless youth are at higher risk of utilizing deviant strategies (e.g., drug dealing, theft) in order to survive when compared to females (Hagan and McCarthy 1997; O'Grady and Gaetz 2004; Thrane et al. 2006; Whitbeck et al. 2001). For example, Whitbeck et al. (2001) found that 29% of male homeless youth compared to only 15% of females employed drug dealing as a strategy of subsistence. However, Baron (2007)

reported that while males in general participate in more instances of violent and criminal transgressions, the context of homelessness and the accompanying stress have a stronger influence on the number of female youths' violent offenses relative to males. Research by Chesney-Lind (2001) suggests that female adolescents may be "closing the violence gender gap" through their involvement in more deviant behavior, which could be viewed as a survival mechanism once living on the street (39). Types of criminal activity also differ between genders, with male homeless youth more likely to commit theft and females more prone to engage in prostitution (Hagan and McCarthy 1997).

Substance Abuse. Substance use and misuse patterns have also been shown to vary between homeless male and female youth. While some studies reported no gender differences in substance use rates and severity (Nyamathi et al. 2010), others found prevalence percentages to be greater for males compared to females (Greene, Ennett and Ringwaldt 1997; Kempf-Leonard and Johansson 2007). In turn, a study conducted by Nyamathi and colleagues (2012) established that male homeless youth were more likely than their female peers to use hard drugs such as cocaine and methamphetamine. Alternatively, research has shown that for females, drug use is negatively associated with condom usage, further exacerbating the risks of living on the street (Solorio et al. 2008). Regarding institutional interventions, Kempf-Leonard and Johansson (2007) concluded that male adolescent runaways experienced more punitive punishments for deviant behavior from the juvenile justice system, such as probation, compared to female adolescent runaways.

While a broad expanse of literature exists concerning the origins and nature of pathways into life on the streets, a scarcity of research addresses the dynamic properties

of youth homelessness. Though prominent studies have touched on the transitional nature of youth exiting their homes, few have placed this concept at the forefront of the analysis (for exceptions, see for example Auerswald 2002; Stablein 2011; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). Additionally, studies that examine gender differences interwoven throughout young adults' various trajectories into youth homelessness and their experiences on the street are rare. Therefore, the present study will fill this gap in the literature by exploring the revolving door of youth homelessness in conjunction with the influence of gender to provide a more holistic picture of youths' pathways into street life.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of theoretical frameworks have been utilized in the literature to not only help explain but also to predict the types of youth that are at greater risk of entering into homelessness. Some theories, however, are better suited to capture the varied and intricate lives of homeless youth prior to their leaving home. Consequently, a combination of theoretical frameworks is used in the present study to fully explore the complex, "revolving door," pathways young adults undergo as they enter into homelessness as well as how gender modifies those experiences. To obtain a more comprehensive picture of homeless youth, both life course theory and risk and resilience theory are employed in tandem to develop an understanding of how youth find themselves living on the street as well as the gendered components that shape their experiences.

Life Course Theory

As introduced by Elder (1998), life course theory is a valuable framework for assessing the situations and circumstances that thrust a young adult into homelessness, as well as the effects of this instability on the youth's later life. This theory is understood through its recognition that "early transitions can have enduring consequences by affecting subsequent transitions, even after many years and decades have passed" (Elder 1998:7). In this way, an individual's life events create a chain of opportunities, disadvantages or some combination of the two possibilities, which then create a multiplicative effect. For example, a young adult may reap further benefits of attending an elite school such as guaranteed employment after graduation, while conversely, youths may continue to fall behind if they prematurely drop out of high school and are confined to low-wage work. As such, positive or negative life events can either improve or exacerbate present conditions as well as future opportunities for young adults. Additionally, the concept of "linked lives" of individuals helps to explain how family members create specific dynamics that effectively shape youths' experiences both within and outside the family environment (Elder 1998:5). Whitbeck and associates (1994) note that disruptions and conflict in early family life between parents and their children continue to exert influence over this relationship well into the children's adulthood. A family unit in discord can drastically alter a youth's life, leading to detrimental consequences for his or her social and emotional development.

Life course theory has been used in previous research to identify pivotal developmental stages in an adolescent's life, and how adverse social, economic and environmental forces may ultimately result in a youth's homelessness (Kennedy et al. 2010; Tyler 2006; Whitbeck 1999). Elder (1998) posited in general terms that life events

occurring out of order, such as giving birth to a child before graduating high school, can result in detrimental outcomes for the individual. The damaging effects of these ruptures in life courses may be most salient for young people. For example, Tyler (2006) focuses on youths' family backgrounds and how specifically timed "events," such as parental drug use or child abuse, can lead to unstable developmental processes and a youth's exit from a housed environment (2006:1386). Additionally, Kennedy and colleagues (2010) cited young women's early exposure to familial violence as a pivotal foundation leading to their premature independence and homelessness. Research agrees that pathways leading to homelessness often begin in an individual's formative years of childhood and adolescence, thus setting the stage for adult life trajectories (Lee et al. 2010; Tyler 2006).

Examining youths' early life histories through a life course perspective is also an effective framework for comparing trajectories between males and females. On a general level, males and females undergo differential processes of gender socialization within the family, which in turn develop the groundwork for future life pathways (McHale et al. 2003). As young boys and girls experience different types and severity of childhood abuse within their households, it is necessary to expound on how the timing and frequency of abusive acts help pave the way for adverse life courses (Tyler 2002). For example, childhood sexual abuse has been correlated with gender-specific adult-onset psychological and behavioral disorders such as PTSD and substance use (MacMillan et al. 2001; Molnar et al. 2001; Thompson et al. 2004). Meyerson and colleagues (2002) found that female adolescents who experienced childhood abuse viewed their family as more conflict-laden and discordant than youth who had not been abused. These beliefs may then extend into adulthood. Specifically, early family life course experiences and

traumas may differ for young boys and girls, creating unique patterns of pathways into youth homelessness that vary by gender.

Risk and Resilience Theory

In general, risk and resilience theory is first conceptualized as a study of the factors, or risks, that work to hinder an individual's ability to pursue their goals (Arrington and Wilson 2000; Fergus and Zimmerman 2005). Within this framework, risk is examined in conjunction with an analysis of that person's capacity to cope with adverse situations, which is defined as resiliency (Arrington and Wilson 2000). According to Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), risk and resilience theory "focuses on understanding healthy development in spite of risk exposure" (399). This theory can be best applied to youth studies and the transformative period of adolescence as a result of young people's struggle to establish a social identity and the risks that accompany experimentation. The presence of widespread social inequality dictates that some youth are more at risk than others for trajectories of instability such as teenage pregnancy and dropping out of high school and therefore resiliency is thus transformed into a survival trait.

As such, risk and resilience theory has been utilized to ascertain both general and specific patterns that may lead to a youth's premature exit from a housed environment and subsequent entrance into homelessness (Kennedy et al. 2010; Kidd and Davidson 2007; Thompson et al. 2010; Tyler and Bersani 2008; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). Risk and resilience theory, when applied to adolescence, is generally defined as a "youth's likelihood of manifesting maladaptive behavioral and mental health outcomes" being

directly proportional to “the amount of stress they encounter via negative life events” (Arrington and Wilson 2000:223). For example, youths living in low-income neighborhoods who drop out of high school and/or experience neighborhood victimization may be at higher risk of entering into homelessness at some point in their young adult years (Thompson et al. 2010). Therefore, the risk components help to explain how a youth enters into homelessness and the notion of resiliency explores how certain young adults are more adept at coping with this stressful transition compared to others.

Risk and resiliency theory can also be effectively applied to analyses of gender differences within the life experiences of youth. Concerning deviant behavior, research has shown that males and females exhibit distinct, gender-specific characteristics and their ensuing risks and resiliency strategies. For example, Kempf-Leonard and Johansson (2007) found that male runaways were much more likely to report gang membership compared to females, which could put male homeless youth at higher risk for physical violence exposure and participation. Conversely, research supports the finding that female homeless youth are twice as likely to experience sexual victimization in relation to their male counterparts (Tyler et al. 2004). Concerning resiliency, female homeless youth are more likely to adopt a street family, which could serve as a protective safety net of support and companionship (Hagan and McCarthy 1997). These street families, however, could create more problems for youth as reflected in the finding that showed “being female increased the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime, even within their own street family” (Smith 2008:756).

Implementing both life course and risk and resilience theory allows for an examination of not only how youth find themselves on the street, but also of the ways in

which females and males experience unique trajectories and possess distinct characteristics. Early life experiences within their families along with issues of gender socialization and differences in risk factors and resilience strategies provide springboards to further analyze how males and females enter into homelessness through different avenues. Combining the two theories will create a deeper understanding of the pathways leading to youth homelessness through a gendered lens.

METHOD

Sampling Procedure

The current study utilized data from the qualitative portion of the Homeless Young Adult Project and has been described elsewhere (Tyler 2006). The sample included 40 young adults (16 males; 24 females) between the ages of 19 and 26 who were currently experiencing homelessness. This narrow age range was due to interests in learning more about the transition to young adulthood among the larger sample. Young people were interviewed in Lincoln and Omaha, NE and Des Moines, IA from April of 2004 through June of 2005. Full-time, trained street interviewers conducted the semi-structured interviews with the consenting participants. The young adults were recruited for the study using a non-probability method of convenience sampling based on prior research showing that it is not feasible to randomly sample homeless populations as a result of their transient nature (Wright 1989; Wright, Allen and Devine 1995). Young adults were interviewed in agency shelter rooms that provided services to homeless youth and young adults. In exchange for their time, young people were paid \$25 upon completion of the interview. On average, interviews lasted approximately 1 to ½ hours.

The definition of homelessness required that the youth currently reside in a shelter, on the street, or independently because they had run away, had been pushed out, or had drifted out of their family of origin. Study procedures were explained and informed consent was obtained from young adults prior to the interview.

Conceptualization and Measurement

Within the format of the semi-structured interviews, respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions that revolved around the topics of maltreatment, parental substance abuse, criminal activity, and past living situations. The present research focuses directly on the general lines of inquiry of pathways into homelessness to address the following research questions: In what ways do youth initially exit their familial residences? How does homelessness represent a revolving door of experiences for young people? For example, the data analysis draws from responses to the following questions exploring entrances into homelessness: At what age did you run away or leave home for the first time? Why did you leave home for the first time? Did you run away more than once? What happened each time that you ran away or left home? Where did you go? Additionally, respondents were encouraged to share information about their family histories regarding child abuse, domestic violence, criminal activity and substance abuse. These questions help to shed light on the motivations for youth leaving home in the first place and if they became permanent residents of the street.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Sample by Gender, Sexual Orientation and Race*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	16	40%
Female	24	60%
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	34	85%
Gay/Lesbian	3	8%
Bisexual	3	8%
Race		
White	27	68%
Black	8	20%
Hispanic	1	3%
Multiracial	4	10%

*N=40

Ethical Concerns

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln approved the Homeless Young Adult Project. Prior to all interviews, respondents and interviewers carefully reviewed an informed consent form and the respondents provided their signatures. To ensure confidentiality, all respondents were assigned pseudonyms in the interview transcriptions. These pseudonyms will be used in the present study to ensure continued respondent confidentiality. Furthermore, the homeless youth were assured that they could drop out of the study at any time without penalty. All respondents were provided with information and access to local service agencies such as food pantries and shelters. Additionally, since interviews would cover potentially sensitive material, the youth were provided with references for counseling services.

Data Analysis

The author performed all data analyses. To begin the process of data analysis, open coding was first utilized to determine initial themes and categories that concerned the areas of pathways into homelessness and familial/residential contexts (Neuman 2011). Next, axial coding was employed to create logical linkages or ordering of the concepts such as different patterns that emerge for youths that go back and forth between home and the street and those who remain homeless. Through axial coding clusters of data or subcategories of pathways into homelessness were identified. Finally, selective coding was implemented to again analyze the data and identify specific cases that best illustrated the selected themes.

Narrative analysis was used to examine the pathways youth experience as they enter into homelessness. As the present research explores the revolving door of homelessness, a narrative analysis allowed for the incremental process of youths' exits from their homes as well as a focus on specific events that shape a young person's life. In turn, this method allows for an analysis of youths' life course trajectories "as expressed by the unfolding of a specific sequence of events" (Franzosi 1998:520). This analytic method most accurately captured the revolving door effect of youth homelessness.

Validity was assessed through triangulation of the data by building evidence for a code or theme (e.g., multiple transitions into homelessness) from several respondents (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). To examine intercoder reliability, a predetermined coding scheme and qualitative codebook were used to identify whether or not the same codes were assigned between text passages (Neuman 2011). Finally, a collaborative data

conference was held with other experienced qualitative researchers to assess the overall validity of the findings.

FINDINGS

Following the systematic coding of the qualitative interviews, three major themes developed as encompassing the complex trajectories youth experience as they enter into homelessness. The themes are organized by level of specificity, beginning with general processes of becoming homeless and moving to particular events that thrust a youth from their home. First, *the revolving door* of young adult homelessness emerged as an overarching theme to capture the process of youth continually transitioning between housed environments and the street. Next, the concept of *early adultification* is explored as an impetus to homelessness as many youth cited adopting adult statuses prior to entering into street life. Finally, *rejection from one's family* materialized as a common experience for young adults that led to their transition to homelessness. Gender differences and implications are also examined for each theme. Each major theme is further supported by a series of subthemes as well as specific quotes from the young adults themselves. Table 2 presents illustrative quotes for each major theme and its subthemes.

<i>Table 2: Homelessness Trajectory Sample Quotes</i>	
<i>Qualitative Themes and Subthemes</i>	<i>Selected Qualitative Quotes</i>
<i>The Revolving Door</i>	
Push and Pull Between Home and Street	- I was kind of not really listening and doing my own thing...everyone acted like it never happened or like it was not a big deal.
Running to Cope with Familial Conflict	- My dad had been really abusive...He had promised that he had changed so I came down here to live with him and it started right back up so I moved back and forth.
Running From Alternate Living Arrangements	- I ran away from every foster home...I have a list that is like four pages long.
Transitional Couch-Surfing	- Most of the time I would run away with a friend or whatever or I'd let my friend know ahead of time, 'I'm going to run away can I come stay at your house.'
<i>Early Adultification</i>	
Premature Caretaking Role	- Basically taking care of my brothers and sisters all the time and never being able to do anything except going to school, work and watching my brothers and sisters.
Raising Oneself	- From the time I was 11 [years old] I started raising myself, cooking, cleaning, doing my own laundry.
Parenthood	- I know getting pregnant changed me...I've seen how a lot of babies end up when their mom is gone off of drugs when their mom is pregnant.
<i>Rejection from One's Family</i>	
Feeling Like an Outsider	- I don't have any family anymore. I like pretty much told every one of them to piss off at one point in time...family was really weird.
Primary Caregiver Chooses Significant Other	- He [my mom's boyfriend] tried to have sex with me one night...and she [my mother] didn't believe me because she said if it did happen he was drunk...
Pushed into Institutional Living	- I went to a foster home when I was 10 because I wasn't real good, my mom and dad couldn't handle it. I was doing drugs and alcohol.
Kicked Out by Caregiver	- I never actually ran away from home. My mom would put me out.

Revolving Door Effect

The majority of youth interviewed (n = 35) were characterized as chronic runaways (Tyler and Whitbeck 2004), in that they had transitioned between housed environments and the street numerous times, creating a revolving door effect of youth homelessness. Gender is a salient characteristic that shaped many of the youths' revolving door experiences. For instance, females returned to their family of origin more often, while males were more prone to transition among institutions or friends' homes. Housed environments spanned an array of definitions, which included parental or familial residences, alternate living arrangements such as foster care or group homes and non-family members' homes. Additionally, youth reported a variety of reasons for exiting housed residences multiple times, such as escaping familial conflict or being kicked out repeatedly by caregivers.

Push and Pull Between Home and Street

Some young adults (n = 8) described their transitions into homelessness as a process that continually pushed them to the street and pulled them back into housed environments. These youth repeatedly found themselves back in their homes after experiencing time living on the street or in shelters. It must be noted that all eight youth characterized by this experience were female. In a sense, young adults who underwent this form of the revolving door viewed their house of residence as a magnet that kept pulling them back from the street. Jennifer exemplifies this effect in that she ran away three different times in consecutive years when she was 15, 16 and 17. While she states she ran away because of "not being able to go where I want and do what I want when I want to do it," she continues to depend on her parents and knows they will support her

because “they gave birth to me.” Jennifer was temporarily living with her parents at the time of the interview. As such, being a chronic runaway may result in a period of unstable transitions that is characterized by a revolving door effect between home and street.

For other youth, though, the pathway back to their homes may not be as easily traversed. Carol also experienced a resounding pull to repeatedly return to her parent’s home after a bout of running away. Also a chronic runaway, Carol stated, “I was kind of not really listening and doing my own thing.” After her first instance of running away she was allowed to return home and “everyone acted like it never happened or like it was not a big deal.” This period of amnesty eventually ended when Carol was temporarily barred from coming back home and all of her belongings were packed for her to leave. Though like Jennifer, Carol was also living with her parents when she was interviewed, it is clear that pathways back home for homeless youth were not always a given, resulting in an enduring revolving door effect for some.

The revolving door experiences of these youth running away from home only to be pulled back home are reflective of Elder’s (1998) concept of “linked lives.” From life course perspective, these youths’ multiple transitions between their homes and the street exemplify the enduring bonds of family. Despite numerous attempts at running away, these youth pulled back to their homes were unable to break the linkages connecting them to their families as they ultimately ended up residing in their homes again at least for a period of time. Gender also shaped this push and pull between home and the street, which may speak to parental practices that grant daughters less autonomy when guided by traditional gender beliefs (Bumpus et al. 2001). Being unfamiliar with autonomous,

independent behavior, such as living on the street, could provide the push back home for these young women. Additionally, studies have shown higher rates of parental monitoring of adolescent females (Smetana and Daddis 2002). A stronger sense of parental control and authority may urge female runaway youth to return home in hopes of recapturing housed stability. While these connections may be positive for some youth, others may be reluctant to return home if their exits were wrought with more adversity.

Running to Cope with Familial Conflict

Other youth reported running away as a means of escaping familial conflict, only to face a cycle of transitions between the home and the street (n = 11). Of this group, six were female and five were male. Multiple forms of maltreatment were a common experience for the entire sample (Tyler 2006; Tyler and Cauce 2002). These young adults were unique in that, despite a desire to flee from caregiver abuse or family conflict, they repeatedly returned to their housed residences. As such, these experiences created “a chain of risks that accumulated over childhood and adolescence and ultimately culminated in homelessness” (Kennedy et al. 2010). It is necessary to examine why these youth would return to conflict-laden homes. The majority of these youth report that they were returned to their homes against their will by law enforcement or other family members. One male young adult, Randy, reported that he ran away because of his stepfather’s “physical abuse and just starting to get tired of it a little.” Concerning the ages of his chronic runaway attempts, Randy stated, “Honestly I don’t know like what age because I left so many times.” Despite these repeated efforts to escape his stepfather’s abuse, different family members as well as police officers returned Randy to

his home. In this sense, Randy experienced the revolving door of homelessness against his will. As Randy puts it, “I never willingly went back home.”

Other youth may transition between the street and abusive parents who are living in separate households. For example, Sandra experienced physical abuse by both her mother and father and at first ran away to escape her mother’s abuse. Regarding her number of attempts at running away, Sandra stated, “It has been on and off for like ever since I can remember.” The following describes the process of Sandra’s transitions between her parents’ homes: “My dad had been really abusive...He had promised that he had changed so I came down here to live with him and it started right back up so I moved back and forth.” For Sandra, then, living on the street was an intermediate point between the two living arrangements with her abusive parents. These multiple transitions represent extensive stressors when a youth is forced to choose between the lesser of two evils: an abusive parent or life on the streets. While the majority of youth described running away from familial arrangements as described by Randy and Sandra, others run away from situations that lie outside of kin networks.

Running From Alternate Living Arrangements

Some youth did not begin to run away from housed residences until they were living in alternative living arrangements such as foster care, group homes or detention centers (n = 6). The gender distribution was evenly split with three females and three males. As such, the very environment of these institutional settings appears to be the impetus for creating a revolving door of homelessness for this group of young adults. Tara, for example, stated, “I ran away from every foster home...I have a list that is like four pages long.” In this way, Tara’s revolving door of homelessness consisted of an

enduring cycle of transitions among countless foster care residences. Tara's experience is consistent with past findings showing that children placed in foster care are at heightened risk of entering into homelessness compared to youth having no experience in this type of living arrangement (Tyler and Melander 2010).

Jody, on the other hand, ran away from numerous mental health treatment centers before he ultimately ended up living on the streets. This institutionalized form of the revolving door caused youth to feel that running away was preferable to residing in the noxious climate of a treatment facility. After being placed in an initial center by his adoptive father, Jody bounced around multiple treatment facilities and detention institutions. He ran away from his first treatment center placement due to maltreatment from the staff. According to Jody, "The one thing a kid doesn't need is a staff member from a treatment center telling them how bad of a fuck up they are." Negative experiences such as Jody's at institutional facilities may actually exacerbate a youth's mental state, thus making it more difficult for them to cope with life on the street or transition into a stable housed environment. The stories of Tara and Jody embody Fergus and Zimmerman's (2005) "challenge model" of risk and resiliency theory as it applies to adolescents. By exposing themselves to street life in lieu of foster care or treatment centers, Jody and Tara could both "elicit a coping response" and thereby "learn from the process of overcoming the risk" of street life that was viewed as preferable to institutional residences (Fergus and Zimmerman 2005:403). For youth living in alternate living arrangements, the revolving door of homelessness may come to characterize their entire adolescence.

Transitional Couch-Surfing

Many youth who experienced a revolving door of homelessness primarily fluctuated between brief stays at multiple different friends' or partners' homes rather than biological or adoptive kin's residences or institutional facilities (n = 22). Fifteen of these youth were female and seven were male. This group of homeless young adults often viewed friends or girlfriends/boyfriends as being more accessible than family members and depended on these individuals in times of need. In effect, members of these youths' non-kin social networks came to symbolize family as these networks provided both affective and instrumental support to the young adults as they transitioned into homelessness.

Youth commonly cited receiving social support from a number of different friends that included provisions of food and shelter. When asked how she typically acquired shelter once she ran away from home, Samantha replied, "Pretty much I was always bumming off people." Though Mandy was also a chronic runaway and cycled between home and the street numerous times, her revolving door was primarily characterized by a dependence on extensive social networks of friends. She described her constant quest for food and shelter in the following way:

I just like stayed with a friend or whatever and eat their food or whatever...Most of the time I would run away with a friend or whatever or I'd like let my friend know ahead of time, 'I'm going to run away can I come stay at your house.'

Mandy, then, made a conscious decision to run away multiple times and strived to make subsistence arrangements beforehand. Being female may have also prompted Mandy to arrange her shelter before running away, as research shows that female homeless youth are at the greatest risk of experiencing sexual victimization on the street (Tyler et al.

2004). Her experience underscores that fact that some homeless young adults rationally contemplate running away rather than it being a rash decision without much forethought.

Transitional couch-surfing became a gendered experience when females fled from home to a male's residence, which included boyfriends as well as random male acquaintances. Though these were often labeled as boyfriends, other female youth sought shelter in the homes of males with whom they shared ambiguous social connections. Katie best fits this pattern in her description of staying with several different older men in their 40s after she ran away. When asked who she stayed with, Katie replied, "Unknown men...they were just cute." She described how she met them in the following way: "I was working at my grandma's pet store so I would sit outside on my breaks and they'd drive [by] and I got [phone] numbers...Then I called him and told him to pick me up." This pattern of transitions could potentially leave female young adults vulnerable to sexual exploitation such as trading sex for food or shelter (Tyler and Johnson 2006b). Engaging in deviant subsistence strategies (e.g., trading sex) and being targeted for "grooming" by a perpetrator all could increase a homeless female youth's risk of sexual victimization from a friend or acquaintance (Tyler et al. 2004). As such, female youth who turned to male partners or acquaintances for support often faced increased interpersonal dangers in their experiences on the street.

Other youth were adamant in their decision to never return home after their first successful attempt at running away. Concerning his initial bout of running, Tom explained his couch-surfing experiences as follows: "After that first time there was never no coming back...It was in my head not to, I mean never come back...Just always staying with a whole bunch of friends and stuff." Tom's refusal to return to his family's

household symbolizes his dissatisfaction with home life as well as his dependence on extensive non-kin social networks. Gender socialization aimed at encouraging tough and resilient behavior in males through the endorsement of masculine norms could prompt more male youth to feel assured of their survival after running away (Epstein and Ward 2011; Galambos et al. 1990). Many youth expressed confidence that they would always have friends to turn to when they found themselves without basic necessities. When asked how he knows where to turn for help, Tom stated, “I know a lot of people...I know people that they [are] cool with me; they come and let me in, let me eat.” Like Tom, other young adults transitioning into homelessness may create extensive social networks from which they can draw resources, which can be viewed as a form of social capital developed on the street (McCarthy, Hagan and Martin 2002).

As the previous section shows, many of the youth interviewed were chronic runaways and are characterized by a revolving door of multiple transitions across both familial and non-kin households, as well as institutional living arrangements. While examining the revolving door of youth homelessness through a gendered lens helps to clarify these young adults’ transitions into homelessness, it does not demonstrate the full complexity of their experiences. Earlier life experiences also primed many of the young adults for a trajectory into early independence and homelessness. The following theme expounds upon these specific “timed events” that shaped a youth’s pathway into street life (Elder 1998).

Early Adulthood

The very act of running away or leaving home thrusts young people into a state of premature independence. However, youths' housed lives may also prime them for street life by prompting the adoption of adult roles and responsibilities at earlier ages.

Possessing a higher subjective age, or feeling more adult, is related to a number of different factors, including economic hardship, lower education levels and caregiving roles (Johnson and Mollborn 2009). Childhood adultification occurs when young people perform the "'heavy lifting' in families...with the intent of meeting a specific family need," typically in the absence of guardian "guidance" (Burton 2007:331). The majority of youth (n = 21) from the current sample were characterized as experiencing the process of early adultification throughout their childhood and adolescent life stages. Gender played a predominant role in shaping a youth's experience with early adultification, as the majority of these young adults were female. Early adult roles adopted by youth included a premature caretaking role, raising oneself and parenthood.

Premature Caretaking Role

Some young adults (n = 9) reported being burdened with excessive household responsibilities while growing up. This group's gender composition included eight females and only one male respondent. Responsibilities included caregiving of younger siblings or relatives and housework that involved gendered chores like cooking and cleaning. Therefore, females were much more likely to report shouldering early adult responsibilities traditionally associated with femininity. Young girls are especially likely to engage in domestic caretaking roles in economically deprived families as a means of contributing to the family's well-being (Elder 1974; Johnson and Molborn 2009).

In describing her life with her mother prior to running away, Sara stated it was “basically taking care of my brothers and sisters all the time and never being able to do anything except going to school, work and watching my brothers and sisters.” Sara’s experience of being forced into the early adult status of caregiver, or “parentification” (Burton 2007), for her siblings created an inordinate amount of stress in her life so that she felt overburdened with the task of caring for others when she was unprepared to do so. The sense of an older subjective age for Sara is further captured in the following statement:

Me being like [in] the body of an eighteen year old girl but like the mind capacity of a 40-year-old...making sure my brother took a shower, make sure my sister got her homework done and where she was at, make sure Trevor wasn’t getting bullied at school.

Gendered allocations of household chores is predominant within families, with girls being assigned care-related work, such as babysitting younger siblings, and boys being relegated to masculine domains (Raley and Bianchi 2006). This is problematic as the task of childcare is typically fraught with higher levels of stress and responsibility. As the case of Sara shows, early caregiving roles of youth may drive them to the street as an escape from family-based caregiving pressures.

While early caregiving is predominantly a phenomena experienced by female young adults, males may also be thrust into these adult statuses. Interestingly, the only male in the group reported mixed feelings of both obligation and resentment towards caring for his nephews. In describing his relationship with his nephews, Joe stated, “I got three nephews...I’m like the only father figure they got.” When asked about stress, he

replied, “I’m stressed out about my nephew crying so damn much and worried about him being a punk.” While Joe’s caregiver role with his nephews was an important aspect in giving his life meaning, it also placed pressure on him to succeed in positively shaping their futures. Joe may have felt more obligated to spend time with his nephews in order to properly socialize them into an acceptable version of masculinity. This example shows that premature caregiving roles can also be associated with issues faced by male young adults prior to homelessness.

Female young adults in this group also cited being faced with extensive amounts of housework and chores in their housed environments that resulted in feelings of early adultification. Christine, for example, experienced the stresses of adulthood when she moved back in with her disabled mother when she was 15:

I got tired of taking care of her...I had to turn her and make sure she stayed clean and I had to cook and clean the house. When her nurses didn’t show up, I had to do it and then I had to go to school and I was tired.

As her daughter, Christine felt obligated to care for her mother in exchange for shelter, but she quickly experienced the weathering effects of the pressure of early “parentification” (Burton 2007). This reversal of roles between child and parent can be especially disconcerting for a young adult as they are placed in a guardianship position that runs counter to cultural expectations. Research has also shown that parents are more likely to not only assign more chores to girls than boys, but girls are also relegated to the more feminine tasks of cooking and cleaning (Raley and Bianchi 2006). The stressful burdens of the early adoption of adult statuses such as caregiver and homemaker can prompt a youth to run away from home as a means of escape.

Raising Oneself

In addition to young adults facing the responsibilities associated with premature adult roles of caring for others, some youth from this sample (n = 4) experienced early independence in providing for their own subsistence. Three females and only one male reported caring for themselves while growing up. Though the typical arrangement of caregiving involves an adult guardian caring for a child, some young adults must independently arrange for their own basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. The act of running away and ensuing homelessness is certainly characterized by a youth's pursuit of shelter, yet some young adults were not even guaranteed basic necessities while living at home. In essence, these youth were forced to fend for themselves in their housed environments before they entered into homelessness.

Some youth reported that they grew up with little parental supervision and were often forced to take care of their own needs with no other choice. When Michelle was an adolescent, she consistently found herself home alone while her mother was working and her mother's boyfriend was drinking at a bar. She described her experience in the following way: "From the time I was 11 [years old] I started raising myself, cooking, cleaning, doing my own laundry." In this form of early adultification, youth are faced with the task of providing for themselves without any guidance or supervision from adults. Michelle's membership in a blended family may have enhanced her early adulthood, as research has identified a link between feeling like an adult and residing in alternative family forms outside of a biological, two-parent-headed household (Foster, Hagan and Brooks-Gunn 2008). Michelle's entrance into early independence and self-sufficiency may have primed her for homelessness by preparing her for street life and

imbuing her with confidence in her survival skills. In some cases like Michelle's, a parent may grant a daughter more autonomy and freedoms, which runs counter to the belief that parents are generally more restrictive of daughters' behavior (Bumpus et al. 2001).

Other youth's transition to premature self-sufficiency was also characterized by wider familial conflict. For Debbie, maternal work demands placed her in the position of the primary homemaker and caregiver for herself as well as her father. Debbie's experience is described as follows: "My mom was a working mom, she worked full-time...She was always gone, well me I would just kind of stay home and cook my own dinner and my dad would get mad because dinner wasn't ready for him." In this way, Debbie found herself in the middle of the conflict between her parents when she was expected to perform the task of cooking for her father. Burton (2007:338) explained that the process of "spousification" occurs "when a child's instrumental duties and responsibilities model those of a spouse or partner." Being responsible for oneself transforms into a gendered experience when a female young adult is further expected to perform caregiving and housekeeping chores for other family members simultaneously.

Some youth, on the other hand, transformed the stress of early independence into something that imbued them with personal resilience against adversity. The sole male in this group, Brian, viewed his experience of taking care of himself as a positive characteristic that prepared him for the struggles of life. When asked about depression in his life, Brian replied:

Just thinking about my life, just thinking about how much crap I've been through...I raised myself most of my life and I'm a damn good person. I'm a damn strong person and the fact that I have to work to bust my balls every day to

get everything that I get makes me a stronger person, makes me a better person that I could ever imagine being.

Personal strength has been shown to be an accurate indicator of how well a young person will get by on the street (Kidd and Davidson 2007). As such, Brian's transition into early self-sufficiency could have caused him to view homelessness as a viable option for survival. Brian may also have felt more inclined to interpret his struggles growing up as character building because of male youth's propensity to strongly adhere to traditional norms of masculinity that reject weakness (Galambos et al. 1990). So, while some youth viewed their experiences of early adultification with negativity, others' early adultification processes symbolized a time of personal growth and development.

Parenthood

Yet other young adults (n = 11) experienced early adultification by being thrust into traditional markers of adulthood status: pregnancy and parenthood. Even for adults, becoming a new parent is a process laden with stress and increased responsibility. For youth, then, experiencing pregnancy and parenthood at a young age is even more difficult to cope with as it is a mistimed event that falls out of line with mainstream trajectories of child and youth life course development (Burton 2007; Elder 1998). Becoming a parent at an early age was a gendered experience for this group, composed of nine females and only two males. Female homeless youth are at much greater risk of becoming pregnant compared to their housed counterparts (Thrane and Chen 2012). Therefore, the combined burden of homelessness and parenthood exacerbated these young adults' unstable living conditions and severely worsened the stresses they experienced on a daily basis.

Being both a young mother and a runaway created incredibly stressful everyday occurrences from which they experienced little relief. When inquired about the daily struggles she faced living on the street, Candy stated, “Not having a job. Being with my son all the time and not getting a break from him. Feeling like I’m going to hurt him because he annoys me because he’s a brat.” Clearly, Candy felt resentment towards her son, which was tempered by her unstable living conditions and her lack of resources. In this way, a young homeless mother is forced to not only face the stress of providing for her own needs, but also the concern of being unable to properly care for her child. Candy’s fear of lashing out at her son is further exacerbated by her homeless status. Early parenthood has been shown to have a strong effect on a young person’s sense of feeling like an adult, and thus experiencing the stressors of adulthood (Johnson and Mollborn 2009). Being simultaneously responsible for one’s own survival and that of an infant or child while living on the street makes the harsh reality of early parenthood and adultification especially salient for young homeless mothers.

Though the experience of early motherhood is rife with apparent stressors for homeless youth, some may interpret their status as young mothers as personally redeeming and transformative. Stacey, for example, reported that becoming pregnant and concern for her unborn child encouraged her to abandon unhealthy habits and gave her a more positive outlook on life. In discussing her son, Stacey told the following story:

I know getting pregnant changed me...I’ve seen how a lot of babies end up when their mom is gone off of drugs when their mom is pregnant...I want my baby to be healthy and I don’t want my baby taken away from me...I know I have to stay

off of drugs because I've got to keep my appointments and take care of myself and the baby.

Despite the stresses of being homeless and pregnant, Stacey positively viewed her pending motherhood as a reason to stop using harmful substances. Stacey's account mirrors the experiences of low-income young mothers and their belief that "children provide motivation and purpose in a life stalled by uncertainty and failure" (Edin and Kefalas (2005:172). Though young homeless females often raise a child as a single parent, the burdens of premature motherhood may be mitigated by the positive changes in lifestyle that can coincide with the news of pregnancy.

Males, on the other hand, often tell a very different story of early parenthood while living on the street. Of the two males in this group, stressful relations characterized Tom's experience of becoming a father, stemming from conflicts with the mother of his child, rather than with the baby. In recounting these issues, Tom stated, "She supposedly got a restraining order on me...Now she's got full custody of the baby. She won't tell me where she [is] at." From this account, Tom had little control over his baby's fate and most likely had little to no access to visitation rights as a result of relational conflict with the mother. Traditionally, custody disputes favor the mother and a father's rights are not always fully considered. When asked how he would like to see his life change, Tom replied, "I'm hoping I can get back what I had...see my child more than what I do." Though a young father may desire to have closer bonds with his child, structural and interpersonal barriers, specifically the status of homelessness, may prevent him from realizing those goals.

As this section demonstrated, the mistimed events characterizing early adultification such as early caregiving roles, self-sufficiency and parenthood can be crucial precursors to life on the street for youth. While the gendered processes of early adultification primed many of these young adults for the revolving door of homelessness, further examination of their exits from housed environments is needed. The “principle of linked lives” is further demonstrated in the next section, which explores the family dynamics of a youth’s entrance into homelessness (Elder 1998:5).

Rejection from One’s Family

In addition to experiencing the revolving door of homelessness and processes associated with early adultification, homeless problematic family relations also characterized youth in this study. Family discord related to domestic violence, criminal activity and substance use has been shown to increase a youth’s risk of homelessness (Kennedy et al. 2010; Tyler 2006; Tyler and Whitbeck 2004). The present theme focuses on the interpersonal relationships shared between family members and the young adult, specifically rejection that places the youth on the margins of the family unit. Nearly all of the youth (n = 36) reported at least one type of familial rejection, and some reported multiple forms of exclusion from kin. As such, the majority of young people cited feeling like an outsider, being betrayed by a primary caregiver for a significant other, being pushed into numerous institutions and being kicked out of their home prior to becoming homeless. These experiences had the cumulative effect of creating an unstable, unwelcoming housed environment for youth, thus transforming the street into a feasible option.

Feeling Like an Outsider

Many young people (n = 15) reported feeling a sense of outsidership within their own family. Marginalized by nuclear and extended family members, these youth recounted being shuffled around to multiple family members and internalizing perceptions of familial alienation. These experiences of disconnection from kin only solidified their pathways into homelessness. Lack of parental and caregiver support has been shown to be especially salient for young people, particularly for girls experiencing maternal rejection (Kennedy et al. 2010). As such, the majority of the young people who reported familial outsidership were female (n = 11). Gender differences are further evident in how youth described their statuses within their families and the significance of their alienation.

Feeling like an outsider in one's family revolved around numerous characteristics ranging from interpersonal conflict to social traits. Vanessa, for example, reported difficulties fitting in with her adoptive family as a precursor to her running away. She described her familial situation in the following way: "They just treated me different than their own daughter. They like distanced themselves from me." After being placed in a home for troubled youth by her adoptive parents, Vanessa grew to resent them. According to her, "I was angry...I was real bitter because I didn't think I needed help. I was just growing up and it was tough being a black teenager growing up with a white family." In Vanessa's experience, racial differences between her and her adoptive parents became an insurmountable obstacle to overcome. A young person's inability to relate to parents or caregivers may prompt them to turn to street connections to fill that void, which could potentially expose them to risk of victimization (Smith 2008).

Of those youth alienated from their families, four males also reported feeling disconnected from kin networks. These male respondents appeared to take a more active role in solidifying fractured family relationships. Scott, for example, made it a point to disengage from any kin connection by outright rejecting familial support after his mother passed away when he was only thirteen. He described his kin relations as follows: “I’m like really way too distant with my sister anymore...I don’t have any family anymore. I like pretty much told every one of them to piss off at one point in time...family was really weird.” After experiencing the major disruption of his mother’s death, Scott cut ties with his family and adopted an independent identity that resulted in his departure from home and entrance into street life. The death of a parent can severely disjoint a young person’s “linked lives” connecting them to other family members (Elder 1998). Additionally, traumatic life experiences may prompt more males than females to engage in rebellious independence, such as running away, rather than expressing their emotions and seeking solace in social support (Watts and Borders 2005). The youth described above all experienced cumulative rejection from their families over time, though gender differences revealed males as more active participants in this process.

Primary Caregiver Chooses Significant Other

Other youth (n = 9) who cited rejection from their families reported more specific instances that involved their primary caregiver and his or her significant other. Examples of this form of rejection involved the primary caregiver, whether it is the mother, father, or other family member, choosing to honor the relationship with a significant other over the needs of the child. In this way, the youth was often explicitly told by the caregiver that the significant other relationship was superior to that shared with the child. This

group was predominantly female (n = 6), with only a few males (n =3) describing this experience. Parental rejection of this type can lay the foundation for a youth's pathway to homelessness, as research has shown that perceptions of parental rejection can lead to both depression and aggressive behavior for young people (Akse et al. 2004).

Issues of abuse by a caregiver's significant other were influential factors that led to a fractured relationship between a youth and their primary caregiver. Especially for females, the inclusion of a mother's boyfriend may increase both their risk of maltreatment at the hands of the new significant other and the stress of coping with changes in household structure. This issue is best exemplified by Jolene's experience of sexual abuse from her mother's new boyfriend and its outcome of maternal rejection. When asked about her relationship with her mother's boyfriend, Jolene recounted the following:

He's more like a type of person that wants to keep her [Jolene's mother] to his self...He tried to have sex with me one night...and she [my mother] didn't believe me because she said if it did happen he was drunk and he doesn't...he stopped drinking...he apologized to my mom if it did happen because he said he didn't remember anything so she forgave him and told me that she didn't believe me at first.

Jolene not only experienced sexual abuse from her mother's boyfriend, but then her own mother repudiated her claims, which exacerbated the effects of the abuse itself. This account is in line with past research that shows females as more likely to delay disclosure of sexual abuse because of fear of being blamed or not believed (Alaggia 2005). Lack of commitment from a parental figure may destroy the sense of trust a child has in his or her

caregiver, which could then cause them to run away in search of alternative forms of social support.

For both males and females, rejection from the maternal caregiver as a result of conflict with the boyfriend or stepfather was often recounted as the most devastating form of familial disconnection. Shane, for example, was the victim of multiple instances of physical abuse at the hands of his stepfather. In describing this abuse, Shane stated that his stepfather, “Grabbed the chain that I had around my neck for a necklace and about suffocated me with it.” Following this altercation, Shane’s mother placed him in a children’s home. While this form of maternal rejection may have influenced Shane’s pathway to homelessness, his mother could also have felt her decision was in the best interest of her son’s safety if she was unwilling to ask Shane’s stepfather to leave. Psychological stress associated with domestic violence has been shown to indirectly diminish maternal attachment to a child (Levendosky et al. 2003). Unstable relationships with primary caregivers characterized several of these youths’ lives before they took to the street.

Pushed into Institutional Living

Many youth (n = 18) from the sample experienced transitions into multiple institutional living facilities at the behest of their primary caregivers. These transitions were typically the outcome of severe familial discord that stemmed from the behavioral issues of the youth. For example, youth explained being placed in an institution as a result of aggression, psychological disorders and delinquency. Institutional settings ranged from foster care to treatment centers. The majority of youth in this group were male (n = 12), with few females (n = 6) reporting this type of familial rejection.

Transitioning into institutional settings increased the instability experienced by these youth, which further contributed to their ultimate passage into homelessness.

Once youth were placed into an alternative living arrangement, it was difficult, if not impossible, to break out of the cycle of institutional transitions. Danielle described the beginning of her stays in different alternative living arrangements in the following account: “I got put in foster care at [age] 12 because of skipping school and my mom couldn’t handle me.” Once in foster care, however, Danielle continued to experience caregiver rejection: “The foster mom said that I was out of control...too hard for her to handle me.” Eventually, Danielle went to a detention center for a few months and a group home for several years, but soon resumed her foster care cycle. Multiple instances of caregiver rejection resulting from behavioral issues most likely made homelessness appear as a viable alternative to the endless cycle of institutions for Danielle and other youth like her. If a youth lacks any form of housed stability or healthy social support from caregivers, the pathway to the street may be more easily accessed.

Overall in this group, more males reported experiencing being placed in an institution by a caregiver because of deviant behavior. John, for example, experimented with substances at a very young age and was transferred to foster care soon after his adoptive parents became aware of his behavior. In recounting his institutional transitions, John stated, “I went to a foster home when I was 10 because I wasn’t real good, my mom and dad couldn’t handle it. I was doing drugs and alcohol.” While John was shuffled around different foster homes, he had little contact with his adoptive family, which further solidified his feelings of familial rejection. Foster care transitions paved the way

for John's entrance into homelessness, as he lived in a homeless shelter after he turned 17 and moved out of his last foster home.

While foster care was the dominant institutional setting for these youth, others were placed in centers designed to modify their behavior. Ryan's story is another example of institutional transitions initiated by a youth's caregiver, but one that was characterized by behavioral treatment centers. According to Ryan, "I was being very negative...my parents ended up sending me to a treatment facility...my parents couldn't handle my behavior...so they sent me away." Because of behavioral issues that included "stealing" and "lying," Ryan's adolescent years from age fifteen to seventeen involved continuous transitions in and out of treatment facilities. Though Ryan's family may have indeed believed that institutionalized treatment was the best course of action for their son, they still did not provide adequate support for him throughout his stays. Ryan remembered graduating from one of the treatment programs, "I hated my graduation because my parents didn't have the courage to come up and visit." Males may have experienced more familial rejection from being institutionally placed in treatment centers, as boys' problem behavior is more likely to be pathologized by caregivers and identified as needing mental health care (Brestan et al. 2003).

Kicked Out by Caregiver

Possibly the most outright display of familial rejection was experienced by youth who were kicked out of their homes by primary caregivers (n = 7). This form of expulsion often left the youth with little recourse but to turn to the street if they did not have friends or other family to turn to for support. Though males are often identified as being at higher risk of being kicked out (MacLean et al. 1999; Tyler and Bersani 2008),

more females (n = 4) in this study reported being kicked out at some point than males (n = 3). Familial conflict typically preceded the young person being kicked out, which could involve physical aggression, substance abuse or severe relationship discord between the child and caregiver.

Being kicked out of one's home often resulted in a cycle of a youth being pushed out of their home and returning home, thereby contributing to their experience in the revolving door of homelessness. Denise's pattern of getting kicked out by her mother began when she was only fourteen, and followed chronic physical abuse from her mother. According to Denise, "I never actually ran away from home. My mom would put me out." In this instance, Denise does not consider herself a typical runaway because it was not of her own choosing to leave home, but rather she was forced out by her mother. Therefore, being kicked out by a primary caregiver can also severely fracture a young person's relationship with that person and damage their ability to form healthy relationships in the future. When asked about the daily struggles she faces, Denise replied, "I just wonder if I'm ever going to have a mother-daughter relationship with my mom. That's all I ever wonder about." The lack of a supportive, stable maternal relationship is especially salient for female youths as they develop into adults and cannot draw from maternal advice and counseling (Kennedy et al. 2010).

Of the males kicked out of their homes, the youth's problem behavior, whether perceived or actual, was cited as the cause. One such example is Greg, who was kicked out by his parents because of enduring conflict between him and his father. In Greg's words: "I didn't run away from home. I got kicked out...My dad and I do not get along...he's an evil bastard and I'm not...been kicked out a lot of times, probably over

six or seven.” Paternal conflict thus led Greg to become imbedded in street life and the revolving door of homelessness and further engage in criminal activity as a survival tactic. As Greg stated, “I don’t think any of my brothers and I could probably like function if we tried to do everything legal. Just wouldn’t work.” This behavior may have incited some of the familial discord Greg experienced, as studies have shown a positive link between male deviant behavior and their likelihood of being kicked out (MacLean et al. 1999). Overall, being kicked out by a primary caregiver resulted in lasting adverse effects for youth as they entered into homelessness.

The theme of familial rejection that emerged from the youths’ interviews clearly demonstrates the importance of linked lives within a young person’s life course (Elder 1998). Specifically, the fracture and dissolution of these relationships was shown to shape youths’ trajectories into homelessness. Living in poverty may have exacerbated these familial experiences and the youths’ ensuing behavioral issues, especially when they suffered maternal relationship discord (Macmillan, McMorris and Kruttschnitt 2004). Both males and females were deeply affected by familial rejection when it stemmed from their maternal caregiver. The notion of fractured linked familial lives combined with the mistimed events of early adultification create a more complete picture of the revolving door of youth homeless discussed by the young adults. Examining youths’ lives leading up to their entrance into homelessness allows for researchers to explore the revolving door as a dynamic, gendered process.

DISCUSSION

The revolving door of homelessness for youth has vast implications for life course development as young people transition into young adulthood and beyond. This qualitative study explored how youth's entrance into street life is a dynamic process characterized by multiple transitions into and out of homelessness. Prior to leaving home and becoming embedded in the revolving door of homelessness, many youth, primarily females, underwent early adultification in which they were prematurely thrust into gendered adult statuses such as caregiver and parent. Experiences of early adultification could increase feelings of competence for these young women, leading them to view homelessness as a viable option. The majority of youth also cited rejection from one's family as paving the way to homelessness, including being kicked out of one's home and feeling like an outsider in a family unit. Males were more likely to be institutionalized by caregivers, however, which could lead to greater alienation from family networks. Off-time life events and non-normative development pathways create lifelong instability for young people (Elder 1998). Thus, female and male youth often had unique experiences based on their gender, which created multiple differences in risk factors for homelessness as well as characteristics of resilience. Gender differences resulted in themes that varied for male and female respondents.

Homelessness is an experience that further complicates adjustments into later life stages by increasing the risks for mental and physical health problems, unhealthy relationships and economic difficulties. Gender must also continue to be considered as young women and men experience the dynamic nature of homelessness in different ways. As such, this study of the revolving door of youth homelessness not only identified issues that youth may experience in their lives as a result of residential instability but also areas

of future research that require further investigation. The pragmatic implications of this study point to everyday struggles youth may face as they enter into adulthood lacking stability and security in their lives as a result of having experienced homelessness.

The overarching revolving door of homelessness presents very real economic challenges for youth as they emerge as adults and are expected to fulfill the normative roles associated with adulthood. Lacking a stable residence and address could prevent homeless youth from securing a stable, well-paying job as well as government aid for which they are eligible. Homelessness combined with economic insecurity also further exacerbates the social stigma youth must face as they navigate the path to adulthood. As most employers equate residential stability with employee competence, numerous addresses listed as prior residences could be labeled as a red flag and eliminate a homeless youth for further consideration for employment. Additionally, listing a homeless shelter as a permanent address on a job application could be negatively viewed and thus bar an individual from the pool of potential candidates. Research has shown that the longer a young person resides on the street and whether they were currently living on the streets represented obstacles to market employment (Ferguson et al. 2012; Karabanow 2010). Most homeless youth may also lack prior work experience in the formal economy while they are preoccupied with everyday survival such as obtaining food and shelter. Limited employment opportunities for homeless individuals are often further complicated by one's social location, including gender, race and age.

Females may be at a higher risk of economic instability as a result of the feminization of poverty, especially single mothers with young children to support (Hays 2003). Contributing to this phenomenon is the fact that women are often relegated to low-

wage, unstable pink-collar work that affords few benefits such as job security or health insurance (Levanon, England and Allison 2009). Mothers with young dependents can find it even more difficult to provide for their children if they are unable to secure stable employment, and in turn housing and other necessities. Employers have been known to withdraw support for new mothers in the form of the “motherhood penalty,” which can consist of a reduction of benefits or hours, and in extreme cases, job loss (Correll, Benard and Paik 2007; Stone 2009). Simply being female and capable of reproduction often places women at a distinct disadvantage to achieving economic security.

As such, female homeless youth who become pregnant at a young age are increasingly vulnerable to economic distress if they are unable to provide for their own basic needs, let alone those of a small child (Edin and Kefalas 2005). Early pregnancy can create pathways to a cycle of economic insecurity that is difficult to escape as a youth transitions into adulthood. Also, female homeless youth may be more inclined to become involved in the sex trade for economic support, thereby risking exposure to victimization and health complications that can follow them into their futures (Chen et al. 2004; Tyler and Johnson 2006b). Victimization stemming from sex work can increase female youth’s risk of becoming involved in unhealthy relationships, experiencing depression and holding down a steady job. Lack of financial independence of female homeless youth may also cause them to continue to depend on familial support, which could be harmful if there is a history of abuse from family members.

Compared to females, males typically enjoy greater general economic stability in their lives. The gender pay gap still exists as a pressing concern in which male workers, on average, earn significantly more than their female counterparts (Blau and Kahn 2007).

Conversely, men may also experience greater strain to conform to the masculine ideal of economic provider and endure markers of stigma for failing to conform to cultural standards of gender norms (Kilmartin 2010). Men may also be more resistant to public aid or other economic support services based on gender stereotypes that dictate men should exhibit independence and personal strength (Kilmartin 2010). While males and females reside on unequal footing in terms of their economic stability in mainstream society, homelessness has the potential to act as a leveling factor that worsens one's financial state regardless of gender.

Male youth entrenched in the revolving door of homelessness also possess additional risks of economic difficulties. Specifically, male youth are at higher risk of entering into a cycle of incarceration if they are unable to achieve economic stability through legal means and turn to criminal activity for subsistence. Male homeless youth are more likely than females to become involved in street gangs, which further increases their involvement in violent and criminal behavior that can lead to jail or prison time (Yoder et al. 2003). Early altercations with the law, especially serving a sentence, can pose obstacles to secure quality employment and housing based on the negative stereotypes attached to ex-convicts and ensuing discrimination. As such, research shows that young fathers can find it difficult to form relationships with their children and babies' mothers as a result of engagement in criminal activity (Edin and Kefalas 2005). Young males are typically monitored and policed at a greater intensity than their female counterparts, and homeless male youths' behaviors are increasingly labeled as deviant (Miles and Okamoto 2008). Male homeless youth who have socially learned that violence is an acceptable means of problem solving often replicate this behavior to a greater

degree on the street (Baron, Kennedy and Forde 2001). Further, a young man's desire to adhere to traditional markers of masculinity, being strong and independent, may prevent a youth from seeking economic assistance (Galambos et al. 1990). Economic difficulties will likely remain a constant struggle for both female and male youth who have experienced the revolving door of homelessness.

In addition to obstacles related to financial instability, the revolving door of homelessness was also associated with off-time life course transitions in the form of early adultification experienced by youth. Roles associated with being a caregiver, parent or early independent require an advanced level of maturation and life experience to be carried out successfully. By prematurely adopting adult statuses and roles, young people are not afforded sufficient time to transition into these stages, but are abruptly thrust into them with little chance to properly adjust to the changes. Many youths' experiences with early adultification primed them for the revolving door of homelessness. The combined effects of early adultification and homelessness often create inordinate levels of everyday stress. As a result, youth may develop unhealthy coping strategies such as increased rates of sexual activity, abusive relationships and substance use (Kidd 2003). Additionally, adverse health effects such as depression and sexually transmitted diseases may follow this self-destructive behavior, which can have enduring effects throughout a young person's life.

Gender also contributes to unique early adultification processes experienced by female and male youth. For example, female homeless youth were more likely to report early caregiving roles that included taking care of themselves as well as other family members such as siblings or parents in their households of origin. Female youth

responsible for younger siblings or relatives could have increased chances of having children at a younger age if they feel prepared for the task of parenthood (Edin and Kefalas 2005). Female youth transitioning into and out of homelessness have been shown to be at a higher risk for unsafe sexual behavior such as infrequent condom use, which could be related to their feeling more adult and independent (Solorio et al. 2008). Young women engaging in this behavior may then be at greater risk for sexual exploitation and victimization both in a housed residence and on the street (Tyler et al. 2004). Early motherhood for female youth could act as a precursor to the revolving door of homelessness or a consequence of unstable living arrangements, as female youth reported being pregnant both before and after becoming homeless. As such, early caregiving roles are especially damaging for the healthy, on-time life course development of female youth.

Male homeless youth, however, were also ill-prepared for early adult roles, such as becoming a father at a young age. Lack of maturity, social support and positive role models all can contribute to young men's inability to take responsibility for children whom they have fathered. For example, if an intimate relationship is characterized by abuse and conflict, a young man may be unable to form a positive relationship with his child. This issue is exacerbated when adolescent males experience gender role conflict that inhibits their ability to express emotion or form relationships (Watts and Borders 2005). Off-time transitions of early adultification can have vast effects on younger generations if the children of these male and female youth lack the benefits associated with a stable, healthy home environment. In this way, early adultification and off-time life course transitions could potentially produce an intergenerational pattern of

detrimental development. Homelessness and economic insecurity combine to create lifelong adverse effects that make it difficult for young men and women to successfully transition into adult roles and experience on-time developmental stages.

Life course theory's concept of linked lives is also important to consider in understanding the implications of a youth's rejection from his or her family (Elder 1998). Homeless youths' family histories are typically characterized by cases of maltreatment, conflict and instability (Tyler 2006). Youth experience familial rejection by being kicked out, shuffled around to different family members or being placed in institutional facilities. Severed linked lives in the form of familial rejection were often traumatic and adversely affected a youth's long- and short-term mental, social and emotional health. The current study showed that instances of familial rejection often paved the way for street life and the ensuing revolving door of youth homelessness.

Specifically, rejection from a parental figure may harm a young person's ability to form healthy relationships as they enter into adulthood. Being disowned by a trusted caregiver can foster a sense of mistrust for others in youth, thereby placing them at greater risk for abusive relationships as well as social isolation. A lack of social support not only makes it difficult for youth to cope with the stressors of everyday life (Kidd 2007), but it also may prevent them from exiting the revolving door of homelessness for good. Forced to function without the social support that can be derived from families and stable housing, homeless youth's well-being suffers socially, economically and psychologically (Kidd 2003). Youth who are shuffled from one living arrangement to the next, such as detention centers, treatment facilities or other family members' houses,

often must cope with life course transitions in the absence of a positive role model from whom they could model healthy behavior.

Concerning gender, parental rejection of a youth in favor of a boyfriend or girlfriend or stepparent may have more harmful effects for females. Bearing witness to an abusive caregiver relationship may lead female youth to view unhealthy interpersonal interactions as normative, thus increasing their likelihood of experiencing partner violence (Hendy et al. 2003). Losing support from a caregiver could also lead a young woman to seek alternative support from situations in which she could be sexually coerced and manipulated. Male youth, on the other hand, more often experience rejection by caregivers on the grounds of behavioral issues (MacLean et al. 1999; Tyler and Bersani 2008). This form of rejection could lead to resentment and self-fulfilling prophecies for male youth, causing them to engage in further deviant behavior. Other studies implementing life course theory in the examination of deviant youth show that maladaptive behavior originating in childhood and adolescence persists in later life stages (Bradshaw et al. 2010). The notion of linked lives in the life course has important implications for female and male youths' development and embeddedness in the revolving door of homelessness.

Future Considerations

Policy Implications

The findings from this study point to a variety of future considerations that both scholars and policymakers can utilize. In addition to the need for continued scholarly work on the dynamic nature of youth homelessness, policy implications must also be

taken into consideration. Based on the findings from this study, it is clear that gender differences must remain an area of analysis in understanding how youth enter into and exit homelessness. A youth's gender often creates very distinct pathways into street life, such as the form of early adultification experienced as well as the type of family rejection undergone. Therefore, service providers may increase their accessibility and usage rate by further tailoring services to homeless youth of specific genders. Moreover, the revolving door of youth homelessness highlights the multiple stages of youths' transitions into street life, showing that interventions can take place at various phases in the process of becoming homeless. In addition to adapting to gender, services can also be shaped to match a youth's stage in the revolving door of homelessness (Auerswald and Eyre 2002).

Future Research

Future research must also reflect on limitations in contemporary work on homeless youth and their experiences with street life. The present study's lack of demographic diversity reflects the need to explore differences in not only gender, but also race and ethnicity and sexual orientation. Though homelessness could be viewed as an economic equalizer, the socioeconomic status of a youth's family of origin should also be examined as it could point to differential access to resources that could facilitate a young person's transition out of street life. Therefore, researchers should make it a priority to enhance the demographic variation of their samples. Identifying additional variations along the lines of differing social locations will also contribute to the effectiveness of policy revisions and service implementation. Further exploratory studies such as the one

described here are first needed to pinpoint areas of demographic difference before these lines of inquiry can be executed in a large-scale quantitative study.

Additionally, this study is limited by how the data itself was collected. The young people's retrospective accounts of past experiences may have been flawed by lapses in memory, the chronology of events and the exaggeration or minimization of life experiences (Hardt and Rutter 2004). Social desirability or interviewer effects may have also influenced the young people's reports. In turn, this study is constrained by only having access to the youths' perspectives and the possibility that they misreported past events. For example, while a youth may state that they were kicked out; his or her caregiver may report that it was the youth's decision to leave home. Future research could account for this limitation by exploring the viewpoints of the homeless youths' primary caregivers in conjunction with the young people to construct a more complete picture of the revolving door.

This study's contribution of framing youth homelessness as a revolving door of dynamic transitions underscores the need to study youth at different life stages. In turn, it is necessary to examine how a young person's experiences change as they transition into different stages of the revolving door, including early adultification and familial rejection. This mode of research could also lead to greater effectiveness at preventing youth homelessness. Longitudinal studies would also be helpful in achieving this goal, as it would be informative to examine how homeless youth transition into adulthood and whether or not they achieve stability. Research shows, however, the difficulty of tracking homeless populations across longitudinal inquiry (Wright et al. 1995). The nomadic

nature and vulnerable status of homeless youth makes it especially difficult to examine their transitions across the life course.

Conclusion

Overall, the revolving door of youth homelessness is a very real experience for many homeless youth that is characterized by multiple transitions into and out of street life. This residential instability is especially detrimental for young people who have experienced early adultification throughout childhood and adolescence. Additionally, familial rejection often set a youth on the trajectory for homelessness, thereby compromising their ability to successfully cope with the stressors of homelessness and transition into later life stages. Female and male youth also had very different experiences with the revolving door of homelessness, placing each at risk for varying types of transitions that in turn determined their resiliency once on the street. The dynamic nature of youth homelessness emphasizes the fact that prematurely leaving home for many young people is not a static occurrence, but rather an ongoing revolving door of transitions that has lasting effects well into adulthood.

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