

Exclusion and Resilience:

Exploring the decision-making processes of young people who are homeless

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Abstract

Young people who are homeless experience adversity, but many are able to overcome the challenges of street life and transition back into housing. This exploratory, qualitative research draws on the narratives from interviews and focus groups with 35 young people who have experienced homelessness, as well as interviews and focus groups with 30 service providers working in youth shelters and a youth drop-in centre.

Exploring themes of victimization, criminal offending, police involvement, and interactions with community services, this research highlights the capacities of young people to navigate around obstacles and negotiate to meet their needs. Integrating symbolic interactionism and social constructivist perspectives, this research explores the importance of micro-level interactions and perceptions, as well as the contexts that frame the decision-making processes of young people passing through homelessness. The implications of these perspectives are discussed within the framework of resilience discourse.

Key Words:

Homelessness; youth; resilience; symbolic interactionism; social constructionism; human agency; structuration; impression management; techniques of neutralization; victimization; offending; police interactions; strengths; adaptation; navigation; negotiation.

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1.0 Introduction

As early as November 1998, the mayors of the largest cities in Canada declared that homelessness is a national disaster (Wellesley Institute, 2006). Studies in Vancouver, Toronto and Ottawa record an increasing demand on shelter services, and an increase in the number of people on the streets (Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006; Eberle, Kraus, Serge & Hulchanski, 2001; Wellesley Institute, 2006). The Canadian Homelessness Research Network now estimates that at least 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness in a given year, and that homelessness costs the Canadian economy \$7 billion per year (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). In addition, the demographic profile of the homeless population is changing: although the large majority are single men, a growing proportion of those who are homeless is composed of women, families, youth and children (Davey, 1998; Novac, Hermer, Paradis & Kellen, 2006). Researchers estimate that young people make up 20% of those who are homeless in Canada (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013).

According to the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012), homelessness can be defined as follows:

“Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing” (CHRN, 2012: 1).

This description highlights that homelessness occurs within the context of a wide array of challenges that intersect. This thesis focuses on the challenges faced by young people living on the street and on their responses to them. The definitions of homelessness and youth are further operationalized in the chapter on methodology.

Young people on the street experience significant adversity. Youth homelessness and criminal victimization are linked: victimization is a frequent precipitating factor for homelessness, and homeless youth are more likely to have experienced physical and sexual victimization (Novac et al., 2006; Roebuck, 2008). Furthermore, many young people who are homeless become involved in criminal activity (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Homelessness can interfere with relationships, education, employment, community involvement and other protective factors. This constellation of risk factors constitutes a significant barrier for positive outcomes. Yet, despite adverse conditions, social exclusion and oppression, many young people who experience homelessness demonstrate tremendous resilience, both in terms of eventually securing more stable housing and in achieving a subjective feeling of wellbeing (Bender et al., 2007; Kidd, 2008).

This research project is an exploratory qualitative study that has been conducted in partnership with a local agency serving young people experiencing homelessness. The broad objective of this research is to gain a better understanding of how young people subjectively experience homelessness and make decisions about their lives.

As I establish in my literature review, much of the writing on youth homelessness focuses on the external constraints imposed on the lives on young people, and constructs young people as passive reactors to negative circumstances. While I acknowledge the adversity, marginalization and social exclusion experienced by young people, I am interested in exploring how young people think about their circumstances and what kind of approaches they use in problem solving. This line of questioning brings human agency into the centre of the analysis, and will allow me to explore the challenges young people face, and the internal and external resources they draw on when making decisions about their lives. Describing human agency, Elder et. al (2003) write:

“Individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance...Children, adolescents, and adults are not passively acted upon by social influence and structural constraints. Instead, they make choices and compromises based on the alternatives that they perceive before them” (11).

While the relationship between human agency and social structures is a classic debate within sociology [see Archer, 1982; Giddens, 1984; Vaughn, 2001], I am hoping that my research will contribute to a balanced exploration of how young people demonstrate human agency in their decision-making; they are not simply being carried along powerlessly by their circumstances. Conceptually, this process of young people navigating and negotiating their social circumstances will be framed within the concept of resilience which at its core implies *adapting positively* despite significant adversity (Masten & Powell, 2003; Ungar 2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008). While I have inevitably encountered data about risk factors relating to homelessness as part of this research, I am also interested in trying to balance this with a discussion of how internal and external strengths and resources may contribute to resilience.

A recent partnership between the Institute for the Prevention of Crime (IPC) at the University of Ottawa and the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB), a local community agency, served as the point of entry for this study. This partnership was developed as part of a community service initiative supported by the University of Ottawa to link researchers with community agencies. The underlying logic is that the university has the capacity to conduct research but has limited access to research populations, while community agencies often lack the capacity to conduct research, but do have access to potential research populations. This agreement is conceptualized as a win-win scenario where the YSB gains access to research capacity and knowledge, while the University of Ottawa gains access to interview service providers and clients as part of a formal partnership.

The Youth Services Bureau (YSB) is an Ottawa-based agency that offers comprehensive services to young people, including: mental health services, a crisis line, drop-in centres, emergency shelters, a health clinic, employment services, youth justice programs, as well as a youth engagement program (YSB Annual Report, 2010). Their mission is to provide “a safe, non-judgmental and accessible environment where individuals 12 years and older can pursue their life goals and be encouraged in making informed decisions” (YSB Annual Report, 2013). Within their community services division, the YSB operates a housing continuum ranging from a drop-in to emergency, transitional and long-term housing. Ideally, a young person may approach the YSB through their drop in services, be provided with emergency housing, move to transitional housing, and be assisted with securing long-term housing. During this process, young people are able to access employment services, mental health supports, and may be assisted with completing high school education. In 2012-2013, the Downtown Drop-in which assists young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless had over 16,000 visits, and the young men’s shelter and young women’s shelter accommodated 408 young people. Although the occupancy rates for the youth shelters were not included in the most recent annual report, previously, in 2009-2010, the young men’s shelter reported an occupancy rate of 103%, the young woman’s shelter reported an occupancy rate of 98.4%, and the Street Outreach program made a total of 2,979 contacts with young people in need of housing (YSB Annual Report, 2010¹).

Research Questions

My research interests focus on the subjective experiences of young people and on their decision-making. I am primarily interested in how young people manage and navigate through

¹ The Youth Services Bureau celebrated its 50 year anniversary in 2010, and the annual report for this period provided more in depth reporting on all of its services.

homelessness rather than in the question of why they may be on the streets. I will be addressing the following broad research question:

- *How do young people who are homeless understand risk and protective factors, and how do young people make decisions and solve problems?*

It is understood that the notion of “risk” involves a language and logic of deficit, whereas the notion of “protective factors” involves a language and logic of strength. Risk and protective factors, as explored in the theoretical framework, can be external or internal. I am interested in how these influence young peoples’ processes of adapting to adversity.

A number of sub-questions will explore the specific experiences of young people accessing the Youth Services Bureau for housing supports. My overall approach will be broad as I explore young people’s stories and perceptions of homelessness, but I will also specifically explore the sub-theme of victimization and criminal offending as it relates to resilience. I will be exploring the following sub questions:

- What decisions do young people make about experiences of victimization and criminal offending, and how do young people engage in problem solving around these experiences?
- What strengths personally, relationally, and in the community are thought to be most helpful for young people who are homeless?
- How do young people’s perceptions of homelessness affect their decision-making?
- What constraints and opportunities shape the operation of human agency in the decision-making processes of young people who are homeless?

The research question and sub questions were explored through a number of qualitative research methods including:

- Two focus groups with young people;
- in-depth interviews with twenty-four young people;
- three focus groups with service providers; and,
- interviews with a small number of service providers.

Interview and focus group data were coded using QDA Miner software, and analyzed on the basis of analytical categories that emerged from my conceptual framework.

I hope that this project provides useful feedback to the Youth Services Bureau on how young people make decisions, and that this in turn can be used to enhance service delivery. I also hope to contribute an appreciation of human agency to the ongoing research conversation about young people experiencing homelessness. There is a need for research of this nature to further develop our understanding of how young people perceive homelessness and how these subjective interpretations influence their decisions as they navigate through homelessness.

A Personal Note to Readers

There is a danger of seeing the lives of young people who are homeless as so extraordinary and different, that it becomes difficult to relate to their challenges and triumphs. As you read through the findings within this paper, I invite you to imagine how you would react personally given the different circumstances that will be described in these pages. I do not want to present a two-dimensional rendering of the lives of young people who are homeless, highlighting only the challenges that they experience, the multiple forms of exclusion and marginalization that surround them, and pointing out the benchmarks of adulthood that they have

not yet achieved. This would limit my study to a deficit perspective, and I do not believe that any of the young people who participated in this research would want to be described in that manner, or even recognize themselves in such language. The young people who I interviewed navigate around daily challenges, often with incredible courage, preserving their own dignity in a world where the decisions of adults have the power to wreak havoc in their young lives. In this project, I was amazed to hear young people telling me what they have learned through homelessness, how they have grown, what strengths they have developed, and what they will take away from the experience. These discussions reshaped my understanding of youth homelessness, and I hope that you will have the same experience in the pages that follow.

2.0 Literature Review

Young people who are homeless have diverse experiences (Kidd, 2008). They may live on the street, in shelters, or on a couch at a friend's house. Many contributing factors to youth homelessness have been identified; these include family conflict, mental health disorders, aging out of child welfare programs, release from correctional facilities without adequate discharge planning, or a lack of access to affordable housing (Hagan & McCarthy, 2005; Kidd, 2008; Roebuck, 2008). Young people experiencing homelessness share exposure to a number of risk factors that co-occur with a complicated network of social interactions and institutional barriers that create obstacles to becoming reintegrated in mainstream society. While some young people who are homeless may be content not to be housed for a time, many are struggling to respond to circumstances perceived as being beyond their control. At the same time, many young people who are homeless overcome daily obstacles to achieve a sense of well-being, and many transition out of homelessness (Karabanow, 2004; Mallet et al., 2010). In this project, these successes in overcoming adversity are conceptualized as resilience.

This review of the literature examines experiences of adversity that both contribute to youth homelessness and characterize the resulting lifestyle, with a particular emphasis on victimization and criminal offending. It also discusses the strengths of young people who are homeless and provide an overview of the literature on resilience. The review concludes with critiques of resilience and the passive construction of young people in the literature on youth homelessness from a critical youth studies perspective.

2.1 Victimization as a Risk Factor for Homelessness

The literature review to follow reveals that victimization and criminal offending are common experiences for young people on the streets; and I will explore the relationship between

victimization, criminal offending, and decision-making. I am interested to know how young people make sense of victimization or criminal offending and how these experiences influence their decisions, particularly decisions related to housing. I would also like to explore if crime may have functional dimensions that relate to resilience, and how victimization may affect a person's capacity to adapt to adversity.

Overwhelmingly, studies of young people who are homeless reveal that significant proportions have experienced family violence and neglect. The following childhood factors are commonly reported precursors to youth homelessness:

- High rates of physical and sexual abuse in childhood (Aubry, et al., 2003; Baron, 2003; Bassuk, Perloff, & Dawson, 2001; Herman, Susser, Struening, & Link, 1997; Mental Health Policy Research Group, 1998; Novac et al., 2006; Tanner & Wortley, 2002; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997);
- Lack of parental care during childhood (Hermen et al., 1997); or
- Frequent foster care and other out-of-home placements, which often occur in response to abuse and neglect (Novac et al., 2006).

A number of the intermediate factors that contribute to homelessness may actually be caused by trauma associated with childhood abuse. Severely abused children frequently display developmental delays, poor school adjustment, disruptive classroom behaviour, school-age pregnancy, truancy and running away, delinquency and prostitution, early use of illicit drugs and alcohol, and suicide attempts (Kidd, 2004; Novac et al., 2006). These social problems can interfere with the development of healthy relationships, and lead to social isolation and low levels of social support, re-victimization, and self-medication. All of these, in turn, are linked to homelessness (Novac et al., 2006).

2.2 Victimization on the streets

People who are homeless experience higher rates of criminal victimization than the general population, and are disproportionately victims of violent crimes rather than property offences (Ballintyne, 1999). People who are homeless report experiencing physical assaults from members of the public such as having objects thrown at them from cars and being hit or punched, and those from minority groups are disproportionately victims of hateful speech (Wachholz, 2005). It is common for people on the streets to be harassed, and homeless women and girls are often the targets of degrading sexual comments and offensive sexual gestures (Wachholz, 2005). A number of explanations have been offered as to why people who are homeless are victimized at higher rates. These point to factors such as:

- The homeless lifestyle involves spending large quantities of time in public spaces, in high crime areas, and alone at night, with limited access to private space (Jasinski et al., 2010; Simons et al., 1989).
- People who conduct illegitimate business on the streets but who are not homeless – such as drug dealers, loan sharks and gangs – often victimize people who are homeless when they do not pay by deadlines. They appear to perceive people who are homeless as being relatively easy targets (Novac et al., 2006).
- High rates of substance abuse among people who are homeless raise the likelihood of victimization because of greater exposure to high crime areas, and of involvement with those in the drug trade (Jasinski et al., 2010; Novac et al., 2006; Simons et al., 1989).
- Theft and physical aggression in particular are linked to people who are homeless carrying all their personal possessions with them (Novac et al., 2006).

Moreover, the risk of victimization is higher among people who are homeless who live on the street as opposed to in shelters (Hewitt, 1994). Ballintyne (1999) found that 78% of young people who “sleep rough” had been victims of crime during their most recent period of sleeping on street; however, only 21% of these incidents were reported to police.² Young people who sleep rough are more likely to be victims of crime against the person than of property crime, including verbal harassment, threatening behaviour and assault.

Homelessness disrupts important social bonds and impairs personal networking that could be instrumental to getting off the street, and many individuals become trapped in an environment where they will be further victimized (D’Ercole & Struening, 1990). Victimization on the street is psychologically distressing and can lead to depression and low self-esteem, which in turn contributes to apathy and feelings of futility, making it more difficult to escape further abuse (D’Ercole & Struening, 1990; Simons et al., 1989). Young people experiencing homelessness have much higher levels of mortality through violence and disease than the general population; rates are estimated to be 8 to 11 times higher than similarly aged youth who are not homeless (Roy et al., 2004). Young people on the streets who feel “trapped, hopeless, worthless and alone” are also at a higher risk of suicide and suicide attempts (Kidd, 2004; 47).

Gaetz, O’Grady & Buccieri (2010) interviewed 244 young people who were homeless in Toronto about their experiences of victimization and their interactions with the police. In their sample, 76% of young people reported experiencing criminal victimization in the past 12 months and 72.8% experienced multiple incidents of victimization. Furthermore, 63.6% indicated that they were victims of a violent offence. The authors argue that the widespread victimization

² “Sleeping rough or rough sleeping” refers to spending the night without adequate shelter, including sleeping outside or in abandoned buildings.

experienced by young people who are homeless is inadequately addressed by the criminal justice system or community services and shelters. They also argue that, “if the levels of violence and other forms of crime found in [their] study were being experienced by any other group of youth in Canada there would be immediate public outrage and considerable pressure for government to take action” (Gaetz, O’Grady & Buccieri, 2010: 1).

Gender and Victimization

Gender also influences adversity on the street. Homeless women in general are more likely to have been sexually abused, raped, and physically assaulted than the general population or than homeless men (D’Ercole & Struening, 1990; Jasinski et al., 2010; Novac et al., 1996). Sexual assaults against homeless women are reported as being more violent and are often perpetrated by strangers in public places (Stermac & Paradis, 2001). Among a sample of people who were homeless in Ottawa, 16% of female young people reported that they had experienced a miscarriage resulting from a physical assault (Aubry et al., 2003). Gaetz, O’Grady & Buccieri (2010) also found that victimization is not evenly distributed, and young women were more likely to experience victimization than males on the street with minority and queer female youth experiencing the highest rates of victimization. Age was also a significant predictor of victimization, with those who left home at an earlier age being more likely to experience victimization on the streets.

Sexual minorities³ are overrepresented among young people who are homeless, and their homelessness is frequently related to their status as a sexual minority (Fournier et al., 2009; Gaetz, 2004; Gattis, 2009; Kruks, 2001); estimates of the size of this group range from as low as

³ Sexual Minority is used to refer to youth who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, queer or questioning (GLBTTTQQ).

6% to as high as 40% of the young people who are homeless population (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Cochran et al., 2002; Ray, 2006). Sexual minority youth frequently leave home because of conflict over their sexual identity or the fear that they will not be accepted if they come out to their parents (Cochran et al., 2002; Gattis, 2009). They report higher rates of abuse in their family home and of victimization on the street than other young people who are homeless (Cochran et al., 2002; Fournier et.al, 2009; Gattis, 2009).

2.3 Interactions with the police

While studies report the presence of both positive and negative interactions between young people who are homeless and police (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O’Grady & Buccieri, 2010; O’Grady, Gaetz, & Buccieri, 2011), young people who are homeless rarely report victimization to the police. Gaetz, O’Grady & Buccieri (2010) found that in their sample of 244 young people who were homeless, only 20% of the young people had reported their most recent serious incident of victimization to the police, and only 16% had shared their experience with a social worker or counsellor.

The following explanations have been offered for lower rates of reporting:

- The “code of the street”: this can reflect either an unspoken loyalty not to tell on others who live on the street, or a fear of reprisals (Brassard & Cousineau 2000).
- Young people with criminal records or who were engaged in criminal activities at the time of victimization want to avoid police attention (Novac et al., 2006).
- Abusive behaviour from the police creates distrust (Gaetz, 2002; Novac et al., 2006; Wachholz, 2005).
- Fear that the police will not believe them (Novac et al., 2006).

People living on the streets report that the escalation or “back-ending” of charges is a common experience (Novac et al., 2006). This occurs when young people, who may be defiant with police, are charged with obstruction of justice in addition to the original offence. It is also common for intoxicated offenders who become aggressive to be charged with resisting arrest or with attempting assault of a police officer (Novac et al., 2006).

Hagan & McCarthy (1997) found that young people with a background of parental abuse were especially sensitive to the stigmatizing nature of life on the street and to the imposition of sanctions from the police. They also found that receiving police and other criminal justice sanctions was found to increase the risk of future criminal offending for young people with a history of family violence, which they theorized may be a result of a compounded sense of shame and embarrassment (233-234).

2.4 Criminal Offending by Young people who are homeless

People who are homeless frequently come into contact with the justice system, and young people who are homeless experience high rates of incarceration (Aubry et al., 2003; Eberle et al., 2001; Novac et al., 2006). In a 2003 Ottawa study, 61% of homeless male youth and 35% of homeless female youth reported spending time in a prison, detention centre or correctional facility (Aubry et al., 2003). A Toronto study of homeless drug-using youth found that 50% had been in custody in the previous year (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010).

While young people who are homeless self-report higher rates of committing both property and violent crimes (Tanner & Wortley, 2002), they are less likely to be charged with violent offences, and more likely to be charged with property-related offences, such as those committed to help them meet their survival needs (Gowan, 2002; Novac et al., 2006), or with

violations of municipal by-laws, such as loitering, noise and panhandling (Avila, Campbell & Eid, 2009; Bright & O'Grady, 2002; Eberle et al., 2001). Young people who are homeless have been found to commit a disproportionate amount of crime and are likely to be repeat offenders (Eberle et al., 2001). Theft of food, theft of property valued at over \$50, shoplifting, possession of marijuana and other drugs are the most common offences (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992). Gaetz (2002) also found that 44% of young people who were homeless in his study carried their possessions with them at all times to protect themselves against theft and 28% carried a weapon to protect themselves against threats of violence.

Several risk factors have been associated with involvement in criminal offending including the length of time individuals are homeless, their exposure to criminal activity, peer pressure, substance abuse and mental illness (Eberle et al., 2001; Hewitt, 1994; McCarthy & Hagan, 2002; Novac et al., 2006). Drugs are a common risk factor since they are easily accessed on the street, and the subculture of drug use may be enticing to young people who are feeling isolated (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Boivin et al., 2005). Many young people experiencing homelessness become involved in selling and/or using illegal drugs, and the rate of injection drug use is high (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Kerr et al., 2009; Lloyd-Smith et al., 2001). Drug dependency is a significant obstacle to overcome; it can interfere with a number of other social relationships and limit access to education, employment, and to those community services that require clients to be "clean and sober". Injection drug users experience higher rates of diseases like HIV and Hepatitis C because of behaviours such as sharing needles, pipes and other drug paraphernalia (Booth, Zhang, & Kwiatkowski, 1999; Kerr et al., 2009; Lloyd-Smith et al., 2001).

Politically-driven responses to homelessness have tended to rely on the criminal justice system and often employ police and prisons as primary solutions (Bright & O’Grady, 2002; Novac et al., 2006). Laws like the *Safe Streets Act (SSA)* enacted by the government of Ontario in 2000 are designed to crack down on panhandling (Bright & O’Grady, 2002).⁴ A Montreal study found that a total of 22,685 tickets had been distributed to people who were homeless for violations of municipal bylaws between 1994 and 2004. In 72% of cases, the individuals convicted were sent to jail for their inability to pay the fine (Béllot, Raffestin, Royer, & Noël, 2005). An article in the Montreal newspaper *Le Devoir* (April 16, 2007) revealed that people who were homeless in Montreal owed over \$3.3 million in unpaid fines to the city. The largest proportion of tickets (20%) were given for sleeping or being spread out on a bench or on the ground in a public space (Béllot, Chesnay, & Royer, 2007). Further investigation by the Quebec Human Rights Commission (Avila, Campbell, & Eid, 2009) found that young people who are homeless were frequently ticketed for jay walking, and that people who were homeless were often subjected to the discriminatory practice of social profiling.⁵

2.5 A Strengths Perspective

A large amount of research has been conducted on the risk factors encountered by young people experiencing homelessness, but far less has been conducted on the strengths, assets, and resilience of young people who are homeless (Bender et al., 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007).

This strength-based literature supports the idea that young people experiencing homelessness

⁴ A similar law was repealed by the City of Winnipeg after an appeal to the Manitoba Superior Court of Justice recognized the right of the poor to use public space (Novac et al., 2006).

⁵ Social profiling refers to targeting law enforcement resources on certain types of people based on their appearance or social characteristics. For example, the Human Rights Commission heard that a business man was sitting on a bench in a park he would not have interactions with law enforcement, whereas someone who appeared to be homeless using the same bench may be approached by law enforcement and asked to move along or given a ticket for a municipal bylaw infraction (Avila, Campbell, & Eid, 2009).

possess many strengths and resources, and that these are important for young people navigating around the obstacles they encounter while homeless (Bender et al., 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Ungar, 2004; 2005).

Through focus groups with young people who were homeless and between the ages of 18-24, Bender et al. (2007) found that many young people develop a set of competencies, attitudes and skills specific to life on the streets that help them to adapt to homelessness and that have the potential to be transferrable to new contexts. Young people in Bender et al.'s (2007) study identified internal *strengths* such as street smarts, coping skills, motivation, attitudes and spirituality as being important to their wellbeing, and highlighted the importance of peer networks, and informal societal resources such as charity from strangers, restaurants and churches as important external assets.

Young people living on the street were also found to demonstrate the following *attitudes*: responsibility for themselves and their futures; aspirations and goals to transition off the streets; maturity demonstrated through a sense of judgment as to who to trust and what to share; a positive attitude in facing daily challenges; and developing trust through reliance on others (Bender et al., 2007: 40). Finally, the following *skills* were observed: coping skills to adapt to adversity; interpersonal skills to interact appropriately with others for well-being; organizational skills to coordinate times, places and services; observational skills to guard and protect against predators; and problem-solving skills to find, access, and utilize resources (Bender et al., 2007: 40). It is useful to acknowledge these strengths, attitudes and skills in our understanding of the experiences of young people on the streets, and I am interested in further exploring the role personal strengths play in making decisions.

Exploring the strengths of young people who are homeless is a prerequisite for enhancing the delivery of strength-based and solution-focused interventions. Saleebey (2013) explains that traditional intervention programs tend to share a deficit-based way of thinking that focuses on risk factors and problems as a means to design and implement interventions. Conversely, strength-based and solution-focused intervention approaches assess strengths and build intervention strategies around them (Roebuck et al., 2011; Saleebey, 2013).

There is also growing recognition that some people may respond to traumatic experiences with what is now being called Post-Traumatic Growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Hill, 2009; Pat-Horenczyk & Brom, 2007). Similar to resilience, the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) acknowledges that experiencing profound difficulty can lead to personal transformation in ways that may be experienced positively. Calhoun & Tedeschi (2006) identify the following three categories of Post-Traumatic Growth:

1. Change in how the person sees herself or himself. This may involve a perception of strength and the sentiment, 'I can survive anything.' Personal changes may also lead a person to explore new possibilities, interests and activities.
2. Change in how the person relates to others. Some people who have been identified as experiencing PTG express that they now feel a greater degree of connection to others and a heightened sense of compassion for the suffering of others.
3. Change in life philosophy. People experiencing PTG often report a greater sense of appreciation and gratitude for the simple things in life, and may also find a sense of personal satisfaction through a change in their understanding of spirituality.

While these positive characteristics may result from trauma for some people, these same people may also continue to experience long-term harm from trauma. Authors such as Karabanow (2004) urge caution against glorifying the growth that may occur in this context, and the concept remains under debate. Still, advocates argue that a strength-based or post-traumatic growth perspective should not be understood as dismissive of risk factors and acknowledgement of harm; rather, a strength-based approach acknowledges that personal growth that can also result from adversity (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Hill, 2009; Pat-Horenczyk & Brom, 2007; Roebuck et al., 2011).

2.6 Resilience: A Conceptual Framework

Young people who are homeless experience co-occurring and interconnected risk factors that contribute to their continued marginalization and exclusion from mainstream society. Some of these experiences are the result of personal choices, but many are imposed through circumstances that are, at least to some extent, beyond their control. Young people who are not homeless may also experience marginalization, but for young people who are homeless, marginalization is reinforced and compounded by the multiple forms of adversity that are part of life on the streets. While this marginalization has the potential to be very damaging, many young people are able to recover. Resilience research attempts to examine how this recovery takes place, with a goal of identifying the types of interventions that are able to stimulate recovery. Understanding how resilience occurs for young people who are homeless will assist communities to respond in a more effective manner.

Resilience research focuses on children who develop well in the context of significant adversity. Many academics conducting research on resilience share the belief that their findings may be useful to inform preventative interventions and social policies to improve the lives of

vulnerable children and families (Cicchetti, 2003; Fraser, 1997; Greene, 2002; Walsh, 1998; Ungar, 2005). While the general concept of resilience comprises overcoming adversity, there are numerous perspectives and debates on how resilience functions. The term, “resilience” has achieved a degree of popularity in everyday speech and may be considered a buzz word within contemporary social science research, but is frequently used out of its proper context, and remains quite ambiguous (Tisseron, 2009; Tremblay, 2005). Throughout its evolution, resilience has referred to a characteristic attributed to an individual, an outcome, and most recently, a process (Ahern, 2006). From my review of literature, the words resiliency and resilience can be defined in the following ways:

- **resiliency** is seen as an *attribute* or capacity of people to adapt positively to adversity.
- **resilience** refers to either the *demonstration of positive outcomes* despite experiencing adversity, or the *process of adapting positively* to adversity; although both of these perspectives imply a degree of subjectivity in determining what may be defined as positive adaptation.

Furthermore, given my analysis of the literature, academics appear to discuss resilience in two different ways:

- 1) As an *objective* phenomenon that can be studied and measured quantitatively; and,
- 2) As a *subjective* social construction that changes based on the interpretations of people with different interests.

In this dissertation, I will define resilience as a *process* of adaptation in spite of adversity; however, I will also draw on academics and interview data that connects resilience to outcomes. The literature review will include discussion and critiques of the objective perspective of resilience, while the subjective constructivist model will be integrated in the theoretical

framework of the following chapter. Overall, resilience will be understood as the active process of young people adapting positively despite their adverse circumstances. This definition is consistent with a number of researchers who have chosen to operationalize resilience as “a dynamic developmental process reflecting evidence of positive adaptation despite significant life adversity” (Cicchetti, 2003: xx; Egeland, Carlson, & Stroufe, 1993; Luthar et al., 2000, Masten, 2001).

Resilience is most commonly understood as a process that can be observed and measured through objective quantitative research; this is the objective perspective. More technically, resilience is perceived as a social phenomenon that must be inferred from observing and measuring a person’s competent functioning despite adversity (Cicchetti, 2003; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & Coatsworth, 1995). It is informed by the ecological perspective which stresses that child development occurs in the context of interactions with the social environment such as family, communities, and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989, 1998; Ungar, 2004). This perspective focuses on risk and protective factors that influence childhood development and on predetermined indicators of successful outcomes generally relating to academic, social, and conduct-related competencies (Ungar, 2004).⁶ In this way, definitions of ‘success’ are based on external evaluations of how well a person is doing, and the concepts of risk and protective factors are pillars of the conventional approach to understanding resilience. In the next chapter, this will be contrasted with the subjective model which bases measurements of resilience on the subjective interpretations of young people and service providers.

⁶ Ecological theorists believe that children are active participants in creating their own environments and place value on both the subjective experiences of children and their objective realities (Heatherington & Parke, 1999).

Risk and Protective Factors from an Objective Perspective

According to Masten & Powell (2003), the key question of resilience research is: “what makes a difference in the lives of children threatened by adversity or burdened by risk?” (4) In lay terms, resilience is a judgment that a person is “doing okay” and that they are currently facing or have overcome significant risk or adversity (Masten & Powell, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Within the objective perspective on resilience, the judgment that an individual is “doing okay” is a measure of psychosocial competence defined by a track record of effective performance in developmental tasks related to academic competence, social competence, and conduct that are appropriate to age, social, cultural and historical contexts (Masten & Powell, 2003; Masten et al., 1995, 1999).

Masten & Powell (2003) use the term ‘cumulative risk’ to recognize that risk factors rarely occur in isolation; they typically co-occur and are generally the product of a sequence of stressful experiences over time (Garmezy & Masten, 1994; Rolf et al., 1990; Rutter, 1979; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975; Sameroff & Seifer, 1983). Adverse events may be *independent* events, such as the death of a parent, or *nonindependent* events that are related to a person’s own behaviour, such as breaking up with a romantic partner or being expelled from school for bad behaviour (Masten, Neeman & Andenas, 1994). As participants age, they generally experience more nonindependent events, suggesting that older youth make more choices that contribute to their own adversity, with “maladaptive” young people making a significantly higher number of these choices than “developmentally competent” peers (Gest. et al., 1999; Masten & Powell, 2003). At this point, I would like to note that the language used in the resilience literature has been critiqued by a number of academics [see Foster & Spencer, 2011; Kelly, 2006; Martineau, 1999; & te Riele, 2006]. In this instance, the term maladaptive and the inference that some

young people may be developmentally incompetent are examples of a perspective that is frequently critiqued by critical youth scholars [See Best 2007; Jones, 2009; Karabanow, 2004; Ungar 2004]. These criticisms will be further addressed in the discussion to follow.

Tools to measure cumulative risk through indexes of known risk factors have shown that young people experience risk on a gradient (Masten & Powell, 2003). For example, children in homeless families all experience the stressor of homelessness, but more problematic outcomes are observed among those who experience the greatest number of concurrent risk factors (Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez, & Neemann, 1993; Masten & Sesma, 1999). Those who are considered to be low risk generally have greater access to assets and resources such as better parenting, and have fewer stressful life experiences (Masten & Powell, 2003). These assets and resources are frequently called protective factors, and resilience researchers frequently operationalize both risk factors and protective factors to conduct quantitative analyses of how protective factors may mitigate risk.

Garmezy and his colleagues laid the groundwork for contemporary resilience research through their investigation of protective factors in high risk populations (Garmezy 1971, 1974; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegan, 1984; Garmezy & Streitman, 1974; Cicchetti, 2003; Masten & Curtis, 2000). In 1977-1978, Garmezy launched Project Competence, a longitudinal research project with a cohort of 205 school aged children, in an attempt to understand the links between competence, adversity, internal functioning, and a number of other individual and family attributes (Masten & Powell, 2003). Project Competence, now under the direction of Masten, followed the lives of participants for more than 20 years with a retention rate of 90% (Masten, 2009). A number of smaller scale projects have also been conducted with high risk youth under the umbrella of Project Competence to examine how resilience emerges with particular

subgroups of young people including a cohort born with congenital heart defects, another with physical disabilities, a sample of young people living in homeless shelters and young war refugees (Masten & Powell, 2003; Masten, 2009). Longitudinal resilience research with high risk groups is still relatively rare, so studies of this nature are valuable to the emerging field (Werner, 2005).

Garmezy (1985) identified three categories of protective factors: individual attributes, family qualities and supportive systems outside the family. Based on other research from a number of academics, Masten & Powell (2003) developed a short list of protective factors summarized in the following table [See Table 1.0 on the following page] (Masten, & Powell, 2003: 13; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Rutter, 2000; Werner, 2000). Masten & Powell (2003) refer to these protective factors as human adaptational systems (13). These protective factors are seen to mitigate risk; an individual who has experienced significant adversity, but has greater access to these individual and contextual attributes is more likely to experience resilience. This form of reasoning reflects an “additive model of resilience” where assets can outweigh risks (Masten & Powell, 2003: 13; Masten, 1999, 2001; Luthar et al., 2000).

Table 1.0 Attributes of Individuals and their Contexts often Associated with Resilience, (Masten & Powell, 2003: 13)

Individual Differences

- Cognitive abilities (IQ scores, attentional skills, executive functioning skills)
- Self-perceptions of competence, worth, confidence (self-efficacy, self-esteem)
- Temperament and personality (adaptability, sociability)
- Self-regulation skills (impulse control, affect and arousal regulation)
- Positive outlook on life (hopefulness, belief that life has meaning, faith)

Relationships

- Parenting quality (including warmth, structure and monitoring, expectations)
- Close relationships with competent adults (parents, relatives, mentors)
- Connections to prosocial and rule-abiding peers (among older children)

Community Resources and Opportunities

- Good schools
 - Connections to prosocial organizations (such as clubs or religious groups)
 - Neighbourhood quality (public safety, collective supervision, libraries, recreation centres)
 - Quality of social services and health care
-

Masten and Powell (2003) identified four principal findings on resilience:

- 1) Resilience arises from the operation of common human adaptational systems or the interconnection of common protective factors like those described above, rather than through extraordinary processes.
- 2) The long history of human biological and cultural adaptation has contributed to these tools for adaptation and overcoming adversity.
- 3) Adaptive systems *develop* and poor outcomes are related to interruption in the development of adaptive systems.
- 4) Social policy should be structured around the requirements for the healthy development of adaptational systems, and the ‘ordinary magic’ achieved through the operation of these systems that seem intuitively positive (Masten, 2001, 2009).

Other longitudinal research on resilience and protective factors has shown that protective factors co-occur and the presence of protective factors at one point in time is a significant predictor of protective factors in the future (Werner, 2005; Gore & Eckenrode, 1994). Werner (2005) found that protective factors can transcend boundaries of ethnicity, social class, and geography. People in her Kauai Island study who experienced resilience frequently sought out resources and opportunities that contributed to life turnarounds, actively constructing environments that reinforced their competencies (Werner, 2005; Scarr, 1992).

Furthermore, Werner found that internal protective factors such as an ‘engaging’ temperament, scholastic competence, an internal locus of control, and self-esteem produced stronger positive outcomes for females, while external protective factors such as family and community supports produced stronger positive outcomes for males (Werner, 2005). The Kauai Island study identified individual differences with high-risk people in their ability to respond to

adversity and create opportunities. Werner's (2005) conclusion is that these individual differences in coping skills suggest that interventions will have varied affects with people experiencing adversity depending on their dispositions and competencies.

Implications for Practice

Based on years of research in Project Competence and reviews of the literature, Masten & Powell (2003) have developed a resilience framework for policy and practice with “implications for the conceptualization of interventions, mission statements, and models guiding programs” (16-17).

Masten & Powell (2003) argue that the mission of interventions should always be framed in a positive manner that promotes competence and the development of human adaptational systems before focusing on other objectives. This aligns well with a strength-based perspective. Masten & Powell (2003) argue that stakeholders will be more invested in a positively framed mission, and provide the example of parents and teachers being more enthusiastic to support plans to foster success in children over plans to prevent teenage pregnancy, delinquency and dropout (17). Comprehensive strategies that promote competence in addition to the prevention and treatment of symptoms and negative behaviours typically produce better outcomes (Cicchetti et al., 2000; Masten, 2001). Generally, Masten & Powell (2003) advocate that positive predictors, protective factors, strengths, and development tasks should be emphasized. Finally they argue that intervention methods should be framed around multiple strategies proven to foster resilience. They suggest that interventions should be risk-focused with an objective of reducing risk exposure and preventing adversity; that they be asset-focused and tailored to enhance resources and assets; and that they be process-focused, mobilizing human adaptational systems.

Resilience, Social Networks and Youth Homelessness

Social networks are situated within the broader context of institutions and social structures including community, school, work, and the political, economic and cultural context which shape the nature and quality of interactions (Biehal, 2006; Dryfoos et al., 2005; Katz 2006; Pinkerton & Dolan, 2007). A social network where members interact based on trust and shared values or norms can be an important resource in a person's life (Callaghan & Colton, 2008; Coleman, 1988; Putnam 1993; Western et al., 2005). Social networks allow people and groups to access resources, support, and solve problems collectively (Adger, 2003; Callaghan & Colton, 2008; Etzioni, 1994; PRI Project, 2005; Zhang et al., 2008). Social networks can be studied by observing the ongoing interactions between individuals and groups (Callaghan & Colton, 2008).

Hawkins & Abrams (2007) point out that a number of researchers operate under the premise that social networking is inherently positive (Kawachi, 1999; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner & Prothrow-Stith, 1997; Lochner et al., 1999). Yet, a growing number of authors recognize that sometimes people develop social networks that operate negatively; preventing them from accessing resources, depleting time and energy, and fostering destructive behaviours (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998; Coleman, 1990; Corcoran & Adams, 1997; Hawkins & Abrams, 2007; Putnum, 2000; Portes, 2000; Roschelle, 1997). The experience of homelessness may strain or limit access to a number of supportive relationships, and people who are homeless may actively attempt to reconstruct supportive networks on the street with other people who are homeless (Hawkins & Abrams, 2007). Savage & Russell (2005) found that homeless women may experience abuse, trauma, and be introduced to drug use through their 'supportive networks' while living on the street.

In longitudinal studies of young people who are homeless from Toronto and Vancouver, Hagan & McCarthy (1997) found that a disproportionate number of young people on the streets came from families with violence or erratic parenting, and were less committed to school work, and were frequently in conflict with teachers. The authors argue that this background lowers the likelihood of acquiring the skills and resources required to compete in the market economy, while the context of street life further limits the potential for developing these skills and resources (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). The authors further argue that an inability to access supportive social networks may actually encourage young people on the streets to capitalize on opportunities to become involved in theft, prostitution and the drug trade. Through participation in illegal networks and limited connection with school and job contacts that provide legitimate opportunities, young people may become embedded within a criminal street culture with limited connections for exiting the lifestyle. (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997: 232, 233).

The research regarding the relative impact of support networks on young people who are homeless is varied. Hagan & McCarthy (1997) found that young people who were homeless with limited connections to conventional families and peers become more integrated in networks of other young people who were homeless, which they considered their street family (233). These groups provide mutual support and safety, while addressing each other's survival needs. Hagan & McCarthy (1997) argue that while they played an important role in the lives of many young people, they did not improve the persistent emotional or survival problems of young people on the street. Other researchers argue that these street communities are important resources that do provide emotional and physical resources to young people on the streets (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007).

2.7 Critical Youth Studies and Critiques of the Literature

Riley & Masten (2005) caution that the concept of resilience should not be used to cast blame on those who do not achieve positive outcomes as this can lead to “blaming the victim.” They explain that resilience must be understood within its context, as a complex process of developmental outcomes of individual children through interactions with families, schools, communities and cultures (19). They explain that the concept of resilience deals with young people who experience significant risk and would not normally be expected to experience positive outcomes. Riley & Masten (2005) believe that resilience should never be used to shift blame on to those who have experienced adversity and have not been successful.

Even so, there are a growing number of critiques of the resilience discourse and its emphasis on the notion of risk (Foster & Spencer 2010; France, 2007; Kelly, 2000; Mallett et al., 2010; Martineu, 1999; O’Mahony, 2009; te Riele, 2006). Foster & Spencer (2011) borrow from Bordieu’s (1999) notion of symbolic violence to argue that the resilience discourse introduces an oppressive logic to the lives of young people whereby they are seen through a risk framework and perceived as either ‘at risk’ or narrowly averting risk and being identified as ‘resilient’. Furthermore, Mallett et al., (2010) express concern that the emphasis on risk factors and the designation of being ‘at risk’ may individualize social problems and inequality, essentially stigmatizing the most marginalized and impoverished people in society as greater ‘risk takers.’ Martineau (1999) adds that “The resiliency discourse imposes prescribed norms of school success and social success upon underprivileged children...The effect is that non-conforming individuals may be pathologized as non-resilient” (11-12).

These critiques seem especially salient when being applied to young people who are homeless, who may easily be considered ‘at risk’ since many are not connected with healthy

families, attending school, or have access to adequate shelter. Karabanow (2004) explains that young people who are homeless navigate through life on the streets, moving in and out of mainstream culture and community services, while often engaging in illegal and unconventional activities to meet their basic needs. However, he also argues that, “Street youth are not ‘social misfits’ plagued by personal pathologies. For the majority, street life is the only viable alternative to extremely problematic (or nonexistent) family or child welfare settings” (Karabanow, 2004: 91). Based on extensive longitudinal research with young people who are homeless, Mallet et al. (2010) believe that there is a need to challenge the stereotypes of young people who are homeless as leading chaotic, risky lives spiralling into drug use, mental health problems and adult homelessness, finding that most young people who are homeless do transition off the streets (Mallett et al., 2010).

One other related concern raised by critical youth scholars is the tendency to define young people who do not meet traditional developmental and economic milestones as ‘transitioning youth.’ Critical youth scholars argue that when adolescence is conceived as a linear journey from immaturity and dependence towards common desirable adult outcomes, any deviations from the projected path are conceived of as failures in transitioning to adulthood (Mallett et al., 2010). In this light young people may be mistakenly considered ‘future adults’ or ‘people-in-the-making’ without recognizing the autonomy, capacity and human agency of adolescents in their own right (Best, 2007; Foster & Spencer, 2011; Mallet et al., 2010). Barker (2005) simply defines human agency as “the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices” (448). Best (2007) and Foster & Spencer (2011) describe how studies of adolescence have moved away from passive constructions of the human agency of

young people, and now focus on the capacities and decision-making of young people. Best (2007) explains the impact of these ‘New Childhood Studies’:

“New Childhood Studies provided a more complex portrait of young people as meaningfully engaged, independent social actors whose activities and practices influence a variety of social contexts and settings...these emerging perspectives generated a cataclysmic shift in thinking about youth as they challenged the prevailing characterization of children as passive actors and instead emphasized children’s autonomy and competence as actors in their own right...For some time now, youth studies scholars have treated children and youth as reflexive social agents and producers of culture, active in the complex negotiations of social life and contributing in significant ways to the everyday construction of the social world” (10-11).

2.8 Addressing the Gap

Critical youth studies today are generally informed by the perspective described by Best (2007) above, and seek to explore how young people understand their lives and how they make decisions. Furthermore, exploring the agency of youth is a growing theme in contemporary studies in contexts of youth adversity and marginalization as this approach may be broadly applied to diverse contexts such as young people experiencing family violence, child soldiers, and youth transitioning into adulthood (Best, 2007; Bjarnason, Sigurdardottir, & Thorlindsson, 1999; Denov, 2010; Jones, 2009; Larson, 2006; Macmillan & Hagan, 2004; Ungar 2004). Exploring agency in these contexts allows researchers to gain a better understanding of how young people understand their social worlds, and how they navigate through challenging environments, demonstrating capacity and resistance (Denov, 2010; Jones, 2009; Ungar, 2004). After my reading of the current research on resilience presented in this literature review, I believe that there is a great need to further explore the role of youth agency in how young people adapt to adversity. This is a perspective that Ungar (2004) advocates, and his constructivist model of resilience will be presented in the next chapter as a response to the dominant models of resilience.

In evaluating research on youth homelessness, many of the articles included in the early portion of this literature review focus on risk factors, and conceptualize young people who are homeless as being ‘at-risk.’ Little attention is paid to how young people who are homeless think about their lives, and how this understanding shapes their decision-making processes.

Karabanow (2004) validates this perspective:

“The vast majority of literature about street youth has focused on etiology and street culture with very little attention placed on the personal experiences of “being” a street youth. Few studies have attempted to account for the feelings, experiences, and sense of identity and meaning construction of street youth, as a way of extending our collective understanding of street culture and of how young people end up there” (Karabanow, 2004: 68).

It would appear that there is a need to conduct research that fills this gap: building an understanding of how young people understand homelessness, and how this understanding shapes how they navigate life on the streets. Also, since young people who experience homelessness are generally successful in transitioning off the streets [see Karabanow, 2004; Mallet. et al., 2010], I would like to explore the process of resilience to understand how young people find the strength to keep moving forward despite the adversity that they face. Given the heightened sensitization to the labeling of marginalized populations and passive constructions of young people, an alternative constructivist model of resilience has emerged to complement the conventional model of resilience and provide a more contextualized approach to understanding resilience among vulnerable populations affected by systemic inequality [See Ungar 2004; 2004a; 2008]. This constructionist model of resilience will be further described and built into my theoretical framework in the following chapter.

3.0 Theoretical Framework: Towards a Constructivist and Strength-based Model of Resilience

In their seminal book on youth crime and homelessness, Hagan & McCarthy (1997), argue that North American criminology neglects street youth. They point out that the majority of contemporary studies on youth deviance are conducted with young people who attend school, and administered through self-report surveys in classrooms. They suggest that an unrealistic portrait of youth crime has been painted through an overreliance on quantitative school-based research, and they highlight the need for the discipline to return to its roots, exploring the factors that are relevant in the lives of the most marginalized and excluded young people in society. This study represents an attempt to do so, and reflects their belief in moving beyond ‘school criminology’ and returning to ‘street criminology.’ In this regard, I would align myself and this research with many of the perspectives that initially emerged from the Chicago School of Criminology and were further developed by its graduates, most specifically, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; 1961).

Ronel & Elisha (2010) argue that there is also a tendency within the discipline of criminology to perceive the ‘subject’ through a deficit-based lens, focusing primarily on what is not going right, and the patterns and social pressures that contribute to criminal offending; although, they do acknowledge a newer focus in the discipline on desistance, restorative justice, and strength-based models of intervention.⁷ In this research, I will integrate criminological theories relating to techniques of neutralization for offending, and the presentation of self [See Goffman, 1959; 1961; Matza 1964; Sykes & Matza, 1957]. While I will be presenting findings

⁷ Ronel & Elisha (2010) propose adopting a conceptual framework of “Positive Criminology” which is loosely modelled on “Positive Psychology.” Given the pre-existing Positivist School of Criminology, I have chosen not to adopt the language proposed by Ronel & Elisha (2010) in an effort to avoid confusion; however, I do support their perspective.

on the challenges faced by young people who are homeless, I will also attempt to focus on the capacity of young people to navigate the challenges that they experience, and the strengths that are required for surviving life on the streets. This chapter will also try to respond to critiques of the resilience discourse by presenting and building upon the constructivist model of resilience introduced by Ungar (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008).

3.1 The Constructivist Perspective of Resilience

An alternative to the objective perspective of resilience, described in the literature review, is a more *subjective* view of resilience that explores resilience through a social constructivist lens (Ungar, 2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008). This introduces the idea of subjectivity to the concepts of risk and protective factors, suggesting that people perceive risk and protective factors differently depending on their personal situation or social context. Ungar's (2004) application of this perspective emerged primarily from qualitative case study research with at-risk youth, but the constructionist framework is also being explored through multi-site, cross cultural, mixed-method research coordinated through the Pathways to Resilience Project based at Dalhousie University (Ungar 2004a; 2008). Ungar (2008) argues that this subjective constructionist approach may be better suited to examining the process of resilience across cultures, or as it is situated within power relations. From this perspective, definitions of 'success' are recognized as changing from one group to another, and potentially changing from day to day. Jeffery J. Mayer (1999) defines success in the following manner.

“Success is not an end result. It's an ongoing process. It's a journey. However, there's an ebb and flow to success. It's not linear. It comes and goes. There are ups and downs. One day you have a great day, the next day is so-so, and the third day is absolutely rotten. But on the fourth day, something good happens, and you're back on top of the world again...That's life! ...Successful people never quit. When they suffer a setback, they just pick themselves up and keep going.”

While these approaches emerge from different worldviews, Ungar (2004) proposes that a constructionist viewpoint is complementary to the traditional resilience discourse. Objective narratives of resilience generate aggregate data on patterns of risk and protective factors that form a foundation of knowledge for planning interventions. The subjective constructionist stance has the potential to broaden the possibilities for intervention by focusing on collaborative problem-solving based on identifying what young people believe to be their needs, strengths and resources.

Carpenter (1996) provides an additional explanation to make sense of the social constructivist perspective. He distinguishes between radical constructivism which assumes that there is no objective world or reality, and critical constructivism, which recognizes that social realities are co-constructed and can be influenced by attitudes and beliefs, such as racism and sexism, that exist in society. Joel Best (1993; 1995; 2008) refers to strict versus contextual constructionism to describe this difference. Planning interventions within the critical constructivist perspective, a worker treats the client as the expert, while still challenging social constructions that reflect social inequality (Carpenter, 1996).

3.1.1 Theory of Structuration

Michael Ungar's (2004) constructionist model of resilience is framed around personal narratives of people as they navigate through and negotiate with their social environments to obtain the resources they need to feel and define themselves as healthy. It introduces the idea of resilience-seeking behaviours, and the sense of a journey, as people deliberately make choices to access, or at times avoid, resources that may help them adapt to their adverse circumstances. This approach stresses the interaction of structure (social arrangements) and agency (individual responses and choices), and seeks to understand the experiences of young people as they interact,

attribute meaning to, and respond to their circumstances. It is based on Anthony Giddens' (1976; 1979; 1983; 1984) theory of structuration, which examines the interaction and mutual reinforcement of human agency and social structures. He writes, "Social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very *medium* of this constitution" (Giddens, 1976: 121, emphasis in the original).

Giddens' theory developed out of his concern that sociology had traditionally exaggerated the constraining nature of social structures on human decision-making.

"Structuration theory developed from the laudable viewpoint that human agents should not be seen as the puppets of social forces nor should they be seen as exercising unchecked autonomy. Structuration theory attempts to lend equal weight to the influences of both structure (and by implication culture) and agency. The means by which this is accomplished is to stop holding structure and agency apart, to no longer see them as discrete entities. To persist in this would be to repeat the dualisms which have bedevilled sociological analysis in the past (voluntarism and determinism; subjectivism and objectivism; macro and micro)" (Vaughn, 2001: 186).

Giddens (1976; 1979; 1983; 1984) sees humans as reflexive beings capable of monitoring their social environment and allowing their observations to influence their courses of action. This means that by reflecting on personal experiences, humans have the capacity, to some extent, to influence and even transform their social situations (Miles, 2000). Giddens (1976; 1979; 1983; 1984) sees social structures as the virtual rules and resources actors draw upon as they produce and reproduce themselves and society in their everyday actions. Vaughn (2001) writes, "To grant [social structures] a real existence would be to admit that structures are anterior to and autonomous of agency and so open up the gap between structure and agency that Giddens is trying to close" (Vaughn, 2001).

Giddens (1984) uses language as an example of the process of structuration. The language is already in existence when a specific English speaker makes choices about which

words and phrases they would use to express their thoughts. The language is the structure and the English speaker is the human agent who demonstrates some aspect of choice in how his thoughts are presented; however, the way the thoughts are presented is constrained by the limitations and structures of the pre-existing language. The structure of the language is also reproduced and reinforced as English speakers collectively use it to express their thoughts; but, the language itself will change over time as the English speakers add new words and expressions to the vocabulary. In this way, the structure of the language shapes how the actors use it, but is also reproduced and transformed by how the actors choose to frame their thoughts. This view is important to understanding youth homelessness and resilience as the decisions, choices, and economic realities of young people on the streets are constrained in very real ways by pre-existing structures. However this does not mean that their choices are predetermined, and this project seeks to explore how young people innovate or resist structures in ways that they perceive will meet their needs.

Another way of understanding Giddens' Theory of Structuration (1976; 1979; 1983; 1984) would be to picture an individual living their life and making choices within a specified set of opportunities or conditions of possibility. The opportunities that exist vary greatly from one person to another and some people are able to easily navigate their lives and pursue their objectives while others face greater challenges or cope less effectively. Some people may live more disadvantaged lives with limited opportunities and experience more constraints on their choices. Within this context, someone with limited options may believe that breaking the law is one of the only ways to meet their basic needs. Young people who are homeless may experience a greater degree of constraint on the choices that they make given their limited economic options and social networks.

3.1.2 Navigation and Negotiation

Michael Ungar (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2007; 2008) uses the interaction of agency and structure articulated in the theory of structuration to develop his own theory of resilience. He frames it around two key principles: navigation and negotiation.

Navigation refers to a child's capacity to seek help, which Ungar (2005) argues is a function of both human agency and, at the same time, of the availability of help to be sought, which he understands as structural (p.225). He writes, "The child seeking [to build] self-esteem or any other aspect of well-being requires access to experiences and relationships that build that self-esteem. One can only navigate to what is available and easily accessed" (Ungar, 2005: 225). So navigation refers to a young person's *capacity* and *choice* to access *available resources*.

Negotiation refers to the efforts of a young person interacting with resources to obtain services that are personally relevant and meaningful (Ungar, 2005). It is similarly a process comprised of a youth's capacity to negotiate for personally meaningful resources, and the adaptability of community services to participate in negotiation and provide structures that can meaningfully engage young people on their own terms. Ungar (2005) argues that the assumption that community services will help produce positive outcomes may not align with the perceptions of adolescents who may experience institutional care as intrusive or iatrogenic.

To demonstrate negotiation, Ungar (2004) provides an example of a young man in the child welfare system, negotiating to remain in the same neighbourhood where he had access to his peers and school community, regardless of multiple out-of-home placements. Though he encountered significant resistance within the child welfare system, he was successful in remaining in his neighbourhood. When interviewed as a university student, the young man

expressed that he felt his ability to remain in contact with his supportive networks through his continual self-advocacy with child services was the most important element in his positive adaptation into adult life. For him, resilience was the result of a process of negotiation (agency) to ensure that his perceived needs were met by the system (structure). Ungar (2005) recognizes that service providers can produce barriers for young people, and that resilience emerges through a complex array of social and political relationships (Ungar, 2005: 441). He believes that the better documented and acknowledged a youth's own construction of resilience, the more likely those intervening will be able to identify the specific aspects of resilience most relevant to the young person (Ungar, 2008; 234).

Rather than calculating the cumulative balance of risk and protective factors, Ungar (2008) proposes that a young person's experience of resilience is framed around their ability to overcome the seven tensions described in Table 2.0 on the following page:

TABLE 2.0 Seven tensions that are central to resilience (Ungar, 2008: 231).

Tension	Explanation
1. Access to material resources	Availability of financial, educational, medical and employment assistance and/or opportunities, as well as access to food, clothing and shelter
2. Relationships	Relationships with significant others, peers and adults within one's family and community
3. Identity	Personal and collective sense of purpose, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs and values, spiritual and religious identification
4. Power and control	Experiences of caring for one's self and others; the ability to effect change in one's social and physical environment in order to access health resources
5. Cultural adherence	Adherence to one's local and/or global cultural practices, values and beliefs
6. Social Justice	Experiences related to finding a meaningful role in community and social equality
7. Cohesion	Balancing one's personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; feeling a part of something larger than one's self socially and spiritually

Ungar (2008) reasons that youth who experience resilience are “those that successfully navigate their way through these tensions, each in his or her own way, and according to the strengths and resources available to the youth personally, in his or her family, community and culture” (231). He explains that the solutions chosen by youth and their ability to resolve these tensions within accepted community norms are dependent on a number of preconditions:

1. Children are only able to select from resources that are available. This is reflected in the concept of navigation.
2. Young people will select resources that they perceive will have a positive influence for them in their situation. This is the concept of negotiation.
3. Finally, resilience will reflect both some degree of cultural homogeneity or shared experience, and a heterogeneity of diverse individual experiences.

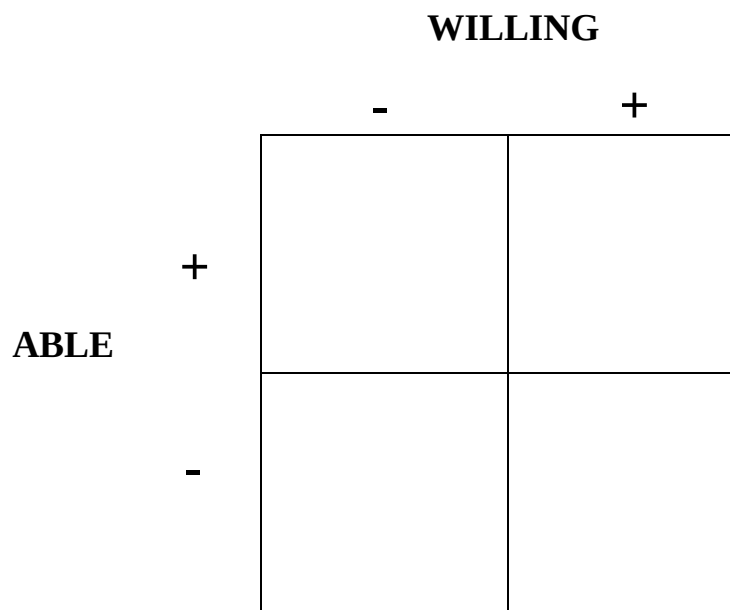
Based on these assumptions, Ungar (2008) suggests that interventions must be multi-faceted and designed to assist youth in addressing the many different pathways through these tensions. He reasons that the most effective interventions will be those designed to help young people navigate resources and negotiate for what they need in order to resolve the tensions. This approach relates to the theory of structuration, and the idea that personal choices are presented and constrained by our social environment. A community with more services and a larger capacity to support youth at risk may provide more opportunities for young people to experience resilience.

Ungar’s (2004, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008) constructionist model of resilience incorporates internal and external protective factors. Internal protective factors are aspects of human agency, and can be seen as strengths that a person can draw on as they navigate through their social

environment. External protective factors are seen as resources that young people can navigate towards to help them adapt to adversity. The concept of navigation is important since it cannot be assumed that young people will draw upon external resources, such as community services, even if they are available. Rather, community agencies need to be accessible and relevant to the needs of youth in order for youth to make use of them.

Ungar's (2004, 2008) emphasis on navigation and negotiation could be enhanced by integrating the concepts of capacity and desire. Youth will vary in their ability and willingness to navigate and negotiate, and these two factors may differ in direction [See Figure 1.0]:

FIGURE 1.0 Four possibilities of capacity and desire:



While these concepts are already present within the model of navigation and negotiation, it may be useful to examine them further. Based on the logic that some youth may be willing to seek help but are unable to access resources, interventions should improve accessibility by deconstructing barriers and providing services in a youth-friendly format. At the same time, some youth may be able but not willing to access resources, which highlights the need for community services to negotiate with some youth to bring them to a place where they are more willing to take the necessary steps to help themselves. The overall logic is that young people move forward when they are both willing and able.

Social Networks, Youth Homelessness, and the Value of a Constructivist Perspective

Complementary to a constructionist perspective of resilience, Lanekau et al. (2005) also connect the concept of social networking with life on the streets, suggesting that young people who are homeless develop “street capital” or knowledge gained through observations and experiences that enable them to survive within the street economy. “Street competencies” are practical actions and skills developed through the accumulation of street capital, and are seen to include a number of activities important to street economies, including buying and selling drugs, the commoditization of sexual activity, shop lifting and finding adequate shelter (Lanekau et al., 2005; Granovetter, 1985). These competencies are developed through interactions and associations with more experienced street youths, through an active process of social networking. When young people gain knowledge about life on the streets, they enhance their street capital and develop a set of “street competencies” (Lanekau et al., 2005). This understanding of street competencies parallels Bender et al.’s (2007) view that young people develop strengths on the streets that can be protective factors contributing to resilience regardless of the adversity

experienced. The discourses of resilience and social networks are intricately linked in this regard.

However, we cannot assume, as may happen within the traditional perspective of resilience, that a young person with “internal protective factors” such as above average intelligence and strong social competencies will use these personal attributes towards socially acceptable ends. While these strengths may enhance the possibilities for the young person to be successful within mainstream society, they could equally enhance the young person’s capacity to be a more successful drug dealer or thief. A great deal will depend on how the young person interprets his personal circumstances and opportunities, which will inevitably be shaped by a number of structural constraints; this reality reflects the theory of structuration. Internal protective factors may be understood as components of a person’s human agency and the internal resources they may draw upon as they make choices based on their reflexive responses to social structures.

If we adopted the stance that social networks are inherently positive, it would be understood to help young people move exclusively towards social integration; however, given the discussion of how social networks are constructed and can have positive or negative influences depending on who is included in a person’s supportive network, to conceptualize it in this manner would not be entirely accurate. A young person seeking emotional support from a group of peers may be influenced to engage in pro-social behaviours that promote healthy adaptation by drawing on this network, or if their peers are antisocial, they may be influenced to engage in antisocial behaviours by drawing on this social network. A young person who is more integrated within mainstream culture could be understood to have more access to positive social networks or the ability to resist the influences of negative social networks; while a young person

who is less integrated may not have access to positive social networks, and may have stronger access to negative social networks, or may demonstrate resistance to the influences of positive social networks.

It is also conceivable that despite any particular balance of risk and protective factors, a person may follow an unanticipated trajectory as they reflect and respond to their own life circumstances. People have the capacity to learn, to be daring, to make difficult decisions, to grow and to overcome obstacles; they also have the capacity to become discouraged, lose hope, and harm themselves or others. This is important to the concept of resilience, and it implies that while interventions can be planned around the patterns that are established through objective research on best practices for fostering resilience and inclusion, the subjective constructionist principles of navigation and negotiation advocated by Ungar (2005) are important for fine tuning and tailoring interventions to individual contexts. Understanding negotiation requires that interventions value a case-by-case approach where flexibility is afforded for young people to make decisions that reflect the protective factors that seem the most pertinent to the individual. Within this framework, the role of intervention may be to help a young person explore their personal strengths and resources, informed by an understanding of protective factors and social networks, and encourage them to draw on the sources that seem like they will be the most useful. This approach, informed by both objective and subjective perspectives of resilience, may assist young people in navigating towards higher levels of social and economic integration.

A point of concern that may be raised when centering youth decision-making and human agency in this research is the potential critique that human agency as a concept treads close to questions of personal responsibility. Authors such as Gaetz (2004) acknowledge that homeless young people experience constraints on their agency because of the systemic barriers they

encounter. The purpose of emphasizing human agency in this analysis is not to suggest that young people are homeless because they want to be. As argued in the literature review, studies on youth homelessness tend to emphasize the role of structural constraints in the lives of young people without considering how young people choose to respond to adversity and structural barriers. For example, studies may refer to the fact that many young people become homeless because of family violence, but relatively few will unpack the individual decision making process of young people in the choices they considered and made. Did they consider reporting their parents to social services? Did they feel that fleeing to other family members would not be effective because of the close connection with their parents? Did they leave home with a plan? The goal of researching human agency is to focus on how young people adapt and make decisions, and to further understand what resources they perceive as relevant to them as they attempt to overcome adversity. To achieve a more holistic understanding, research on youth homelessness needs to balance the role of structural constraints imposed on young people with an analysis of how young people interpret and respond to their circumstances.

3.2 Negotiation with the self and with others

Navigation and negotiation are central components of Ungar's model of constructivist resilience (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2007; 2008); however, his explanation of negotiation could be further developed and enhanced. To explore how young people may negotiate with themselves and others, two theoretical concepts will now be introduced: techniques of neutralization (Matza 1964; Sykes & Matza, 1957) and impression management from Goffman's (1959; 1961; 1963) symbolic interactionist work on the presentation of self in everyday life, and the self as both socially constructed and as a creator.

3.2.1 Negotiation with the self: Techniques of Neutralization

Sutherland's (1955) theory of differential association posited that criminal behaviour involves learning techniques for committing crime, as well as the motives, rationalizations, and attitudes favourable to the violation of law (Sutherland in DR Cressey, 1955). Sutherland's theory is about social learning, and how patterns of delinquency may be learned and copied by others. Sykes & Matza (1964) set out to move beyond studying how people learn these delinquent patterns to study what specifically they begin to believe that may help them to break their bond to social conventions and drift towards the consideration of delinquency (Matza, 1964; Sykes & Matza, 1957).

“It is our argument that much delinquency is based on what is essentially an unrecognized extension of defences to crimes, in the form of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquent but not by the legal system or society at large” (Sykes & Matza, 1957: 666).

Sykes & Matza (1957) argue that delinquency is enabled and reproduced through a series of justifications for deviance that young people may use to distance themselves from the consequences and guilt emerging as a result of the harmful impact of their offending behaviour. These justifications may be explicit messages that young people recite to themselves, or they may lay beneath the surface, and only become visible when rationales for offending are sought out. Exploring what young people believe about their social world and how this influences actions is central to my theoretical approach, and the exploration of what notions come to be seen as valid within different contexts also aligns with a constructivist perspective.

Sykes and Matza (1957) identify five major types of neutralization that are frequently used by young people to justify engaging in criminalized behaviours:

1. **The denial of responsibility.** Here a young person may assert that their behaviour is due to influences outside of their control. This may align with a structural perspective of homelessness that constructs young people as victims of abusive homes and uncaring social structures leaving them desperate on the streets. Sykes and Matza (1957) include the examples of unloving parents or bad companions or a slum neighbourhood as reasons a young person may cite to deny responsibility for their actions. They suggest that a young person may adopt a “billiard ball conception of himself in which he sees himself as helplessly propelled into new situations”. This view point is aligned with a passive perspective of young people and diminished human agency. Sykes and Matza (1957) explain that a young person employing this technique of neutralization may view himself “as more acted upon than acting (p. 667).”
2. **The denial of injury.** Here the young person may question whether anyone has been clearly hurt by his actions, and may feel that the behaviour does not really cause harm even though it may be illegal.
3. **The denial of the victim.** Here the young person may accept responsibility for their behaviour and recognize that they have injured someone but may claim that the injury is not wrong given the circumstances. Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that a young person may see themselves as having been wronged and therefore see the injury they inflict as a justified retaliation or punishment somehow transforming the victim into a wrong doer, deserving of injury. They also suggest that in some cases the notion of a victim may be

reduced to a vague abstraction where a young person has a diminished awareness of the types of reactions and emotions that a victim may experience from the behaviour.

4. **The condemnation of the condemners.** Here a young person may shift attention from their own behaviour onto the motives and behaviour of those who disapprove of his actions. He may see his condemners as hypocrites, rule breakers or vindictive. This feeling of unjustified oppression may be transferred into cynicism about the conforming world overall. Sykes and Matza (1957) use the example of police explicitly saying young people may perceive the police as corrupt, stupid or brutal as a way of minimizing their responsibility for law breaking. This technique of neutralization allows young people to shift the focus on wrong doing away from themselves and onto a perceived oppressor.
5. **The appeal to higher loyalties.** Here Sykes and Matza (1957) acknowledge that sometimes young people find themselves trapped between their loyalty to the larger society and the demands of a smaller social group to which they belong. This does not mean that the young person disregards the values of the larger society but rather they find themselves in a dilemma where the cost of conforming with the values of the smaller group involves breaking the law. Some of the values within a smaller group might include always helping a friend and never snitching to authorities about this friend even if there are consequences for the young person. In the case of homelessness the strong camaraderie between young people on the streets fits well with this technique of neutralization. In my research many young people talked about their willingness to help a friend obtain food or clothing or shelter even if the behaviours required to obtain it were illegal.

Sykes and Matza (1957) suggest that these techniques of neutralization assist young people in suspending their internalized values but may not fully shield them when they are called to account for their behaviour. Some young people may engage in these techniques of neutralization directly and reflexively to justify behaviours while others may become so detached from mainstream society that the techniques of neutralization occur on an almost subconscious level. In my interviews with young people who are homeless who engaged in criminal behaviours, all of these techniques of neutralization are readily apparent. The choice to include this theoretical framework arose as a grounded response to the data I collected, since most of the young people I spoke with provided rationales for their offending behaviour that were contextualized within the experience of homelessness. For this study, techniques of neutralization are understood as a form of negotiation with the self, where young people weigh specific rationalizations as they drift towards and choose to engage in criminal behaviour.

3.2.2 Negotiation with others: The art of impression management

In his celebrated book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) uses the metaphor of theatrical performances to explore how human beings relate to one another and attempt to manage the impressions of their identity that they allow others to see. Essentially, Goffman argues that all of our social interactions can be analyzed as performances intended to achieve some desired result on the part of the actor. This provides a fascinating backdrop for the daily negotiations of young people who are homeless as they navigate through the tensions of life on the street and attempt to manage the impressions that they convey to their peers and to service providers.

One of the aspects of Goffman's (1959) work that I will draw on is the difference between what is performed on the front stage for others to see, and what occurs backstage when

the pressure to perform is no longer felt. The young people I spoke with described the ‘fronts’ that they use with peers and service providers and how tiring it can be to constantly perform those roles. They also spoke about the spaces where they could be themselves and not feel the pressure to perform for others. These two spaces represent what Goffman refers to as the front stage and the backstage: the front stage refers to the roles that are performed for others to see, while the backstage refers to a more authentic space when a person does not feel the need to play a role. However, Goffman (1959; 1961) also talks about how some performers can become so committed to playing a role front stage that, over time, they begin to believe it. Many young people who are homeless project a hardened image to others on the street as a way to protect themselves and seem less vulnerable. Playing this role for an extended period of time has the power to influence identity, and some of the young people who I spoke with seem to experience a blurring of projected and believed identities. Furthermore, in many ways life on the streets may be understood as a form of improvisation where young people experiment with playing different roles and assuming different identities.

As young people negotiate with peers and service providers, they selectively perform roles where they present themselves as “acted upon” or “acting on.” The “acted upon” role may be staged to convince the audience that the young person has limited power over their circumstances and may require assistance. Conversely, an “acting on” performance may be staged to convey a sense of capacity and power, and be intended to convince an audience of the actor’s strength or ability to master their own life. In chapter 9, towards the close of the dissertation, I will present more of Goffman’s work as I examine these performances.

The presentation of self and techniques of neutralization are valuable tools to further explore how young people who are homeless navigate through quickly changing environments

and negotiate with peers and service providers to try and meet their needs. These approaches are situated within the tradition of symbolic interactionism, which explores the meanings and understandings that are constructed through human interactions. It is anticipated that these analytical tools can further enhance a constructivist model of resilience through further building on the concepts of navigation and negotiation.

Conclusion

Pulling all of these pieces together, this project is conceptualized as a strength-based exploration of how young people overcome the adversity that they experience through homelessness. This chapter has attempted to provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of homeless young people and to emphasize the role of human agency as youth respond reflexively to their circumstances. Although young people who are homeless experience significant adversity, they also possess many competencies, and may be seen as highly resilient depending on the starting point of the definition. A constructivist model of resilience provides more theoretical space to recognize the success and strengths of young people who are homeless without this recognition being contingent on a pre-packaged set of outcomes that might be considered normative for the middle class. Furthermore, the added tools of the techniques of neutralization and presentation of self in everyday life provide an enhanced model for exploring how young people who are homeless negotiate with themselves, their peers and service providers. The following chapters will explore these theoretical concepts through the experiences of the young people and service providers who participated in this research.

4.0 Methodology

Research with young people experiencing homelessness tends to focus on psychological issues such as self-esteem, mental illness, and measurements of individual developmental capacities, or on sociological aspects such as structural risk factors for homelessness, social exclusion, and barriers to housing [See Baron 2003; Hermen et al., 1997; Karabanow, 2004⁸; Kidd, 2004; Roy et al., 2004; Tanner & Wortley, 2002]. While both of these research agendas are important, I am keenly interested in locating the human agency of young people experiencing homelessness, particularly in how they attribute meaning to their circumstances and how they make decisions in light of all the externally imposed constraints. Essentially, I want to explore the processes that Michael Ungar (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2007; 2008) describes as navigation and negotiation. I believe that an analysis of this nature will add an additional layer to the current research and contribute to a more advanced understanding of how young people understand and interact with the obstacles they encounter. As identified in my theoretical chapter, my epistemological perspective is rooted in social constructionism and recognizes the pluralist construct of multiple truths, and the power struggle between representations of competing interests that can occur to establish a dominant truth (Patton, 2002).

My research is about the strengths and resources that young people draw on in their attempts to overcome obstacles and challenges in their lives. It is framed within resilience discourse and focuses on the human agency of young people as they make meaningful decisions about their lives. Approval for this research was obtained from the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa [Appendix A], and a letter of support was provided for the Ethics Board on behalf of the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa [Appendix B].

⁸ Karabanow (2004) highlights a need for research that explores the perceptions of young people about their experiences of homelessness.

4.1 Operationalization of Key Concepts

This section will present the operationalization of “homelessness” and “youth” for the purposes of this research.

A) Homelessness:

The way that homelessness is defined and measured varies from one study to the next, making it difficult to gather consistent data or to compare research findings (Carlen, 1996; Gaetz, 2004; Kyle 2005; Mallett et al., 2010; Marvasti, 2003; Robinson, 2008). Hopper and Baumohl (1996) argue that it is “an odd-job word, pressed into service to impose order on a hodgepodge of social dislocation, extreme poverty, seasonal or itinerant work, and unconventional ways of life” (p. 3). Hagan & McCarthy (2005) advocate for broad definitions of homelessness to be used in research with young people in order to create wider parameters of inclusion.

The United Nations recognizes two categories of homelessness (UNECE, 2004):

- 1) Absolute homelessness: These individuals do not have access to physical shelter of their own. They may be sleeping in temporary shelters or “sleeping rough” on the streets in locations not deemed acceptable for human habitation.
- 2) Relative homelessness: These individuals experience hidden or concealed homelessness living in spaces and shelters that do not meet minimum standards. They may be lacking protection from environmental elements, access to clean water and sanitation, or personal safety.

Young people experiencing homelessness are likely to sleep on the streets, in parks, abandoned buildings, shelters, or engage in couch surfing, staying with friends as long as they are able (Carlen, 1996; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Karabanow, Carson & Clement, 2010; Mallett et al.,

2010). The diversity of their experiences can only be captured by including both absolute and relative homelessness in my operational definition. Furthermore, Hagan & McCarthy (1997) found that the greater amount of time young people spend homeless, the more likely they are to become entrenched in street culture, to experience higher rates of victimization, and to become involved in criminal offending. For this study, I was interested in talking with young people who have had a significant experience of homelessness, so I developed inclusion criteria that would include both the experiences of sustained homelessness and reoccurring homelessness. I operationalized this as lasting either a period of one month in the past year, or experiencing three or more shorter episodes of homelessness in the past year. Logically, the more exposure young people have had to homelessness, the more opportunity they have had to make decisions and engage in problem solving related to homelessness. While participants were not required to be homeless at the time of the research, I made efforts to ensure that the research was focused on homelessness by being specific in my interview guide, and asking questions such as, “What challenges did you experience when you first became homeless?” [Appendix D].

B) Youth

Youth are also somewhat more broadly defined in this study. Social sciences that study the life-course have been identifying a growing delay in transitions to adulthood in western nations (Clark, 2007; Hagan & McCarthy, 2005). Transitions into adult roles such as the completion of high school, registering for post-secondary education, living independently from family, and engaging in lifestyles typically prohibited for younger teenagers are happening later for much of the population (Clark, 2007; Hagan & McCarthy, 2005). For these reasons, many youth-serving agencies have adopted varied upper age cutoffs to access their youth services, such as 21, 24 or 25. Hagan & McCarthy (2005) explain that it is common for researchers working

with community agencies to operationalize the concept of youth according to the parameters adopted by their partner agencies. Since the Youth Services Bureau serves young people until the age of 24, in this study I included young people from age 16-24 in my definition of youth.⁹

4.2 Research Methods

My research methods combine multiple sources of data, including: focus groups and in-depth interviews with young people experiencing homelessness and focus groups and in-depth interviews with service providers from the Youth Services Bureau. I also conducted feedback sessions with young people and service providers to report back on my findings and discuss the relevance of my conclusions. I conducted 24 interviews with young people, and two focus groups with some overlap in participants. I also conducted three focus groups with service providers and four individual interviews. In total, I spoke with 35 young people, and 30 service providers.

4.2.1 Focus Groups and Interviews with Young People

I conducted two focus groups with young people: one with young men and one with young women. Both focus groups also included young people who identify as transgender. These focus groups were held early in the research process to explore collective understandings of the strengths young people rely on in difficult times, and different indicators of resilience. Because of the multiple in-depth interviews that I conducted, the focus groups were intended to provide both a broader response to my research questions than what I could obtain in a single interview and an overall ‘snapshot’ of responses by hearing multiple voices speak to my research

⁹ In Canada, 18 is generally understood as the age a person becomes a legal adult, and this is reflected in the right to vote, and the transition from the youth criminal justice system to the adult justice system. Furthermore, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child prescribes a number of rights and protections for young people under the age of 18, while those 18 and over are legally defined as adults.

questions quickly. The discussion in the focus groups did help to better prepare me for individual interviews, and helped to validate what I was learning from talking with young people individually.

The focus group with young men included 5 participants and the focus group with young women included 7 participants. This focus group followed a semi-structured focus group protocol, including a number of open-ended questions with associated prompts [Appendix D]. Berg (2001) explains that ideally, the focus group mediator will follow the group dynamics, and allow the participants substantial influence in the direction of the discussion. Even so, I anticipated that the focus groups would follow a more structured format than the individual in-depth interviews and would permit me to walk through an analytical grid with participants.

While I had intended for each to last one hour, the focus group with young men lasted only twenty-five minutes and the group with young women lasted about thirty-five minutes. My first focus group was with young men, and I quickly discovered that I was unprepared to facilitate the group dynamics with the group of energetic young men who chose to participate. I also found that the group dynamics shaped the conversation dramatically, and provided a very different perspective than what I heard from young men within their individual interviews. Young men seemed to want to impress each other with their comments and many bragged about sex and drug use. My poor facilitation of this session allowed the group to be loud and unfocused; however, there was one older male who remained very focused. He had spent a number of years in and out of prison and on the street, and he seemed to have some status among his peers. He participated very actively in the conversation and expressed gratitude at the end of the session for the opportunity to discuss these issues with his peers. He explained that he took the opportunity to try and encourage his friends to make some better life decisions.

Having learned about the need for more directive facilitation from the first session, the focus group with young women was much more productive; and after each question was put to the group, we went around the circle allowing each young person to respond in turn. The young women also spoke a great deal about sex and drugs in their session, but they also discussed the challenges related to drug addiction and trying to be sober when everyone around them was using.

At the beginning of each focus group, after I had explained the issue of informed consent, I provided a cue card to each person, and asked them to draw something that they found helpful when things were difficult. After each young person had completed their drawing, we went around the room and they were able to show their work, which proved to be a nice way to build rapport with the group. See Figure 2.0, Figure 2.1, and Figure 2.2 as examples.

Figure 2.0 Drawing (no. 1) from Focus Group with Young People

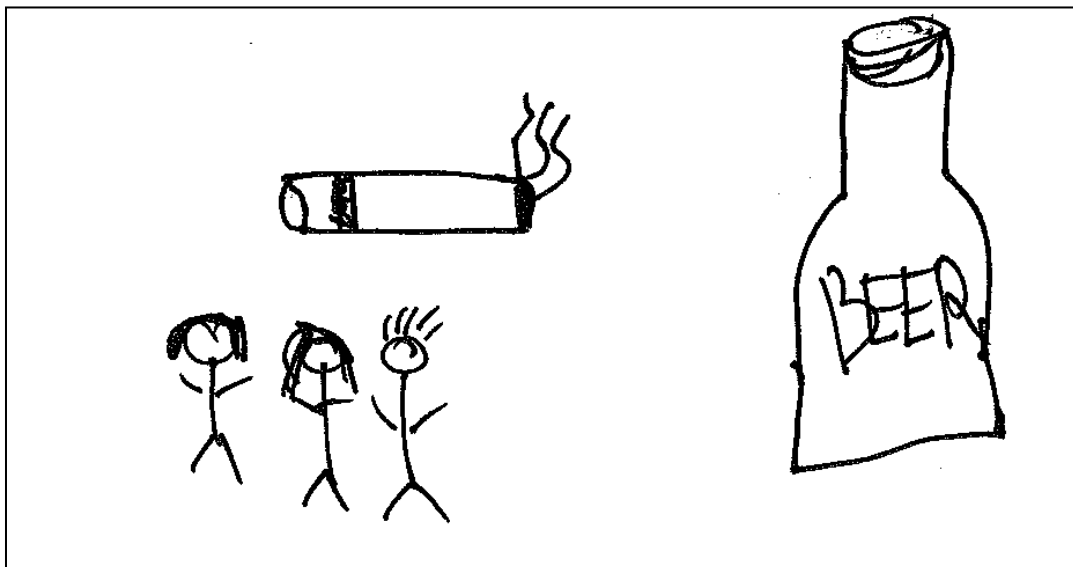


Figure 2.1 Drawing (no. 2) from Focus Group with Young People

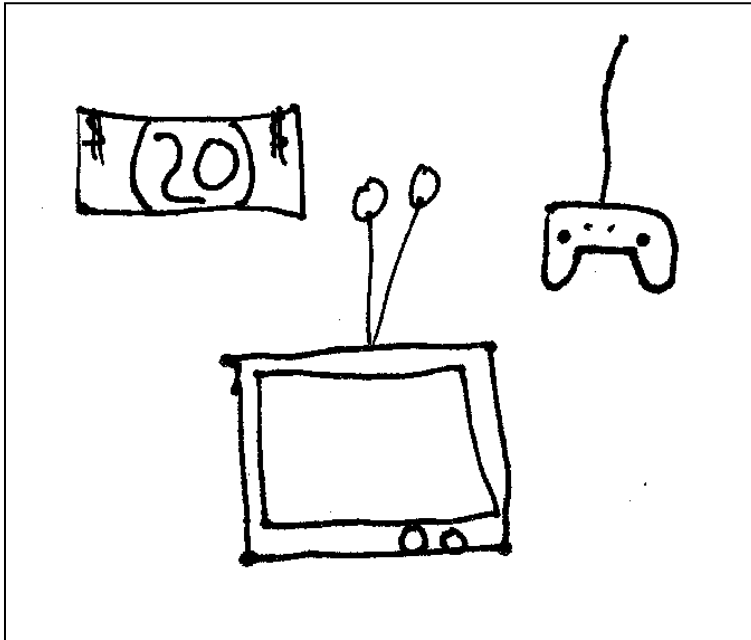
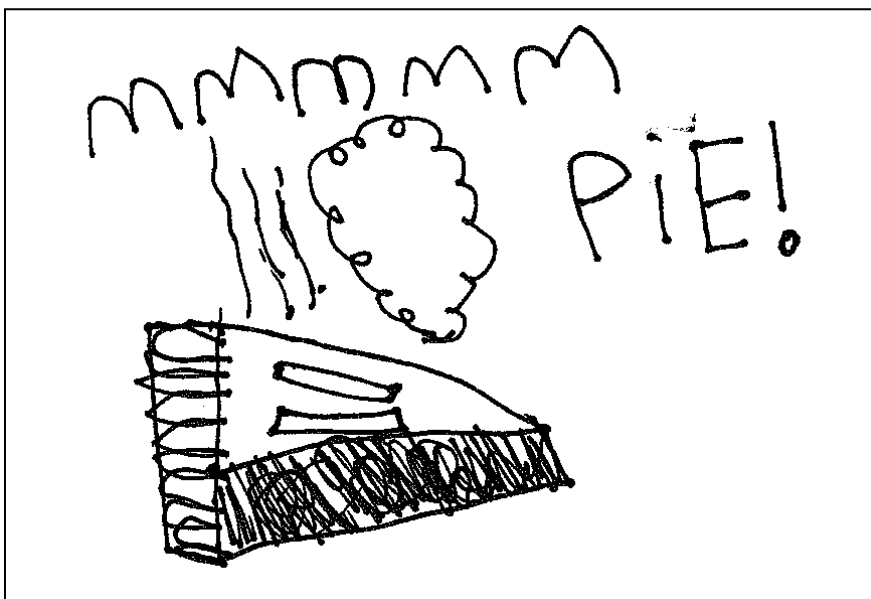
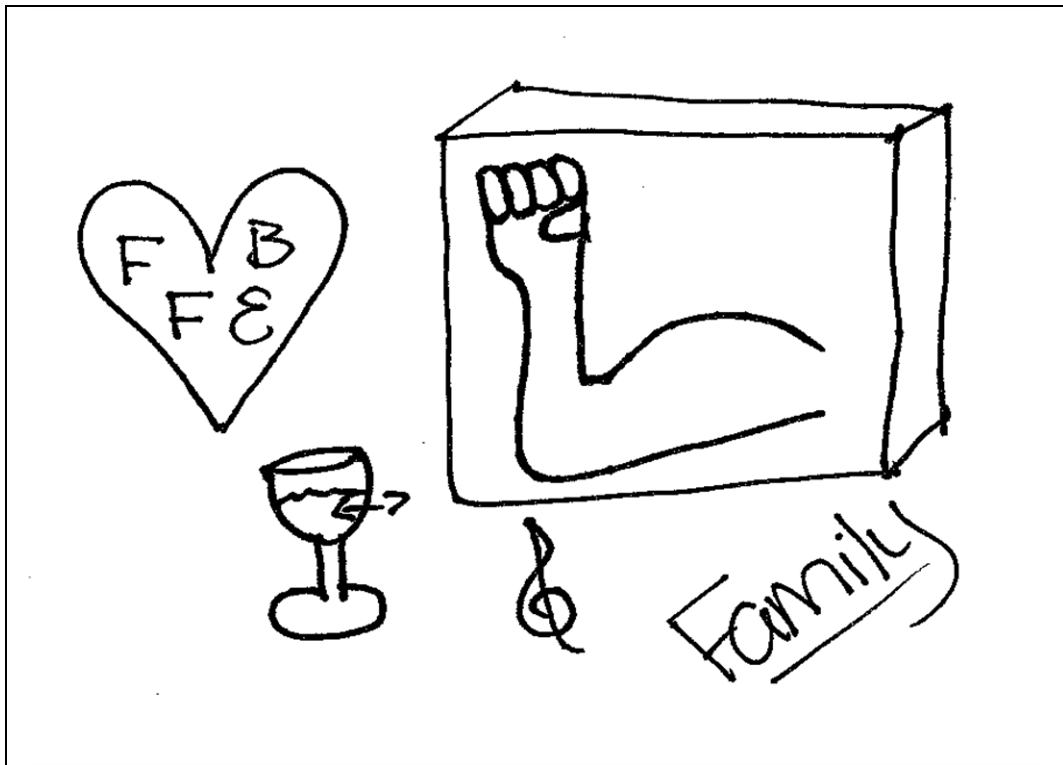


Figure 2.2 Drawing (no. 3) from Focus Group with Young People



Most of the drawings were quite light hearted and food, recreation, or drug themed; however, a few stood out as representing something more personal for the young person presenting. The following example, [Figure 2.3], was presented by a young woman in the focus group who seemed to want to make a point to the group.

Figure 2.3 Kristin’s drawing from the focus group with young women



The heart included the initials of some of her closest friends, who she explained helped her through her most challenging moments; she drew a treble sign to indicate her love for music; and she wrote the word “family” to indicate that those closest to her on the streets are like family to her. After briefly explaining these in a lighthearted tone, Kristin adopted a serious tone to explain that the muscled arm in the box represented inner strength, and that outside the box there was a glass of alcohol with an arrow pointed towards the depiction of “inner strength.” Kristin indicated that she had been sober for two weeks, and that she had found the strength to do this,

but that it was hard when she was constantly surrounded by others who were using drugs and alcohol. This drawing and the reference to inner strength became an important resource for my follow-up one-on-one interview with Kristin, where we discussed this drawing in more depth. That conversation will be further described in chapter nine.

Following the cue card exercise, the majority of the focus group content was structured around the following grid which explores the challenges that young people experience when they are homeless, what they do about the challenges, and what they find helpful [Table 3.0].

Table 3.0 Analytical Grid for Focus Group Discussions

	Challenges	What I do	What helps
Personal			
Relationships			
Community			

The personal category was chosen to explore youth perceptions of personal challenges, strengths and resources. For the relationship category, we discussed the many levels of personal interactions with others, including: family members, peers, social networks, and romantic partners. Finally, at the community level, we discussed interactions with service providers, teachers, and representatives of criminal justice system. Asking young people what they do about these challenges reflects the centrality of human agency in my research, and it allowed me to hear about the specific decisions young people make as they navigate and negotiate their way through homelessness.

For the focus groups with young people, this grid was written on a large white board in the interview room, and I used a marker to write down the comments young people made in the appropriate boxes. Following the focus groups, I wrote down all the data recorded in the chart, and transcribed the sessions verbatim.

Although all of the focus group participants signed a consent form, I did not collect any demographic data on the participants, and so when I describe the descriptive data collected from the sample in this project, these figures will always refer to those young people who participated in the individual interview process.

Interviews with Young People

Depth interviewing is used to “generate narratives that focus on a fairly specific research question” (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). Rubin & Rubin (1995) explain that it is a personal and intimate approach with an emphasis on depth, detail, vividness and nuance: it is a co-construction of a detailed narrative. Depth interviews are organized around an interview guide that includes minimal relatively closed ended questions, and a number of open ended “grand tour” questions with associated prompts (Miller & Crabtree, 1999) [See appendix D]. While depth interviews can be conducted in a number of ways, I chose to use non-directive interviewing techniques whenever appropriate to minimize the interviewer influence in the narratives presented by the young people. Klodawsky, Aubry & Farrell (2006) found that 90-120 minute interviews conducted with people who were homeless in Ottawa were “very demanding” and tiring for the participants as well as those conducting the interviews. For this reason, my goal was to conduct one hour interviews with young people.

To prepare for interviews with young people, I piloted the interview guide [Appendix D] with four young people who were asked the interview questions, and then asked to provide feedback on the interview guide and focus group protocols as well as my interviewing style. These interviews have been included in the results. Two of the “pilot” interviews included extended discussions about the interviewing methodology and questionnaire, while the remaining two “pilot” interviews included a more brief discussion. These pilot interviews allowed me to assess if the interview guide would solicit the type of information that was relevant to my research questions, if any of the questions might cause discomfort or solicit resistance. The young people reported that they were quite happy with the interview protocol as designed, and they were happy to participate in a study that explored the strengths of young people who were homeless. One young person expressed that he felt that it was important to share his story, and that he hoped that this research would call more attention to youth homelessness. I also received some helpful feedback about asking questions directly, about methods for facilitating the youth focus groups, and very helpful suggestions on how to capture demographic data; particularly, one young man expressed the importance of allowing young people to self-define their gender and sexual orientation. Following the pilot interviews, I added two questions to my interview questionnaire: the first asked about youth interactions with police officers, and the second question was, “I have been hearing from young people that experiencing homelessness can change you. Has this been true for you?” I also ensured that young people were given the opportunity to self-define their gender and sexuality with as part of a series of open-ended demographic questions at the end of the interview. I simply asked, “Gender and sexual orientation?”, and while some young people found this funny, others took the time to describe their gender-identity and the role that it played in their lives. Young people identified

as male, female, gender-queer, male-fluid, transgender, unsure, and two participants were in discussions with their health care providers about a medical gender transition. The feedback from my pilot interviews helped me to further appreciate the intersection of gender and youth homelessness.

I intended to conduct 15-20 “depth” interviews with young people who had experienced homelessness, with the exact number depending on my satisfaction that I had reached a point of saturation where the themes being presented in the interviews had become familiar. However, once I began interviewing, more and more young people began to approach me to be interviewed, and at one point, I finished an interview with a young man to find five or six young people waiting outside of the office. By the end of the study, I conducted 25 interviews, with some that were quite short at 15 minutes, and others that were closer to 1.5 hours. I was pleased to have more than my target number of interviews to compensate for the shorter interviews that I conducted. With very few exceptions, I felt that even the short interviews provided rich data that were relevant to my research question. Because of the demand from the young people, I often conducted three or four interviews per day at the drop-in centre, and I found this tiring, particularly after hearing some of the heavier content. I found that I needed to take some time after a few of the more difficult interviews to go for a walk, or get a coffee and clear my head before returning to the office.

4.2.2 Sample Selection and Ethical Considerations

To gain entry into the world of youth homelessness, I began by spending some time volunteering at the YSB downtown drop-in centre. This proved to be an important site to learn more about how the young people interact with each other and with YSB staff, and to orient myself to the way that young people tended to interact with adults. Starting this research project,

I felt like I needed to learn more about how the young people communicated and to establish some rapport and credibility before conducting focus groups or interviews.

At the request of the Director of Community Services, for a period of approximately two months prior to conducting my research, I spent one or two afternoons per week at the drop-in centre from 12-4 pm, participating in the role of a community volunteer. This involved serving meals, running the food bank, playing ping pong, piano, and engaging in conversation with the young people. Although the formal gatekeeper to this research location was the Director of Community Services, and he was a supporter of this research project, there were also a number of informal gatekeepers. Employees at the drop-in centre already had developed relationships with many of the young people who attend, and I felt that they would have the power to sway whether people would be willing to participate in the research, so I felt the need to build rapport with these service providers. If I made staff feel like they were under surveillance, or that I was creating more work for them, I was worried that they would be more likely to feel hesitant or hostile towards my presence at the drop-in. To counter this possibility, the Director of Community Services suggested that I make a presentation to the service providers at their regular staff meeting. This allowed me to explain my project, and to convey that I respect their expertise in working with young people who are homeless. The service providers received the project well, and I felt that the time volunteering helped me to move from an outsider to an insider within the group of service providers. My greatest opportunity to build rapport with the staff team came when a young person at the drop-in who was intoxicated vomited in the washroom. I quickly volunteered to clean up the mess so that the staff members would not have to deal with it. The intense gratitude that followed helped to cement my rapport with the staff team, and

convey that I was contributing to their work through my volunteering rather than adding to their workload.

Other informal gatekeepers were the young people themselves. Berg (2001) explains that every social group will have people with different levels of status and influence among their peers. Identifying and building trust with some young people through my role as a volunteer certainly helped to establish credibility with larger groups of young people. Prior to conducting interviews, I engaged in basic screening of potential participants through an informal discussion of the research project. I would explain what the project was about, and then describe the inclusion criteria. If the young person agreed, then we would set a time for an interview, or immediately go to conduct the interview in the upstairs office provided by the agency. Even so, I conducted one interview with a young woman who did not specifically meet the inclusion criteria, and she was provided with the honorarium.¹⁰ She had recently experienced homelessness for one week, but had been street-involved and dating a young man who was homeless for a longer period of time, and she was very keen to participate. I explained that she did not have to complete the interview and would still be entitled to receive the \$10, but she wanted to share her story, and we had an interesting conversation that I did transcribe and include with my findings. I found that young people who had become homeless more recently provided more detail about the shock of becoming homeless, and this young woman who had experienced a short period of homelessness introduced some interesting perspectives. She also elaborated on her experiences with her boyfriend who was homeless, who I also interviewed in my study. Given the unique perspectives she shared, I deemed that she had a ‘significant’ experience of homelessness, and I believe that her contributions strengthened the research.

¹⁰ Honorariums of \$10 were provided for interviews, and will be further discussed in the section on ethical considerations.

Given that research participants were selected primarily through the Youth Services Bureau, I was concerned about the possibility that service providers could potentially create selection bias by approaching youth who they feel have been successful in their programming to participate in the research. In this case, the sample might not be representative of the larger group of young people experiencing homelessness who participate in YSB programs. Efforts were made to reduce this possibility through a number of measures. Firstly, this scenario was discussed with YSB service providers with the explanation of how there is much to be learned from young people who have not been successful in obtaining stable housing through their programs. Secondly, I tried to minimize the possibility that young people might feel obligated to participate in the research study if approached by service providers from the YSB or if the researcher was perceived to be an employee. To alleviate this concern, a recruitment text to explain the research project and identify the research affiliation with the University of Ottawa was posted in prominent locations in the youth drop-in centre [Appendix C].

Even with the precautions that I took, on the first day of interviewing, one of the service providers took one of my posters and began approaching young people in the drop-in to ask if they would like to participate in the research. However, after a few young people were referred for an interview, snowball sampling of participants quickly occurred as most of the people I interviewed were referred by their friends. I was also present at the drop-in centre to build trust with young people for two months prior to interviewing, and some of the young people I had met were also quick to participate. The Youth Services Bureau provided me with an office on the second floor above the drop-in to conduct interviews, and it was very easy to chat with a young person about my research in the drop-in and then move upstairs for an interview. I asked each young person if they were comfortable conducting the interview in the upstairs office, or if they

would like to use an alternative location. Everyone that I met through the drop-in was comfortable using the office at the YSB. I also discovered that many of the young people were ‘research savvy’ and had previously participated in research projects and received the honorariums. One day in the drop-in, a young woman turned to her friends across the room and excitedly shouted, “This guy is doing interviews!”

Since my interviews were conducted at the YSB drop-in centre, I anticipated that my sample would include young people who are present or previous clients of the agency. I also interviewed three participants who were not clients of YSB; one who heard about the research at Operation Come Home and stopped by for an interview, and two brothers at Matthew House for asylum seekers and refugees in Canada. I met these brothers through a friend, and when I described my project, they were keen to participate. I conducted these two interviews at Matthew House. I conducted interviews with young people from age 16-24, and while it would have been easier to conduct interviews exclusively with clients over the age of eighteen, it may be difficult to design the study in a way that would exclude younger young people who would like to participate. Young people experiencing homelessness are already a marginalized population who experience multiple levels of social exclusion. I intended to approach this project in an inclusive manner. Furthermore, I anticipated that the majority of young people who participated in the focus groups would be different than those who participated in the interviews, and while this was the case, three of the fourteen focus group participants also participated in the interviews.

I found that scheduling interviews with young people was not an effective approach. During the interview process, I scheduled three interviews with young people, and in two cases the young people did not show up, and in the third case the young person was close to an hour

late. Service providers at the drop-in seemed to share a similar laissez-faire attitude, with four of my five scheduled interviews either arriving over 30 minutes late, or not showing up at all.

As a researcher, I was very aware of the power of time in determining success for the project. If I was running a focus group at 1:00 pm, and spoke to young people at 12:00 or even 12:30 about participating, I may only have 1 person attend. However, asking at 12:55 would generally provide participation at maximum capacity. In practice, I would circulate on the floor talking to the people that I already knew, planting a seed about the idea of participating early on. It was very common for young people who I knew, who committed to participating even 30 minutes before a session not to show up at all. Frequently, they would step outside for a smoke or to chat with friends, and then were caught up in the momentum of whatever else they would be doing throughout the day. When I made an announcement just prior to start time, young people would be more likely to grab their peers to attend with them. For the focus groups, it did seem to be the mention of \$10 or pizza that made young people willing to attend. I gather this by hearing phrases like, “PIZZA!” or “Guys, you can make \$10 bucks if you come talk to this dude.” While I considered that this may be an unfair incentive given the disadvantage of the participants, I quickly discovered that almost all of the people who came were very eager to talk and share about their experiences. At the start of each session or interview, I stressed that it was entirely voluntary, and I wouldn’t mind in the least if anyone took the pizza or money and left immediately (or “dipped”, as the young people were saying). I found that this was actually a very effective way to build rapport with the young people, who seemed quite amused that I was almost daring them to take advantage of the research arrangement.

Finally, a number of service providers and young people that I interviewed mentioned that each summer there seems to be a group of young people who will be homeless because of a

conflict with their parents, or because they don't like the rules at home. However, these young people will typically return home when the weather gets colder. Since I was conducting my interviews in mid-late December, it was quite cold out, and it would seem that this group was not really represented in my sample. Throughout the interviews, many young people mentioned the cold weather, and discussed how the cold would impact their decisions in different ways, such as increased motivation to search for housing, a greater willingness to use shelter and drop-in services, and one young woman had temporarily stopped selling drugs in the suburbs because she felt it was too cold to travel from downtown.

Ethical Considerations

Young people and service providers who participated in focus groups or interviews were provided with an honorarium of \$10 for participating in the study. Patai (1991) writes about research as a means of economic production, whereby entrepreneurial researchers capitalize on their participants stories as raw materials. Although I would like to believe that my intentions are more altruistic, I am cognisant of the economic benefit that I will accrue from conducting this work, and I recognize that my research participants will be working. As such, at the beginning of each interview I provided an amount roughly equivalent to minimum wage. I also respected the YSB guidelines for compensating young people for participation in research. Given the harmonization with standardized wages, I did not believe that the amount would be considered coercive. To ensure that young people did not feel obliged to disclose personal information in exchange for the \$10 offered, I provided each person with an envelope containing \$10 before they signed the consent form, and explained that the money belonged to them, and they could choose to leave at any point during the interview, or even immediately without sharing a word. I found that this became a playful interaction that seemed to build rapport with the young people.

Many asked about it with a big smile, “I can take this and go?” “Absolutely!” I would reply with a laugh. None of the young people chose to take the money and go, and the amusement seemed to set the tone for the start of the interviews.

Although a 2005 study on ethical issues in research with young people experiencing homelessness found that roughly 30% of researchers use oral consent rather than written consent when interviewing young people experiencing homelessness, many still obtain written consent (Ensign & Ammerman, 2008). For this project, I requested written consent. Given the research indicating that many young people experiencing homelessness are involved in various forms of illegal behaviour, caution was taken to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants and to minimize the risk of any possible legal repercussions (Gaetz, 2002; Novac et al., 2006; Roebuck, 2008). Pseudonyms for participants were used in transcripts, field notes, and QDA Miner, and there is no document matching the pseudonyms of the young people to their actual names on the consent forms. In one of my pilot interviews, a young person suggested that it would be nice to let young people choose a pseudonym for the project. I allowed this to guide the first half of my interviews, but found that young people would often suggest an actual alias that they used on the street, or they asked for their real name to be used with their stories regardless of the sensitive data that they shared. After about twelve interviews, I simply explained that I would be using a pseudonym to protect the identity of all participants, and everyone agreed to that approach.

I was also careful to guard the anonymity of young people when I talked with service providers. Since I discussed the recruitment of participants, and the scheduling of focus groups and my feedback session with service providers, on three different occasions service providers suggested that I provide them with a list of the young people who I had interviewed so that they

could assist me in contacting them. In each of these cases, I explained that I could not share any information about the identities of the young people I had interviewed. Finally, I have also changed or removed data about specific hometowns or schools that might be used to identify participants.

Ethically, I was very hesitant to conduct interviews with such marginalized and vulnerable young people about common themes in criminology such as stigma and exclusion. I understand that these are central themes in the lives of young people, and while I am interested in knowing more about these realities, I did not want young people to leave an interview with a reinforced sense of how stigmatized and excluded they are from society. Instead of focusing on the negative experiences of young people who are homeless, I intentionally wanted to focus on the strengths that young people possess and how these strengths help them to navigate around their obstacles. My hypothesis was that young people engage in a lot of creative problem-solving to manage the stigma and barriers that they encounter. I wanted the interview process to explore youth perceptions of their personal competency and their ability to affect their circumstances. In exploring the implications of human agency in the interview process, I was inviting young people to reflect on their own power and limitations to navigate through homelessness.¹¹

In keeping with this approach, the interview was framed as a story. I asked participants to share their story with me, to share the challenges that they had encountered because of homelessness, and to reflect on what strengths and resources they had relied on and that had been

¹¹ This perspective aligns with the “ethics of care” and the idea of moving beyond the ethical principle of “do no harm” towards a principle of “doing good” [See Mander, 2010; Pittaway, Bartolomei & Hugman, 2010; Madlingozi, 2010]. While this study is not fully participatory in nature, I was conscious of my responsibility to the participants throughout the design and implementation of the research, and I continue to pursue ways to responsibly follow-up on what I have learned.

most helpful. Part of my interview guide was to acknowledge and encourage the strengths that I was hearing from young people. The end of each interview opened into a discussion where I could express very genuine appreciation for the strengths that young people were sharing.

During the interview process, I had three types of experiences with this approach:

- 1) In interviews with young people who had transitioned out of homelessness, it was often very easy to see the strengths that they had relied on to exit street life. They were resourceful, willing to ask for help, they had learned a lot from their experiences with homelessness, and were thinking about how they wanted their lives to look in the future. These interviews were easy to conduct, and it was easy to focus on how their skills would serve them in the future.
- 2) In the majority of interviews with young people who had been homeless for several months, it was also easy to see a number of strengths they were relying on to overcome their daily challenges. Young people were accessing community services, forming peer groups for support, trying to limit their drug use, and were taking steps to care for themselves.
- 3) The more difficult interviews were with young people who were newer to homelessness, or who were resorting to violence as a means of survival. Several of these young people seemed very defeated by their circumstances or did not consider their violent acts to be problematic. In every case, I was able to find evidence of strength, but it was not as obvious. Strangely, I felt a strong connection with the person in each of these interviews. I am certain that these young people have a number of strengths that would be helpful for moving them forward, but to explore the strengths outside of their interview narrative lies outside of the scope of my research and within the scope of social intervention.

Reporting Back to Young People

Following the completion of the interview process and transcription and coding of the interviews, I conducted a feedback session with young people at the drop-in. I arrived around noon, and started talking with a number of young people. Several expressed interest in coming, but were gone by 12:30 and did not attend. In the end, at 12:55 after picking up the pizza, I went on the floor and made an announcement to a small number of youth about the pizza and feedback session, and four decided to attend. I had a total of 6 participants; 4 males and 2 females, including one male and one female who had participated in the original research. I explained the premise of my research and the purpose of the feedback session; that I was looking to present back what I had learned and ask people if the themes made sense to them and if I had missed anything important.

I organized this session around the following five themes. On 8x11 sheets of blue paper, I used a marker to write the following headings:

- Leaving “Home”
- Challenges
- Adaptation
- Services
- Future

I used tape to stick these sheets on the wall grouped together in no particular order. To facilitate the session, I provided the young people with a choice of which category they would like to explore, letting them pick one that interested them, and then choosing in the order that interested them the most.

In general, the young people expressed that the findings were interesting and made sense to them. Certain topics like marijuana use, youth shelter rules, adult shelters, and police interactions lead to quite a stir of comments.

As I presented the findings on leaving home, the young people expressed strong non-verbal agreement about the diverse pathways into homelessness. When I asked if I had missed any pathways into homelessness, they felt like most things were covered, but that I could add racism as a contributing factor. One young man suggested that some youth may try to leave and escape neighbourhoods with high levels of racism, and another mentioned that she had a friend whose father was a white supremacist and objected to his daughter dating a black man. The subsequent violence necessitated that the daughter leave her home to be with her boyfriend, and she became homeless as a result. The feedback session provided strong validation for my findings, and the young people expressed gratitude that I had taken the time to share what I had learned from their stories.

4.2.3 Focus Groups and Interviews with Service Providers

To complement the data on decision-making and resilience that I received from young people, I also conducted focus groups with service providers from the Youth Services Bureau. A service provider perspective provided an alternative viewpoint of youth strengths and decision-making. Service providers have worked with a large number of young people over the years, and were able to provide a larger context around youth strengths and problem-solving than I could get from individual interviews. Having this perspective also responds to a concern that was raised from a colleague when I presented my proposal in an academic conference. He asked, “If you are talking with young people, and they claim to have certain strengths, how will you know that this is true?” First of all, in this project I am interested in the perceptions of young people

and how this influences their decision-making, and secondly, the service providers that I spoke with provided validation for the strengths that young people possess, often providing more descriptions of these strengths than the young people themselves.

I conducted three one-hour focus groups with service providers from the Youth Services Bureau [See Appendix D for the focus group guide]. To build connections with the service providers, the Director of Community Services for the agency invited me to present to the program coordinators in their regular staff meeting. They were pleased with the strength-based focus of the research, and when it came time to schedule the focus groups, they were all quick to respond. The focus groups were arranged during the time of the regular staff meetings for the Drop-in Centre, the Young Women's Shelter, and the Young Men's Shelter. These focus groups lasted for an hour and were conducted at each program site. The collective experience of these service providers included comments related to working with young people of differing age, gender, sexual orientation, and lifestyle.

Two of these focus groups were conducted early in the day at the beginning of the staff meeting, while the third focus group was conducted at the end of the workday after a lengthy staff meeting. The participants in this latter group seemed quite tired when the focus group began and they seemed to have less energy to contribute than the other staff teams. This was likely because of the scheduling. Also in both of the earlier focus groups, the program coordinator participated actively in the focus group, and I perceived that their willingness to participate and welcome me into the agency transferred over to their staff teams. When the program coordinator for the third group left at the beginning of the session, there seemed to be some confusion with some of the staff about who I was and what I would be doing. In the end, all of these service provider focus groups produced valuable information and broadened my

understanding of the experiences of young people who are homeless and their negotiations with service providers.

Interviews with Service Providers

After the focus groups, I conducted four individual follow-up interviews with service providers to follow up on the discussion begun in the staff meetings. The service providers interviewed all participated in the focus groups, and were asked to further expand on some of the themes explored in the group discussions. Following the focus groups, I approached five service providers and asked if they were interested in conducting an individual interview, and I also provided my service provider recruitment text. All five agreed, but one was unable to make the appointment and we did not reschedule as this was just before Christmas. These interviews were semi-structured and quite informal. I also asked a number of questions about things that had come up in my interviews with young people or the focus groups with service providers to ask for clarification [See Appendix D for the interview guide]. I also used the individual interviews to get a more structured sense of the agency responses to youth victimization, since in the one-on-one interviews, service providers could walk me through the policies and procedures in a more linear fashion than in a group discussion.

To prepare for the focus groups and interviews with service providers, I conducted a pilot interview with one service provider, and I discussed the interview protocols with the Director of Community Services and his Assistant Director. The positive feedback that I received on these aspects of the research methodology improved my confidence for conducting the focus groups and remaining interviews. The pilot interview with the service provider was also transcribed and added to my findings.

4.3 Analysis of Interviews and Focus Groups

All of the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 310 pages of single-spaced transcript. The transcripts were uploaded into QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis software package, to be coded for key themes. Given the large quantities of data, QDA Miner assisted in tracking themes that emerged from the narratives of young people and service providers. Qualitative research adopts a “unique case orientation” that recognizes the divergent nature of each individual's experiences (Patton, 2002). Before any form of horizontal, cross-comparisons were made from one case to the next, each case was examined and coded vertically to look for the continuity and integrity of themes on an individual level.¹² Following a vertical coding and reading of all the transcripts, another horizontal reading and coding process was conducting to explore theoretical connections and themes among the different cases. The transcripts were interpreted using a narrative approach that gives consideration to the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and the context from which the interview data emerged (Borland, 1991; Mishler, 1986; Silverman, 2003).

The first five interview transcripts were used to identify some emerging themes and develop a code book with different categories to be used for the remaining categories. However, at many points during the process of coding all of the interviews, a new theme would become apparent and was then added to the code book. In this case, I would revisit previously coded cases to search for any instances that should be identified with the new code. Reliability in the coding process was improved by this kind of frequent re-examination of earlier transcript data to ensure that coding was being applied in a consistent manner. Inter-rater reliability was further enhanced through the collaborative coding of two transcripts early in the research process, and

¹² Vertical coding refers to reading each case through and coding from top to bottom of each case. Horizontal coding refers to exploring emerging themes across cases, and then coding for new themes from case to case.

one later in the research process. A colleague was asked to walk through the coding of these interviews with me and to discuss the codes as they were assigned, challenging the relevance of any codes and asking questions to help clarify any codes that were not clear. The transcripts for this collaborative coding were chosen based on which transcripts I was ready to code when my colleague was available.

Descriptive Data from Sample

I conducted 25 interviews with young people who were homeless; however, one of the interviews was very short as the participant remembered an appointment and asked to continue the interview at a later time. As we were unable to resume the interview, I was not able to gather her demographic data to include in the descriptive data from the sample. As such, I have included the data from the remaining 24 interviews in the following table and descriptive statistics [See Figure 4.0].

Table 4.0 Descriptive data from sample (n=24)

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Sexual Orientation	Ethnicity	Time in Jail	Drugs/Alcohol	Length of Homelessness
Dustin	Male	16	Straight	Caucasian	Yes	Sells and Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Ella Matthews	Female	16	Straight	Caucasian	No	Sells and Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Chad	Male	17	Straight	Caucasian	Yes	Sells and Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Jay	Male	17	Straight	Mixed-Native	No	Sells and Uses	1 year or more
Marshall	Transgender	17	Bisexual	Caucasian	No	Uses	1 month to < 3 months
Scott	Male	17	Straight	Eastern European	No	No	1 month to < 3 months
Adam	Male	18	Straight	Native	Yes	Sells and Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Ezra	Male	18	Straight	Asian	No	Uses	1 year or more
June	Female	18	Straight	Caucasian	No	Sells and Uses	1 year or more
Kristin	Female	18	Bisexual	Caucasian	No	Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Pete	Male	18	Straight	Caucasian	No	No	1 year or more
Bryce	Male	18+	Straight	Caucasian	No	No	1 year or more
Jake	Male	19	Unsure	Mixed	No	Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Paul	Transgender	19	Queer	Caucasian	Yes	Sells and Uses	1 year or more
Thomas	Queer	19	Queer	Latin American	No	Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Max	Male	20	Straight	Mixed	No	No	1 month to < 3 months
Vince	Male	20	Straight	Caucasian	Yes	Uses	1 year or more
Jean-Olivier	Transgender	20	Queer	Caucasian	No	Uses	1 year or more
Christine	Female	21	Straight	Caucasian	Yes	Sells and Uses	< 1 month
Marco	Male	21	Straight	Caucasian	No	Uses	1 year or more
Syrus	Male Fluid	21	Queer	Arab	No	Uses	1 month to < 3 months
Ryan	Male	22	Bisexual	Caucasian	No	Sells and Uses	3 months to < 1 year
Aaron	Male	23	Straight	Caucasian	Yes	Sells and Uses	1 year or more
Patrice	Male	23	Bisexual	Eastern European	No	No	1 year or more

To provide a quick snapshot of the interview data, the following pie charts show the equivalent breakdown of the sample population:

Figure 3.0 **Ages of sample (n=24)**

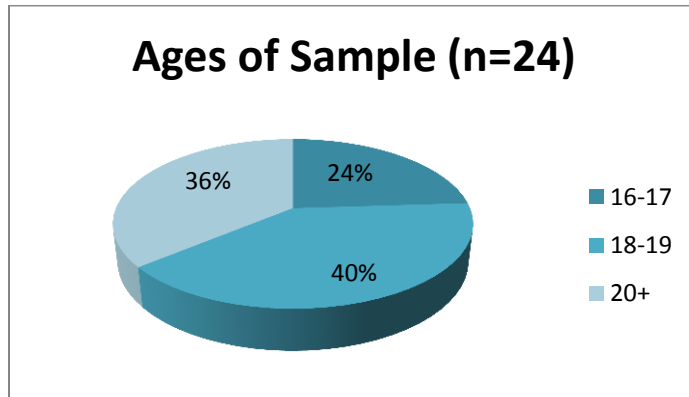


Figure 3.1 **Length of homelessness experienced by sample (n=24)**

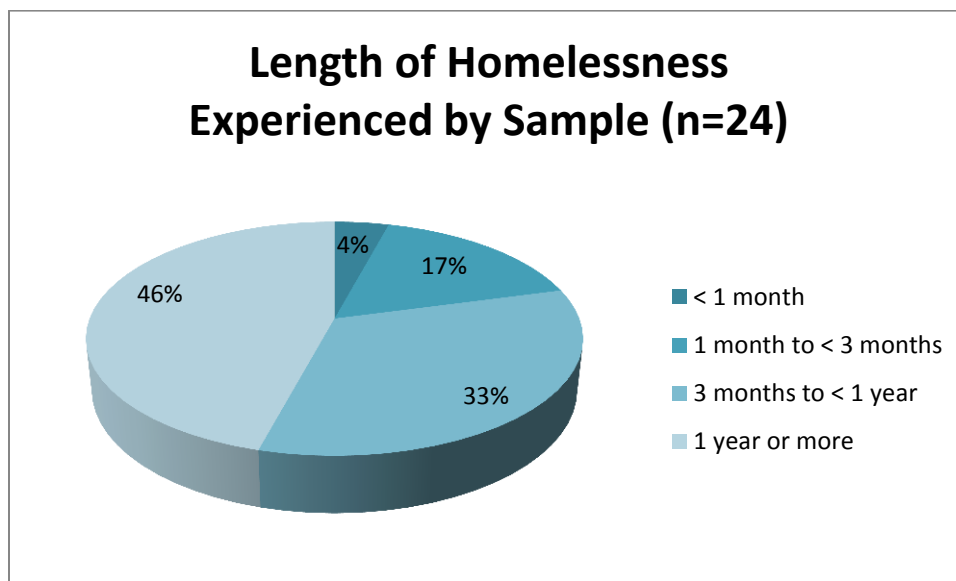
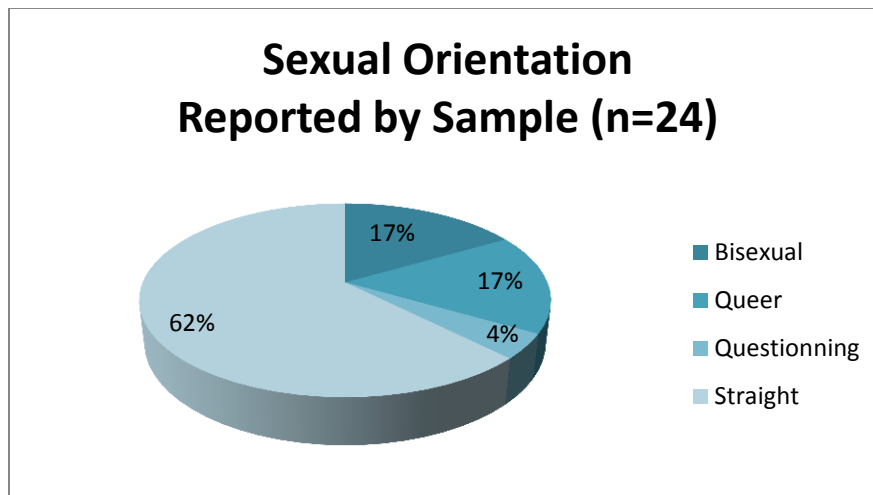


Figure 3.2 Sexual orientation reported by sample (n=24)



Reflexivity (Locating the Researcher)

Ceglowski (2002) argues that social research is conducted on the stage of human interaction where a researcher is influenced by the relationships formed with research participants and the research setting. A researcher's personal perceptions, interactions, assumptions and analytical approach all shape what the researcher is able to observe and understand about the phenomena being studied. This makes it important for researchers to be self-aware of personal biases; not to eliminate them, but to attempt to understand their influence on the research process. Because of my involvement in training and advocacy for strength-based intervention with young people in Ontario, I am aware that I have been strongly influenced by this strength-based perspective in my research¹³. I have built inter-rater reliability into my coding process to ensure that I am not being overly generous in my interpretation of the strengths

¹³ Through my involvement with Youth Now Intervention Services (YNIS), I have co-authored a training manual on strength-based intervention with young people [See Roebuck, Roebuck, & Roebuck, 2011], and I conduct training sessions with managers and service providers from youth justice, child welfare, and youth and adult mental health agencies on how to move away from deficit-based interventions, and work effectively from a strength-based philosophy of care.

and resilience of young people, while not acknowledging risk factors or decision-making leading to negative consequences. I recognize that a subjective strength-based resilience framework is inherently value laden, and although I argue that the same may be true of a risk-based framework, I have relied on some intersubjective verification of my coding, and I have also tested my findings with a feedback group of young people and another group with service providers.

Conducting this research also ‘opened my eyes’ to the social realities that young people were describing, but that I had not previously seen. Ceglowski (2002) describes a similar experience in her research, and how conducting research with school-aged children living in poverty opened her eyes to the poverty in her own community. Best (2007) describes a similar experience in her research with young people, “I began to *see* and *sense* the world in a dramatically different way from how I had once *thought* of the world...I came to see a conceptual rift between my everyday world and the youth worlds I studied” (3). As I heard young people describe the places where they would sleep, the drug economy on the streets, and the types of criminal offenses they would conduct, my view of the space around the drop-in changed dramatically. I became keenly aware of the drug pushers waiting outside the drop-in, I witnessed constant drug exchanges, and I felt less safe carrying personal belongings. At the time of the research, this was in a neighbourhood where I had lived for eight years, but I had never truly seen these things before in that space. Now when I am in the space around the drop-in, I never experience it without thinking about the stories of the young people I have met.

Limitations and Reflections

Social desirability was an anticipated threat to the internal validity of the study. I believed that young people may not want to speak negatively about the Youth Services Bureau

or to disclose personal experiences of law-breaking behaviour, and that they may try to present themselves in a very positive light. I did attempt to minimize this by assuring participants of the anonymous and confidential nature of the study; however, once I began conducting interviews, I was amazed at the openness of the young people in expressing their opinions, in disclosing their weaknesses and poor decisions, and also expressing their hopefulness for a better future. Even so, since a large portion of this research focuses on the strengths of young people, social desirability may have played a role in how both young people and service providers discussed their strengths, and there is potential that some of the strengths presented may have been exaggerated or their significance may be over-emphasized. In my analysis I tried to identify ways that strengths were demonstrated through action or examples rather than taking the strengths that young people or service providers identified at face value; nevertheless, social desirability remains a threat to the validity of the findings.

Self-selection bias is evident in this research since the sample for interviews with young people was drawn entirely from those willing to participate, and these young people are not representative of all young people experiencing homelessness, even in Ottawa. I have been conducting exploratory research on the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness, and each personal narrative contributes to the research question: no one story is more important than another.

Even so, the external validity of this study is limited to young people experiencing homelessness in the Ottawa who have accessed the Youth Services Bureau for drop-in or housing-related services. Since this is a qualitative exploratory research case study with a small sample size, the results cannot be tested for statistical significance, nor is this the goal of qualitative research. This project is intended to identify important issues in the lives of the

specific young people who participate. Additional research will then be required to test these themes within a larger sample. Furthermore, even though the young people I spoke with discussed their experiences with many different services in Ottawa outside of YSB, it is possible that a sample so connected with one agency may have introduced bias into the perspectives of young people and excluded the narratives of young people who are homeless but do not access any services, or deliberately choose to access services other than YSB. While this threat remains considerable, the young people I spoke with reported different relationships with YSB, including young people who had not accessed services through the agency for long periods of time, or who were previously barred from access and then returned.

Another limitation of this research is the analysis of ethnicity. While I did interview young people from visible minority, cultural, and linguistic minority backgrounds, the number of these participants was small and made it difficult to identify broader connections across their narratives. When I was able to identify the intersection of race or some other minority status with other key themes in the research, these were reported with the findings. However, a larger sample focusing on young people with a minority status would contribute to a broader understanding how minority youth experience homelessness.

As a researcher it is beneficial to have access to the sample population; however, I was also conscious of the risk of creating institutional fatigue. The Youth Services Bureau is a community agency with limited time and resources to invest in research. I was concerned about the possibility of encountering resistance if the staff members perceived parts of the research as creating more work for them. I feel like the time spent volunteering in the drop-in was an important step to offset the burden on service providers and to create goodwill.

5.0 Pathways into Youth Homelessness

*“Everyone has a personal story of where their life has taken them so far.
Can you share your story with me?”*

Each young person that I talked with had their own story of how they became homeless and how that experience had affected them. While their stories are all unique, there are a number of themes that recur and align with previous research on youth homelessness (Aubry et al., 2003; Karabanow, 2004; Mallet et al., 2010; Novac et al., 2006). This chapter will explore the multiple pathways that young people described as contributing to the decision to leave home or being asked to leave their housing, including: sources of family conflict, family violence, complications with child welfare, and other pathways into homelessness.

When talking with young people, I often followed up with the question, “Can you tell me more about when you decided to leave home?” This question helped me to capture a glimpse of the difficult decision-making processes of young people considering the possibility of living on the streets. The stories and explanations that I will share confirm the perspective that young people are active participants in constructing their social realities regardless of the constraints that are frequently imposed upon them.

5.1 Family Conflict

In my interviews, family conflict emerged as a primary pathway into homelessness, which confirms the dominant research in the field (Aubry et al., 2003; Karabanow, 2004; Mallet et al., 2010; Novac et al., 2006). Many of the young people explained how multiple challenges within their family of origin lead to an environment of instability that contributed to homelessness. In many cases, young people were either kicked out or chose to leave home because of conflict with their parents, siblings or grandparents. Some young people described

their decision to leave home as a way to escape constant arguments with family members. Jay (age 17) acknowledges what a big decision it was for him to leave his home at the age of 14, and describes how he weighed the pros and cons of staying in his family home versus his perceptions of what homelessness would be like.

“I was about 14, um...I...we, me and my mom, had arguments, on a daily...I uh, eventually just decided, ‘Fuck it...I’m out of this house, I can’t...I can’t deal with this anymore, I’d rather be on the street.’ And I ended up downtown right in front of McDonald’s. [Laughs]. So uh...I realized I’m homeless. The big decision was leaving my house or not...do I keep dealing with this, or do I leave and be me and not have someone over my shoulder all the time? And I decided to leave. That was basically my big decision” (Jay, age 17).

Similarly, Marco (age 21) was having challenges with his brother and felt the need to get some space away from the conflict. He described his choice very matter of factly, “So, I just had a little dispute with my brother, and I just decided to leave home and see how it was in the shelters and stuff...so I stayed there for 8 months” (Marco, age 21, male). Given the voluntary nature of interviewing, it is possible that there were other factors involved in the lives of the young people that they chose not to share in the interview, but in these two cases, the young people expressed that they choose to leave home to gain some distance from family conflict. In the cases that follow, this environment of tension is a constant, but the young people provide further insight on what issues were contributing to their conflicts.

Divorce

Today, many marriages and long-term romantic partnerships break up, and the affects of the divorce or separation on the intimate partners and on their children will vary greatly. In my interviews, several young people described how the difficult divorce of their parents left them torn between two worlds, as they were passed back and forth between parents. June (age 19)

believes that the pressure she experienced from her parents to choose sides in their conflict contributed to her choices to “rebel” and to use drugs.

“I was always happy when I was at home. I was always really spoiled. I actually came from like, a really rich family, and uh...my parents got divorced cause my Dad cheated on my Mom, and just uh...I guess I blame my Mom a lot for it cause I was Daddy's little girl, and I didn't see my Dad at all, like, ever. So I just started kind of rebelling and doing drugs” (June, age 19, female).

June was using drugs and the combined tension of her parents' divorce and her mother's distress about June's drug use and truancy from school lead to a situation where June was given an ultimatum to stop using drugs or to leave home. In the lead up to the ultimatum, June was passed back and forth between her parents, and was not able to find her fit.

“But my Mom kicked me out cause I started skipping class, and whatnot, and she was just fed up, uh...and then... She told me I was going to go live with my Dad. So I went to go live with my Dad. He kicked me out after a week, because I guess he couldn't handle it, and he just liked...his single lifestyle. And then I went back to my Mom, and she just had enough of me. And I said, 'Whatever, I don't need you.' And I left home” (June, age 19).

June made a few attempts to come home after she was homeless, but these attempts would typically break down after about a week. When I asked her why this would happen, she explained that her continued drug use created tension in her relationship with her mother.

“At sixteen I started going really hard into drugs... I was really addicted to meth, and uh...she found drugs in my purse, cause she used to go through my stuff, and like...read my diary. She didn't help me. She never said, 'oh, we'll go see a counsellor together' or something. She'd just be like... 'Get out of here'. I don't know...She never really offered help. She just kind of... ignored it. Yeah, so...I dropped out of high school, and...that lovely mess” (June, age 19).

Drug use is a central challenge for many young people who become homeless. Drugs are easily available, and many young people begin to use heavily to cope with the emotional stress

of homelessness. This will be discussed more in depth in the chapter on adversity. For young people on the margins of homelessness, who are still in and out of their family home, it seems drug use can exacerbate pre-existing tensions, and make a parent less willing to work through conflict.

Using Drugs

Young people reported that drug use was a common contributor to family instability; this includes both parents using drugs and young people using drugs. Many of these young people lived in homes that were also characterized by violence or other criminal activity. Vince explains how his home environment led to his choice to leave.

“I left home...around the age of 17, 16. My parents were really really heavy users of...they were addicted to pain killers, oxycontin... My mom left one Christmas, and my dad was robbing like so many banks...so he finally got caught and everything like that. So um...I left for my friend's house” (Vince, age 20).

Kathryn had a similar family environment characterized by instability, drugs, alcohol and violence. This led her to reluctantly choose homelessness at the age of 14.

“I moved out of my mom's house willingly, kind of not willingly, because I would've loved to stay with my mom. My parents are separated, and my dad is remarried. My mom on the other hand, she's just never going to change. Like... I remember times where we would move around, like... I would have to change schools every year, and that... is not stable at all, you know? So whenever I did have a home, it wasn't really a good place to be anyways, you know? With drugs and drinking going on, and, you know, just...violence, all that. It just does not do any good for a kid growing up” (Kathryn, age 19).

Kathryn's description of the tension between her willingness and unwillingness to leave home highlights how her choices were constrained. Within the confines of the limited options of remaining in an unstable environment or leaving for the street, she chose the instability of

homelessness as preferable to remaining with her family. This is a heavy and difficult choice for a 14 year old to make. Five years after first becoming homeless, Kathryn continues to cycle through homelessness. She describes her decision with a lot of ambivalence.

“If you don't have to, here's some advice, don't leave your parents. If you have to, well...you know, if you're mature enough to make that decision, then you should be mature enough to keep on having to make that decision, because once you make that decision, you're making that decision for the rest of your life after that...You could either just keep on feeding into the bullshit, or you could do something with your life. And I'm trying to, but it's kind of hard living in the streets and having to live the street life your entire life” (Kathryn, age 19).

In Adam's case (age 18), he stopped paying rent at home when he lost his job because of alcohol addiction. He was given time to find a new job, but did not put in the effort.

“Ever since I was like 14 I've had a drinking problem. I am an alcoholic. Um...I had a job. I was working every day. 40 hours a week, you know? Making 15 bucks an hour. And...I started drinking and then...I have to pay rent at my dad's house...so...I started drinking and eventually I started missing work...one day would turn into two days, then three days, then eventually I got fired. So I couldn't pay rent to my Dad anymore, so...I don't know, he let me live there for a few more months, and he told me I have this long to get a job, and I was just constantly drinking. I never went out and looked for a job at all. And...I ended up getting kicked out, and going to live with my buddy...who got evicted. And that's how I ended up on the street” (Adam, age 18).

Adam highlights the tension that existed between his Dad and his Step-mother in deciding to kick him out. Previous research indicates that children in blended families or with re-married parents may experience higher rates of homelessness than children from families where both parents have remained together; a result of the conflict that arises from new expectations and roles within the family (Mallet & Rosenthal, 2009). In his case, Adam perceived that his father would not ask him to leave, and that this decision was made by his Step-mother.

“My Dad's wife is the one who kicked me out of the house, not my Dad. My Dad would never kick me out. But like...the whole winter, he had a shed in the backyard and stuff and he's like...he put a blanket in there and everything for me, and he's like, 'You can sleep in the shed if you want.' You know? But it's a shed with metal walls... it's still freezing, but...that's where I slept most of the time. Eventually he had a futon mattress in there for me and everything, like...he tried to help me. Either that or I slept on his porch” (Adam, age 18).

Christine (age 21) also experienced tension with her family because of her choice to use drugs.

She didn't feel like her parents would understand her choice, so she tried to hide it from them.

Christine describes how her ongoing dishonesty with her parents about her drug use led them to ask her to leave home.

“I was just lying a lot...making up stories as to where I was going and who I was hanging out with because...I didn't want to disappoint my mum, you know. She inevitably found out through just doing a little bit of picking around and finding out different information and stuff like that so ... you know, her and my stepdad sat me down...and I kept lying and lying...so they were like, 'Okay, we know the truth and you just keep lying so you're out.' So I kinda got kicked out for the first time in my life and my mum has never even threatened it before...so the fact that I got kicked out is pretty hard. I just had to pack all my stuff and they drove me to the bus stop and that was it” (Christine, age 21).

Christine's boyfriend, Ryan (age 22), has experienced a longer history of drug use, and has participated in multiple treatment programs, in Ottawa and in another region of Canada. In his attempts at cleaning up, his parents have allowed him to live with them periodically. He told me, “I stayed with my parents for a little bit, but then...I relapsed once or twice and then got kicked out” (Ryan, age 22, male). When I asked him to tell me a little more about the conversation he had with his parents he explained that he had gone for a job interview one day and met up with some people afterwards. It was three days before he returned home. He said that when he returned home, his parents were so angry that they told him he was no longer welcome to stay with them. He described his choice to return home as “bucking up,” so losing

his housing at a key moment of decision was frustrating for him. Since he could not return home, he went to an adult shelter.

Conflict over responsibility in the family home

Another pathway into homelessness that I heard about from young people and service providers was conflict over responsibility in the family home. This refers to conflict between young people and their parents about helping out with chores, looking for a job, or paying rent at home. It tended to play out in the ambiguity of expectations about what behaviour was expected or appropriate as a young person was aging. Young people and service providers indicated that becoming homeless for these reasons would often result in a faster family reunification process once young people realized the incredible pressures of independence that come with life on the streets. Homeless young people have to do everything for themselves, and even living in a shelter, there are chores and expectations. In a focus group with service providers, Alain provided a description of this phenomenon.

“I had one young man living upstairs, and he was living on his own for the first time, so he had to clean, and he had to cook, and you know, he had to keep an eye on his budget, and I guess these were things that he was struggling with when he was living with his mom. Part of the reason he was asked to leave the home, I guess Mom felt at his age, he should be more supporting, and you know, kind of independent in the sense that he should be cleaning up after himself, he should be out working, he should be doing all these things. So he lived here for a few months, and then decided to go home because he said, 'I'm ready. I'm not going to take my mom for granted any more. I want to participate, and I want to do these things. And you know, now I understand what it's like to clean up cause I had to clean up after myself all the time. Now I understand how much it costs to buy groceries cause I had to buy my own groceries. So now I'm willing to kind of help my mom, and so we're gonna work on that relationship.' And so he moved home. As far as I know, he's doing well” (Alain, Service Provider).

Service providers and young people described this pathway into homelessness as being more common during the summer months, rather than in the winter, when the weather makes it

more difficult to spend time outside. Young people and service providers explained that other street youth are quick to judge young people who they perceive as lazy, who could be at home but do not want to help out. Aaron (age 23) laughed as he told me that he finds it funny that these ‘kids’ leave home because they don’t want to do chores, but they end up doing them anyways once they’re on the streets.

Only one of the young people I interviewed indicated that not wanting to do chores played a role in his decision to leave home; however, service providers and young people identified that they do see others making a similar choice. The limited prevalence of this narrative from young people could be for several reasons. I conducted most of my interviews in November and December when the weather was cold, and school was in session. Most young people I talked to would be housed if they could during this time period. It is also possible because of the potential for judgement that if a young person left home for this reason, they would not want to be perceived as lazy and emphasized other reasons for leaving home. Finally, since my recruitment process focused on talking with people who had been homeless for more than three months, or three periods of three days or more, it is also possible that I may have screened out people who come to the street for relatively short periods of time before returning to their families. Jean-Olivier (age 20) was hesitant to accept this type of homelessness at face value. He felt that if a young person is kicked out or runs away from home, there is something else going on under the surface that is deeper than conflict over responsibilities at home.

Family Conflict over Mental Health

Many of the young people that I spoke with have struggled with mental health in multiple capacities. Young people reported struggling with diagnoses of depression, bipolar disorder, multiple personalities, post-traumatic stress disorder, or schizophrenia. At least four had spent

time hospitalized for suicide attempts or treatment programs, and I suspect that this number may have been higher than reported. In Jean-Olivier's case (age 20), his ongoing mental health challenges were the cause of considerable tension in his family home. In his view, these challenges were not understood until he became homeless and service providers were able to identify his symptoms and refer him to mental health resources where he eventually received a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Trying to cope with these symptoms at home had generated tension to the point where his mother did not want to keep him, and he was kicked out and lived with a friend, eventually returned home and then chose to live with his Grandmother. Eventually, Jean-Olivier's mother and grandmother dropped him off at a youth shelter.¹⁴

“Around the age of 12...I started having different issues, and my family was all like, 'You're being difficult', and I was like, 'I'm sorry.' And it was very very difficult for a very long time. I was all over the place, like even at the age of 12. And then finally, my mother kicked me out when I was 15, and then...I was staying at a friend's house, and she calls my friend's mother, and she was like, 'I don't want her anymore. Can you adopt her? Just keep her. I don't want her.' I never found out...like I found out about that two years later, my friend told me, 'This is what your mother did.' And I was like, 'What? That's awful.' It made me hate my mother even more. But then finally, I went back home. And then, again, I chose to leave because I was like...I live in this house and it makes me want to kill myself so I don't want to stay here anymore. So I went to stay with my grandmother, but things were not much better because you can't just run away from your issues, right? So...I wasn't in school. I wasn't doing anything, I wasn't eating, I wasn't talking to anybody. I was just in my room all day all the time. And my grandmother, eventually she comes in one morning, she wakes me up at 8 in the morning, and she's like, 'Pack your stuff, we're leaving.' And I'm like, 'Where are we going?' And she says, 'We're sending you to this place.' And I'm like, 'Okay.' So I pack my stuff and they drop me off at the [Youth Shelter]. It was a little after I turned 16...And my mother, she wanted to give me a hug, she met me there... and I was like, 'Don't even talk to me right now.' And I left, I didn't say anything to anybody, cause...I was a little upset. I didn't see this coming” (Jean-Olivier, age 20).

¹⁴ Jean-Olivier did not start identifying as male until quite recently. Many of his early experiences with homelessness occurred when Jean-Olivier was identifying as female. Jean-Olivier's first stay in a youth shelter was in the Young Women's Shelter, while later stays were at the Young Men's Shelter. The Youth Services Bureau allows young people to stay in whichever youth shelter most closely reflects their gender identity, and will allow young people to move from one shelter to the other if their gender-identity is in transition.

In Jean-Olivier's case, he felt that his family was not equipped to handle his mental health challenges, and that this contributed to the escalating conflict in his home. In the end, without communication or negotiation, his family dropped him off at a homeless shelter. It is likely that some of the conflict other young people experienced in their families was also related to mental health challenges. Kristin (age 18) explained how spending time at her mother's house exacerbated her multiple personality disorder, and other young people speak more generally about the challenges they experienced coping with mental health disorders at home. While mental health disorders may not be a direct pathway into homelessness for young people, they may be understood as a powerful risk factor that applies pressure on pre-existing challenges in the family home, and complicates family conflict.

Family Conflict following the Death of Parents

Two young people that I interviewed described how they became homeless shortly after the death of both of their parents, and following conflict with remaining family members. Thomas (age 19) was asked to leave his grandparents' house because of his sexual orientation, and Aaron (age 23) struggled to live peacefully with his step-brother after the death of his parents at the age of fifteen. Both of these young men were deeply affected by the loss of their parents and found themselves living with relatives who were not able to adequately care for them. At the time of the interview, Aaron was 23, and had been living on and off the streets and in and out of prison for the past 8 years. Thinking back to when he first became homeless, Aaron expected life on the streets to be easier than staying with his step-brother.

"It'd be about 8 years ago, I like...uh, I was living...well my parents deceased and stuff before that, but uh...I ended up living with my step-brother down in Cornwall, and pretty much moved down to Ottawa thinkin' it'd be easier" (Aaron, age 23).

Aaron's girlfriend, June (age 18), described the impact of the death of his parents in the following way:

"He's bipolar schizophrenic, so he'll have attacks a lot...but again, he's more self-destructive. You know what I mean? So, he'll kind of sit there rocking back and forth, and both his parents died when he was twelve, so he'll just cry for hours about his mom. You know? And it's really sad, but people will call the cops on him...like our neighbours or something. It's like...it's not helping...but he's been taken to hospital a bunch of times" (June, age 18).

Thomas (age 19) struggles with not having family members available for him. His twin sister died in an accident when they were thirteen, both of his parents died in another accident later in his life, and his grandparents who he lived with after the death of his parents have both passed away. He wishes that he had family to tell him what he should do, but even so, he maintains a positive attitude about the independence he has been able to develop.

"My parents...they died in an accident, and that's it. So it has been hard...because I don't have anybody. I have just myself. And sometimes people think that it's better, but it's not. Sometimes I wish that I could have my mom tell me what to do and what not to do. I wish I could have my mom or my father just telling me, 'You've got to walk on the right side,' like every father tells their sons. But it's really really disappointing. But at the same time, I am glad because I have to do a lot of things" (Thomas, age 19).

Thomas draws incredible strength and a connection with his past through his collection of tattoos. When I asked him why his tattoos are important to him, he answered in this way:

"It's important to me because sometimes I have a bad memory. Sometimes I forget important things in my life. I have my sister's name on my ribs. She was my twin and she passed away when we were thirteen. She had an accident. I have it here on my ribs, on my right side. Why my right side? Because my Grandmother used to tell us that she was the right side in the belly of my mom, and I was the left side, so I am the black sheep. But no, that's not true. I miss her sometimes, but she gives me strength too" (Thomas, age 19).

While Thomas maintains a positive outlook in life, and has found meaningful ways to carry the memories of his family members, his pathway into homelessness was linked to the death of his natural family.

Family Conflict over Queer Identities

Society is organized around the dichotomy of male and female, but there are many people who do not experience their gender along these binaries or they experience a degree of fluidity in how they define their gender and sexual orientation. For young people who identify as queer, it can be challenging to navigate a frequently hostile world and to cope with misunderstandings, especially in the family home. The literature review has indicated that young people who identify as queer are overrepresented among homeless youth, and this was also true in my study (Fournier et al., 2009; Gaetz, 2004; Gattis, 2009; Kruks, 2001). Nine of the twenty-four young people I interviewed identified as either gay, queer, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (37.5%).¹⁵

In a focus group with service providers, Lynn confirmed that they see a number of “GLBTTTQQ youth”¹⁶ becoming homeless in Ottawa. She explained, “If their parents have a really different value set that doesn't really include them in it, then they can end up on the streets.” Syrus (age 21) is an example of this type of value conflict. Syrus grew up in a traditional Muslim family and believed that his gender identity conflicted with his family’s traditional values. He chose to run away from home at the age of 18 as part of his decision to come out as queer.

¹⁵ While this overrepresentation exists in my sample, this study does not include a representative sample, and these findings are not statistically significant. These are descriptive statistics about my convenience sample group. Furthermore, the agency where I recruited considers itself a queer positive organization, and it is conceivable that there would be a higher number of queer youth who choose to access these services over other agencies serving homeless young people in the same city.

¹⁶ Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two spirited, queer and questioning

“I ran away as I was coming out, a personal choice...because I felt that my family was really Muslim and couldn't accept that or handle it...I left at 5 am while everyone was sleeping. I...packed up my stuff and left a note. I got... guidance from a social worker at the Youth Services Bureau who helped me translate my letter into Arabic so that my family could really understand it...a coming out letter and a running away letter” (Syrus, age 21, identifies as “male fluid”¹⁷).

For Syrus, while his decision to leave home was not based on a particular conversation with his parents, and he was not asked to leave, his perception of their likely reaction was based on his knowledge of their adherence to their faith and it led him to make his choice. He engaged in a tremendous amount of planning and forethought in preparing a letter and seeking help from existing community services to have the letter translated into Arabic.

In the case of Thomas (age 19), after the death of his parents, he lived with his grandparents. At the age of 14 his sexual orientation became known to his grandparents and they kicked him out of their house. Thomas was living in a European country without a number of the social support mechanisms that are available in Canada. His hope was quickly depleted. He says, “Everything that I was thinking about my future just went away. I cried too much, I was desperate, I [thought] about killing myself, but fortunately I [saw] the bright side. It has been hard for me. I don't have any more family.” He explained that his Grandma died just six months after kicking him out of the house, and his Grandpa died shortly after that. He has lost both of his parents, his twin sister, and his grandparents, and he was left homeless.

For some young people, gender identification and sexual orientation may destabilize housing options with their extended family as well. Paul (age 19) was born a female, but is transgender and identifies as male. He had a very violent history in his family environment, and

¹⁷ “Male Fluid” implies that Syrus currently identifies with the male gender but does not feel that his gender is fixed, and that it may fluidly change with time and context.

consequently spent time cycling through prison and periods of homelessness for over 5 years. At the age of 12, Paul was molested by his father, and decided to run away because he felt like his mother wasn't doing anything about the problem. Although Paul returned to his family home shortly after that incident, at the age of 14 his parents told him to leave when he came out as transgender. Once again, Paul was able to return home; however after another significant family crisis which I will describe shortly, Paul was incarcerated and left homeless. Several years later, Paul moved to Ottawa to live with his grandparents. They were as concerned about his gender identity as his parents.

“They found out I was ‘gay’...in their terms. I told them I was transgender. They told me I was just gay. And they kicked me out for it...well, they didn't really kick me out...they threw out all my guy clothes and everything, and they're like, 'If you don't like being straight, then you can get out of the house.' And I was like, 'Fine. I'll leave.'" And they said I left them financially screwed, but that's their own problem for kicking me out for no reason” (Paul, age 19).

Young people who are discovering, exploring and experimenting with non-heterosexual sexual orientations and alternative gender identities seem to experience a lot of discrimination, harassment and homophobia in society. For many queer adolescents these experiences are not just in school yards and city streets, but also occur in the family home.

5.2 Family Violence

Many of the young people's stories that I have presented have touched on family violence. Now I would like to address this pathway into homelessness directly. Many young people choose homelessness as a way to escape violent physical and sexual victimization from their parents, siblings, or members of their extended families. Other young people may be perpetrators of family violence that is directed towards their parents or siblings. In these cases,

parents may ask their child to leave or, after police and court involvement, the young person is no longer allowed to live at home.

When I interviewed Ella (age 16), she had been homeless for 5½ months. As she described her experiences of child abuse and how she planned her exit from her home, I was amazed to see how much thought a young person may put into the timing of their decision to leave home, and to get a sense of the planning that may accompany an exit strategy. Ella and her sister had first started running away from home at the age of 10. She always returned and decided to wait until she turned 16 so that she could avoid involvement in the child welfare system. Before she felt like she could leave, she also watched carefully to assure that her younger sibling would be safe when she left. Finally, Ella lived in a rural area and had to find a reason to get her friend's mom to give her a ride into town with some of her belongings that would seem credible and would not result in questions being directed towards her parents. Here is a description of her decision to leave.

"I decided to leave this summer, cause I've had it with my parents abusing me and stuff. I have a younger brother... but...they never touched him. So I decided no, it was okay if I left cause he wouldn't get hurt. I used to be like...sneaky about whatever I would do, and like, not talk back and stuff, not react to whatever they did, but then, I thought, you know...I deserve better than that. I don't deserve to get...abused like that when I don't do anything. They take out their frustration on me, but why should I take it? So I just decided to, you know like...kind of rebel against them, and just like...not take their shit, and they just got madder and madder. You know...cause I acted like nothing they did I cared about or affected me at all, so...they just kind of gave up, and I left. And uh...I told them too, like a week before, that I was going to leave and that this time I wasn't going to come back. And they didn't believe it because every other time I would always come back.

"So, I just packed all my stuff like a week early...cause I lived in the country, right? So there were no buses. So the way I did it is...my friend's mom, she works in the city, so I told my friend, 'Let's go shopping today,' you know? And then I brought all my stuff. She thought it was kind of sketchy, you know? And her mom too, they were thinking why do I need all this stuff? I just told them I was going to leave it at my Grandma's

cause it's stuff I was giving away...She gave us a ride, and then I told my friend what I was doing...She...tried to talk me out of it, but she didn't know about...I never told anyone about what my parents were doing before. Cause...even when the CAS, they came at my house once because of my sister, cause she was always getting in trouble with the cops...and um, I was scared to tell them anything, so I just...I told them everything was okay, and that I didn't know why they would come here. So yeah, I told her, and then I just left. I came...uh...well I actually did leave most of my stuff at my Grandma's at the beginning, cause I didn't want to carry that around. I just kept like...uh...the necessities like clothes and toothbrush, and whatever money I had, which wasn't a lot” (Ella, age 16).

For many young people, family violence exists within the context of many other challenges. Kristin’s story (age 18) brings together many of the themes that I have discussed so far. Her experiences of sexual violence contributed to a drug addiction, which ignited tensions and violence in her family home. All of these situations place strain on Kristin’s mental health challenges; she is currently living on the street with, what she describes as, un-medicated multiple personalities. Kristin has lived through some difficult experiences for a young person. When we spoke, she carried the weight of the trauma in her words, but was still able to articulate hope for her future.

“I...got raped...multiple times, by multiple different people [speaking softly and slowly], and uh then I went to one of my parties, and uh...a friend of mine offered me oxy's...and I took them. When I got addicted, that basically drew a rift between my family and I. So I was bounced between my dad's house and then my mom's, and my dad's and then my mom's. And then...my dad and I ended up in a pretty violent fight, and it uh...I can't live with him anymore...we get along perfectly fine now, but as long as I'm out of the house. My mom and I are...always on rifts...always. It's always wars, always fights, always. So...even though I could live with her...it's not a possibility because of my mental health. I have split personalities, and my mom brings out my depressive personality and my aggressive personality, and none of those are a good thing to have out. So, I can stay there a night, a week, a month, and be okay, but if I stay past that...all hell breaks loose. Um...so I bounce from couch to couch. I go to friend's places, I go to my sister's once in a while, and I'm...on the streets the rest of the time” (Kristin, age 18).

Scott (age 17) and Patrice (age 23) are two brothers from an Eastern European country who arrived in Canada seeking asylum because of the danger posed to them because of their

family involvement in organized crime. Their mother is heavily involved in fraud activities and borrowing money, and has high level bookies pursuing her to reclaim their money, including several members of organized crime from their home country. Their mother is also wanted by the National police. Scott explained how growing up, the family would move to a new place almost every month to avoid detection. Patrice eventually decided to run to the UK where he lived homeless on the streets of London for close to three months. After some time, he was able to find odd jobs under-the-table and keep working. Eventually, both boys rejoined their family which had relocated to a small island nation in the Caribbean to get away from the organized crime at home. It was here that a bookie eventually found the family and abducted Scott off the street, holding a gun to his head while attempting to have the funds returned. Scott's brother Patrice arrived with the police 30 minutes after the abduction, and Scott was rescued. They decided that they could no longer be safe around their mother, and that they could not return to their country of origin. They fled to Canada for protection and to keep distance from anywhere that their mother had racked up debts where they could be in danger. Scott reasons that the collector in the Caribbean had threatened his life over a relatively small sum of money: a few thousand dollars. He questioned what would happen when people came looking for hundreds of thousands of dollars. For Scott and Patrice, it was the family connection to fraud and money-borrowing that introduced violence in their lives, and eventually led to the two of them leaving and seeking asylum in Canada. One service provider explained that many people in society may think that homeless youth are stubborn or obstinate, but that really it has taken a lot of courage and strength for them to leave their family environment, especially at the risk of becoming homeless.

While family violence is frequently perpetrated by parents and step-parents, occasionally young people may also be the perpetrators of violence in their home and be kicked out as a result. Ezra (age 18) is a young man with FASD who explains that he has trouble controlling his anger. He became homeless at the age of 16 after repeated conflict with his family. After describing an incident where he punched a hole in the wall in his house, he said, “And I started getting...um, mad. And I started destroying the house, and then they were just like, 'Okay, you got to get rolling'. I was just like, 'Bullshit! Why the hell...why the hell am I going?' and all that. I was really pissed off. So I guess, I went out and I experienced it, what it's like to be on the streets” (Ezra, age 18). In addition to violent episodes at home that destroyed property, Ezra explained that he would come home very late against his parents’ wishes, and that he was associating with a young man that his parents did not like because of his smoking and drug use.

For Pete (age 18), it was an alleged incident of violence between him and his sister that led to his homelessness. He was living in a state of conflict with his parents, and one day they called the police to lay charges against him for assaulting his sister.

“Well I first became homeless...two years ago now, cause there were a lot of issues going on at home, uh...you know, kind of the teenager growing up and trying to still be a kid, but you know...starting to try and get up to my grown up phase, but...conflicts with parents and everything else just came to a headstrong. I was kind of forcibly removed from the home, and...so I spent a couple of weeks out on the streets. It was...two police cruisers, no, three actually...one marked police car and two undercovers...cause apparently I had assaulted one of my younger siblings...I didn't really, but uh...my parents are just over reactive that way” (Pete, age 18).

Pete did not provide many details about this incident, and he clearly feels that the police intervention was not necessary. Interestingly, he was not charged for the incident, even though

he was removed from the home. After the incident, Pete spent time sleeping on the streets and eventually got into the Young Men's Shelter.

After Jake voluntarily left the care of CAS at the age of 16, he returned to live with his parents. Tension built quickly, and Jake says that the family was no longer speaking to each other, but rather communicating through post it notes. On Boxing Day, Jake had a violent altercation with his father.

“It all started for me December 26th. I got kicked out of parents' house...It was just like, literally like, 'Merry Christmas, you're not getting charged, you're not going to jail for assaulting your parents.' Because we got physical, and I'll admit partially it was my fault, but I'll still say my shirt was ripped, my Dad had been at fault too I'd say. So if they arrested me, I would have made the biggest stink if they didn't take him too” (Jake, age 19).

Jake was 16 at the time. The police left Jake outside of his house and told him to find somewhere to go. Jake went to his girlfriend's house and called the Victim Crisis Unit with the Ottawa police and explained what had happened, and how frightened he was. The Crisis Unit already had documentation about the history of victimization Jake had experienced in CAS group homes. The Victim Crisis Unit dispatched the police to Jake's girlfriend's house, and then drove him and his things to the YMCA where he was able to access shelter. He says, “The police came and they found me, and they just picked up all the stuff in front of my parents' house and they drove me back to the shelter. It was pretty cool. And I got a lot of support from them” (Jake, age 19).

I have already described how Paul (age 19) was kicked out of his family home and also from his grandparents' home for being transgender. At the age of 14, Paul had a violent altercation with his father that resulted in Paul being incarcerated.

“My step-dad was an alcoholic...he was usually yelling at my mom, and hitting my mom, or trying to hit my little brothers or sisters. I have three brothers and one sister that are all younger than me. And he used to try to beat them, and I'd say it was me that did whatever they did, and I'd take the beating. He used to beat us with leather belts, spoons, his hands...he beat us with a lot of shit... I tried to take a 2x4 to his head 'cause he was like...beating the fuck out of my little brother. So I took a 2x4 and I started beating his head in. I got arrested, and I went to jail for a bit. They tried me as an adult because they thought it was attempted murder” (Paul, age 19).

For Paul, this violent incident with his family and the resulting incarceration severed his ties to housing. Once he was released from custody, Paul had nowhere to go and ended up in a youth shelter.

Dustin (age 16) explains that most of his family used drugs and he was around it so often growing up that he decided to try it himself. He began using drugs and alcohol while living at home, and quickly became addicted. His illegal behaviours to obtain drugs began to escalate and Dustin ended up in trouble with the law. Eventually, he was charged with assault for a minor incident outside of the home where he spat on somebody and he was incarcerated. Dustin had also been involved in drug dealing and armed robbery which I will discuss in a later chapter. Following his involvement with the criminal justice system, his mother did not accept him back to live at home.

“And then I ended up in jail...I wasn't supposed to get released, but I went to court, and they said, 'We're gonna release him to you', talking to my mom. And then my mom was like, 'No. I'm not taking him back.' So I got released, and they made it a condition that I stay with my mom, so even though she didn't want me, they made her take me back cause I was only 15. And um...then she just kicked me out. My mom used to kick me out a lot, even though...like I was 15, so I knew that I could call somebody and they'd get me a place to stay...they had to. But I didn't really like...talking to people...like calling cops randomly like, 'Hey can you help me or something?' I'd just kind of take care of it on my own sort of thing. So if I had nowhere to stay, I'd just stay outside” (Dustin, age 16).

It is likely that Dustin's involvement in illegal activities made him more hesitant to seek help from the police once he had no place to go. Since Dustin was under 16 years old, he would also be ineligible to receive services from drop-in centres, soup kitchens, and shelters for youth or adults; ultimately, he had to take care of himself.

5.3 Child Welfare System

The child welfare system plays a large role in the lives of many young people who experience victimization, and who eventually experience homelessness. Many young people who are victims of serious family violence are removed from their families and placed in the care of the Children's Aid Society. For these children, experiencing further abuse in "care" can be a strong push towards homelessness. As reported in the literature review, numerous studies show a link between youth homelessness and state care (Mallet et al., 2010; Novac et al., 2006; Whitbeck, 2009). It was quickly apparent in this study that many young people in Ottawa who are homeless share a history of involvement with child welfare:

"So before I became homeless, I was in a number of...group homes and foster care."

(Bryce, age 18)

"I lived with my Mom and my Stepdad till I was about 7, and then she moved out. I guess she thought she was too sick, or was, or whatever...I went to foster care till I was 18, 19, and then I lived on my own. I said, 'See you later, bye.' ... I'm just stubborn, and I don't like people to tell me stuff. I like to...I guess I learn my own way. So I said, 'F-you, I'm moving out.' And I moved out. That was it."

(Max, age 20)

"I don't know...rough childhood, shit didn't work out...went to Children's Aid in group homes, rebelled, criminal record, got into using drugs, and then...shit just kind of went downhill from starting drugs, I guess. And then I fell out with my family, got kicked out of Robert Smart, and now I'm on the street."

(Chad, age 17)

Some of the young people describe their placement in CAS group homes with mixed feelings, like Jay (age 17), who spent 6 months in group care. While his initial reaction was negative, Jay eventually found that if he treated staff well, he would also be treated well.

“The first thing that I didn't like was the point system thing they had going, like the levels. I didn't like that at all. I didn't like the fact that everybody else got an allowance, and I didn't” (Jay, age 17).

Jay later conceded,

“The group home...it wasn't bad. I ended up flipping out maybe twice out of the whole six months I was there, which I consider to be really well. Most of the staff were pretty good...I treated them with respect, they treated me with respect, so I didn't really have too much of a problem in there. I didn't want to go there at first, but once I got used to it, it wasn't bad at all” (Jay, age 17).

One young person in CAS, Chad (age 17), described how he began to associate with criminally involved peers in the group home, and he felt that he did not receive support when he began to get arrested.

“The group homes? A bunch of kids who are all street smart put together in one room...so it didn't exactly work out for the benefit of anybody. So it's like this guy knows how to get drugs, this person knows how to rob somebody, you know how to make money quick, and the other guy is just there for support, so you just all work together and look for ways to get high...rob people, shit like that. And then like...your social worker is so busy that they don't even really know that you get arrested a lot. They're always, 'Oh, I'm busy', and you're just like, 'Well, what the fuck man?' So it's just like...not very much support as a teenager in group homes and whatnot, and Children's Aid is kind of why” (Chad, age 17).

Other young people, like Jake (age 19), experienced severe emotional consequences stemming from sexual assault while living in CAS-run group homes. Jake was particularly troubled by his perception that people were aware of the sexual assault that he was experiencing, and were choosing not to intervene.

“My life in CAS was shit, and they knew that. Like a lot of the workers knew exactly what was going on in my opinion. There were days where stuff would be going on to me, the staff would walk right past...they had to have seen something. But they would just pretend, like...they would go on with their life like nothing was there, or nothing had happened. Like, it was so bizarre that they were like a statute, like they didn't know what to say or what to do about the situation so they'd just keep going, you know? The feeling of like...I don't know, I call it utter despair...of your emotions running wild through you, is kind of like taking the most powerful drug you could find. Because I can remember having been sexually assaulted and feeling so happy, but yet so sad. And I'd be crying but laughing, but trying to convince myself that it was all fucked, and like...I was just deluded in the head...maybe I just dreamed all of it” (Jake, age 19).

Jake explains that sexual experimentation and assault was common in his group homes. His narrative shows how confused the abuse made him feel as tried to understand his feelings of sexual excitement and his sadness over being violated. He later explained that the sexual abuse he experienced continues to make him feel unsure about his own sexuality, since it was confusing to receive sexual attention from other males.

“Like, it's a common thing in group homes, I guess. I don't know if a lot of people are aware of that, but like...it is, it's very common that...boys, I'd say especially, unless you're in a co-ed, which I was too, I was in a co-ed group home at one point. But boys especially, like...I mean, there's kids that...I didn't even know how to react to that, that would just reach over and bam, their hand is in your pants, and there's nothing you can do...or say, I mean what do you say to that? 'Okay, I'm a boy, but yet another boy just touched me. So do I accept it or not?'” (Jake, age 19).

Jake explains that the long-term impacts of the victimization he experienced in CAS affected him in many ways. When he was homeless following his voluntary discharge from CAS, Jake began to engage in prostitution as a means of survival. In the next chapter, I will show how he links that choice to his sexual victimization. Jake also experienced tremendous levels of fear and anxiety resulting from his victimization.

“I think that contributed to...me being homeless, or me at some point making the decisions I made...I think CAS set me up for a lot of failure in life actually. I worked so hard to get out of CAS too. I was honestly going to try to sue them, and they knew that because of all the stuff that happened. I was so scared that I couldn't walk anywhere without pepper spray” (Jake, age 19).

I had seen Marshall (age 17) several times in the drop-in centre coming in for food and other donations that were available. The first time that I met him, he had a very open conversation with a staff member about injection drug use. On the day of the interview, Marshall came into the office to meet with me and slouched in his chair, laying his arms out across the desk where I was sitting. They were slashed with bright red marks from his hands all the way up to his shoulders. It was December, and Marshall explained that he was wearing a t-shirt because the cool weather outside helped his injuries not to burn as much. Similarly to Jake, Marshall had experienced sexual assault in his CAS group home, and found that the staff team was not able to understand what had happened or how it had affected him.

“Recently, I was in a group home...and this was like three months ago, I got raped, and I ended up leaving...um...running away from my group home cause nobody understood what was going on, and I was gone for a month. And I came here and I was doing all this stuff...and I then I ended up getting out of there...and during that one month, I had a place to go, but...I couldn't go back...so in a way I was homeless. I was living on the street... I was living in shelters. And then, basically they said, 'fine, you can go', and then I had like...um... I moved out on my own” (Marshall, age 17).

Marshall describes how becoming homeless was deliberate decision that he had made to escape the pain of living in his group home. He expresses that he felt mistreated and misunderstood, and his flight to the street was in part, to escape the poor treatment he experienced in the group home.

“It was better to be homeless than to be in a house where everybody didn't understand. And every time I went back to the group home when I ran away, they would punish me and make me stay in my room. So I chose it...better to be on my own, and be homeless

and have nothing, than to be in a house with stuff and feel like I have nothing. So why would I be in a house where everyone treats me like shit and I have nothing inside, when I can just go outside and have nothing without being treated like shit? So I would have rather been homeless than be in a house. I would have rather slept on the street than slept in a bed, cause of all the emotional pain that was going on” (Marshall, age 17).

Given his personal circumstances and the mistreatment that Marshall experienced within a child protection agency, Marshall presents his decision to become homeless as a rational attempt to protect himself from further abuse and mistreatment. Marshall’s description of the punitive response he received when he did return to his CAS group home was also echoed by a service provider with previous experience working for CAS.

“When I worked at Children's Aid, if they took off, you had to strip search them when they got back...not complete strip search, but empty their pockets, do all this stuff...like it went against so many...how I wanted to work with youth” (Cheryl, Service Provider).

Running away from CAS seemed to be a common experience for a number of young people. In the next chapter, I will further describe some of the interactions that young people in CAS have with police when they run away. Jake (age 19) describes how difficult it is to evade police detection.

“[Running away] from CAS, I would have been nearly 15, and then they issue an all point bulletin, missing person, and you're found pretty fucking fast. It's amazing how fast. You can just go, take a bus somewhere, and bam there's the cops right around the corner. And as stealth as I can be, they just know. The resources that they have, it's just endless” (Jake, age 19).

Some young people experiencing family violence who were not involved with CAS deliberately waited until they turned 16 to either become homeless or to report their abuse to authorities. This demonstrates a deliberate negotiation of personal circumstances where young

people chose to live with abuse until they reached an age where they would not be taken into CAS. In the case of Ella (age 16), she waited until she turned 16 to become homeless.

“And uh...I told them too, like a week before, that I was going to leave and that this time I wasn't going to come back. And they didn't believe it because every other time I would always come back, cause I didn't...cause when you're 12 and you're so little, they're not going to take you in a shelter, they're gonna send you to CAS, and I didn't want that. I didn't want to live in a group home or whatever, so I would always come back. Yeah, so this time, I knew I was old enough to live in a shelter, I just didn't know where it was or whatever” (Ella, age 16).

Young people who are waiting to disclose their abuse may not have all of the information required to make informed choices. One service provider explained the case of another young girl who waited until she turned 16 to report abuse because she was under the impression that she could report it without affecting her siblings who were still living in the family home.

“I had a girl that I worked with for a number of years, as soon as she turned 16, she went into the principal's office and told her that her father was sexually assaulting her. She thought as soon as she was 16, she wouldn't have to...you know, but obviously CAS did an investigation, and the family was all kind of split up” (Cheryl, Service Provider).

While many of the youth in this study had numerous negative experiences in CAS, this does not mean that their experiences are representative of child welfare in general. While abuses are certainly present, other young people continue to feel that they benefit from the many services offered by CAS. One service provider speaks to this disconnect,

“A lot of negative connotations come with CAS, right? 'All they do is take kids away,' right? But they're also very supportive...and a lot of youth resent them for 50,000 other reasons, which they could have some validity with, but at the same time they forget that they're there to help. So a lot of our youth that come here have had so many negative experiences with CAS, but there are the positive ones that they often forget about” (Donny, Service Provider).

The child welfare system exists to protect children under the age of 16 who have been victimized in their family environments, among other roles. Sadly, many young people continue to experience abuse within the system. Some of these young people feel that homelessness is the only alternative to living in group homes where they are victimized, or because of their negative experiences in CAS, they choose to leave care before they have acquired the skills to live independently, and then become homeless. The way that young people have articulated their choices regarding the child welfare system and their deliberate measures to avoid placement in child welfare demonstrates the significance of human agency and the capacity of young people to navigate their housing status on their own terms. Unfortunately, a young person's decision-making about housing can be constrained by factors like violence and maltreatment at home, a lack of information about available resources, and dependence on adults to provide adequate shelter.

5.4 Other Pathways

For some young people, the pathway into homelessness was through eviction from the apartments that they were renting. This happened for numerous reasons. At the age of 19, Max was evicted from his apartment for having too many parties. Aaron (age 23) explains how he and his girlfriend had so many fights over the past year that they were frequently evicted from their apartments. "For the past year...we had a hard time jumping around, like uh...place to place. One place they'd be like, 'Uh...I'm tired of the fighting', cause at that point...like she wants to go one way, I'm used to the other way, so it's like...arguing about that. And stuff like that got us kicked out" (Aaron, age 23). Ryan (age 22) has experienced several reoccurrences of homelessness that have frequently been related to his own drug use. However, at one point Ryan was living in a downtown apartment with his father as the co-signer. Ryan allowed a young

man to live at his place who was known to the police for dealing drugs. After the police were involved in an incident at his place, Ryan's Dad refused to keep his name on the lease and Ryan was evicted.

"I had an apartment downtown recently, and uh...I lived there from...I guess it was August until the end of September, and...I was addicted to opiates at the time, but through sale and distribution I was able to keep myself going. And uh...then I met someone on the street, and he asked me if he could stay with me for a little bit, and I wouldn't say I was sympathetic, more empathetic cause I had been there. So I let him stay with me for a bit. Then...a day turned into a week, and then he started selling crack cocaine out of my place, and it was around that time that I was like, 'Look, I think you should leave.' Then that didn't go over so well. He was a bigger guy, and kind of, basically took over my home. Yeah, within a month, my place was raided, and then no charges were pressed on me because I wasn't the perpetrator, the person they were looking for, but because my Dad was the co-signer, he went and got me evicted because he found out what was going on at my place. So pretty much since then, I've been homeless" (Ryan, age 22).

After Jake (age 19) was able to obtain subsidized housing through his priority status with the social housing registry, he was at risk of eviction from his unit several times, and narrowly avoided eviction through some active negotiation. He felt strongly that the housing office did not like renting to young people, but that once his son was born, his housing status became a little more stable.

"I've been at risk of being evicted a few times, and that's just because I feel like the housing office doesn't really like young kids. Being that I have a kid though, as of lately, they've been a lot more flexible in terms of, you know, like the first time I ever had an eviction notice at my door, I was very scared. And I went to go see this lady...at the top of our building there's a little...Service Centre, and she said, 'No, you just need to sign this paper.' And basically the paper was to relinquish my apartment over to Ottawa Housing, so in turn I would be homeless had I signed the paper. But for whatever reason I had this feeling, like to talk to someone else about it... and it turns out I made the right decision because I would have had no place to go...I talked to a lawyer, and I talked to the tenant worker who later just dismissed it, said, 'You know, you were caught on camera trying to sell weed, you were caught here doing this, you were caught...you know, we have you. We could very well easily evict you right now, but because of your situation, or because of...you're on your own and that, we're going to give you this one last chance'" (Jake, age 19).

Couch surfing is another common experience for young people who are homeless and can occur at any point in the cycle of homelessness. Some young people manage to couch surf for long periods of time to avoid living on the streets. One service provider explained, "Some of them seem to have ways of finding a warm place to sleep, or...navigating other people they know, couch surfing or whatever. Some kids arrive here and they've been couch surfing for like 8 months before they get to our services or find out about it" (Steve, Service Provider). Many young people first turn to their friends for shelter when they leave home or the child welfare system. One young woman I spoke with, June (age 18), bounced from house to house, and stayed on the streets periodically for several years. For others, they quickly exhaust their social network, and their friends may have limited resources to help. Kristin (age 18) says, "And my friends, they can try as much as they can, but like...really? Couch hopping...like, I can't stay at one place forever, you know?" (Kristin, age 18, female). It was common for young people to report crashing at a friend's place for several nights or weeks before eventually ending up on the streets.

For other young people, they were invited into homes after they were spending time in adult shelters. Bryce (age 18) was kicked out of a youth shelter for a behavioural issue, and was staying at the Salvation Army shelter when he received an invitation to stay at a friend's place. Bryce explains that he was not ready to make many life changes at this point, and described himself in the interview as lazy. He told me that that his friend eventually asked him to leave.

"I went back to the Salvation Army...for maybe a couple days, and then I got a call from a friend saying I could stay at his place for a bit. So I stayed there; he was nice. He...paid for my...food. He didn't ask for rent money. So then, one day, he's like 'yeah...you've had your time here...your help. It's time for you to leave', and I was like, 'Alright'" (Bryce, age 18).

When Max (age 20) first became homeless, he spent time calling all of his friends trying to find a place to stay. He became really frustrated, because he had been so generous and allowed friend's to stay at his place in the past, but no one would take him in. Max was staying in an adult shelter when he bumped into a friend he hadn't seen in a while, and he was eventually invited to stay with his friend.

"My friend just said...I saw him for the first time in a while at...right at the end of October, and he's like, 'Ah, I've been thinking of you. I've been worried.' And I told him I was homeless, and I met up with him again, and he's like, 'You know, you can stay at my place if you want.' And I said, 'Okay! Alright.' I didn't even ask" (Max, age 20).

In two other cases, young people told me that they made the decision to decline housing with a friend. For Ezra (age 18), after 3 months with one friend's house, he decided it was time to leave, and he went back onto the streets. For Vince (age 20), he felt like staying with a friend would be a barrier to him developing personal responsibility and dealing with his drinking problem.

"So I've been drinking every day heavily... and I decided to get clean. My friends were a big, big, huge help...just with support and everything like that. They were really there for me... Some people offered me places to stay but I refused just because I felt like I would get too comfortable. I wanted to be actually trying to reach my goals" (Vince, age 20).

Vince's decision not to couch surf represented a point of maturing in his journey, when he chose to give up an easy housing option that he felt would not be in line with his goals of personal growth. He did want housing, but explained that he feels best about himself when he is able to obtain and maintain his own housing.

In my interactions with young people in the drop-in I heard about how people would often try to take in friends if they were able to secure their own accommodations. Jake had a very negative experience with allowing his friends who were homeless to stay at his place, and

he felt like he lost control of his own environment, since he feared that he would be evicted if he sought help.

“I’ve let people homeless stay at my apartment before. Actually, that was where my biggest downfall was, because I used to let everyone that I knew just come to my apartment and just crash and chill. And they’d be writing on my walls, punching holes in my walls, doing drugs, and you know, it was crazy. It was just like...I would never say no, or I’d try to say no but at that point it was just taken over. I’d have no control. It was either call security and then I’d get evicted for sure, or call the police and then I’d get breached on my probation, so I’d just let people stay and do whatever the hell they’d want” (Jake, age 19, male).

Jake ended up owing thousands of dollars to multiple phone and cable companies since his friends would order non-stop movies on his TV box, and exhaust the data plans on his cell phone. Jake describes a feeling of powerlessness as he tried to clean up after his friends, but that they kept ‘trashing’ his place.

5.5 Sleeping Rough

For many young people, when they first became homeless they spent time ‘sleeping rough’, looking for a place to sleep anywhere they thought they might be safe. Young people would often crawl into small out-of-the-way spaces to try and avoid public attention and to stay warm. Adam (age 18) shared, “I was pretty much sleeping in the stairwells...everywhere, stairwells, bus shelters, I didn’t really care.” Similarly, Marshall (age 17) explained, “I slept in an elevator, I slept in a parking garage, I slept in shelters...I’d end up some nights just calling the city, cause I was just done.” Several young people also reported sleeping in forested areas around the city or its outskirts. Chad (age 17) experienced severe health consequences after a period of camping out in the forest.

“I slept out in the forest for two months with one of my buddies, and then...I checked into the Young Men's shelter, I weighed 80 pounds, I was addicted to Oxycotton, I had bronchitis, and I like...nearly died” (Chad, age 17).

While young people did express different sentiments about their first nights on the streets, the most common reaction that I heard was fear, and it was common for young people to have trouble falling asleep. Jake (age 19) explains how he would look for a quiet place to sleep, but how that only slightly reduced his fear while sleeping on the streets.

“I found myself trying to sneak into buildings to try and get a place away from society, more or less. If I had to, I would sleep in little garbage areas or somewhere where I knew that for sure no one would be walking by. You know, this way I could assure my safety, I could try to fall asleep which was a joke anyways...you'd always be up every few hours, which is great because I just like to get a sense of my surroundings again and reassure myself that I'm the only one there. I mean, heaven forbid I wake up and there's a group full of people circling me, you never know...so, you know, I did that. I used to stay in parks with people, we'd just stay awake all night” (Jake, age 19).

Pete (age 18) described his process for vetting if a space seemed like it would be a good and safe place to sleep at night. He was more concerned about finding a space to sleep where he would not be disturbed by law enforcement or private security.

“It was kind of hard being, you know, on your own all night...you know, doing nothing, but trying to find a warm comfy place to sleep...it was mainly walking around during the day, carrying around all my stuff...I actually had a pretty good system going where I would wait for a place for two hours, and then if I didn't see any sort of NCC or cops go by, I'd figure this is a good spot...not like a hard piece of concrete, I had to do that a couple of times, but one where you could lay your bag down and use that as a pillow and not be worried about being disturbed all night” (Pete, age 18).

Kristin (age 18) grew up in a rural area, so for her becoming homeless meant adjusting to urban life as well. Her fear of sleeping on the streets at night is linked to previous experiences of sexual victimization. When Kristin is not in a shelter or housed, she tries to find places in the city to sleep that are not in the downtown area.

“City streets? That's a scary idea for me, but...I have to do what I have to do, right? I'd rather ...be sleeping on the city streets than being on country streets...cause when you're homeless, that's a scary place too. And um...I've spent more than one night sleeping in my school's backyard, because it's better than sleeping downtown by Rideau Street, and...getting raped again” (Kristin, age 18).

Dustin (age 16) also experiences anxiety when he is outside for the night, and reports that he has trouble sleeping downtown because of all of the negative experiences he has witnessed.

“Most of the time that I had to stay outside, I'd just stay up all night downtown, just doing whatever. I hate sleeping, especially when I'm on the street downtown. That just sketches me out. I've seen too much stuff, so...like...I don't like it at all. So if I'm downtown, then I'm awake no matter what. I...can't sleep. It's annoying” (Dustin, age 16).

Adam (age 18) expressed a similar experience of fear when sleeping on the streets.

“It was scary at first, like...I had nowhere to go, it was winter, like...I had no clothes, like...this is what I'd wear in the winter [referring to his T-shirt], so...I had no jackets, no nothing, so...it was shitty” (Adam, age 18).

Other young people expressed similar mixed feelings about homelessness, reporting a wide range of emotional highs and lows. Some young people, like Ezra (age 18), also explained that being on the streets can be really boring. Ezra felt like he had adapted to homelessness quite well. He said, “I had to push myself to the limits sometimes, but...other than that I was actually pretty good. I didn't really mind it” (Ezra, age 18).

Jay (age 17) first experienced homelessness at the age of 14. He was terrified. When I asked him what it was like to be homeless at such a young age, he replied,

“Pretty...pretty...pretty fucking devastating man, like...in all honesty, like it was pretty fucking scary. Like, it would get late, and I wouldn't have a place to go, and I'd wonder where to go. I'm fucking 14 years old...at this age I'm supposed to be put either in a fuckin' foster home or something, like I'm not supposed to be on the streets. I don't know where to go. I ended up sleeping...like, my first night of being homeless, I ended up sleeping up on Major's Hill. I don't know, like no sleeping bag, no blanket, no nothing...just on the bench” (Jay, age 17).

Young people under the age of sixteen are not able to access services such as food banks or shelters, and Jay had nowhere to turn. Many young people do not consider child welfare as a valid option for care either because of previous experiences in CAS or stories of abuse that they have heard from friends. Being homeless at such a young age can also lead to mixed feelings. While Jay was scared at first, he eventually began to camp in a forest with a friend and loved the feeling of freedom that he experienced for a time. Eventually the reality of his situation began to hit him, and he became quite distressed.

“So it was cool, it was fun, you know? I liked it. I liked being 14, no mom, no nothing, chilling with my friend, like sleeping where I'm sitting. It was cool for a bit, but then like, you know, the reality set in. I didn't like it too much” (Jay, age 17).

It was common in the stories of young people to hear that they slept out in a park or open space for up to a week before hearing about the existence of services and shelters for homeless youth. Many youth referred to the fact that sleeping outside can be okay in the summer, but that it becomes very difficult or impossible once the winter settles in.

“Because it was summer, you know...it was okay to sleep outside because it wasn't cold like now. So I was on the street for about a week until I found out about the shelter. Confederation park...Major's Hill, and under the bridge. But I was never really alone, I always had...people with me...I didn't really know them, but whatever...they were okay.”

(Ella, age 16, female)

“What was challenging was, I'd have to say would be the winter...I mean, I wasn't on the streets for long in the winter, but like...I have experienced it, and it's actually pretty tough. I actually went into the forest at Baseline, and me and my buddy, we were both on the streets, and we just chopped down trees and we lit it up...and it kept us warm.”

(Ezra, age 18, male)

“I slept outside a couple times, but mostly in the summertime...I never really slept...I was so high on drugs that you don't have to sleep, you know, crashing wasn't a big deal...I was always so hyped up on drugs that being on Rideau street all night was not a big deal.”

(June, age 18, female)

5.6 On Becoming Homeless

This chapter has described multiple pathways into youth homelessness, including family conflict, family-related violence, mistreatment in the child welfare system, and eviction, which align well with previous research on pathways into youth homelessness (Aubry et al., 2003; Karabanow, 2004; Mallet et al., 2010; Novac et al., 2006). Themes of decision making and human agency cut across the multiple narratives that the young people presented. For some, making the choice to be homeless was perceived as a matter of survival, for some it was about asserting their independence, and for a few it was a thrill-seeking adventure. For others, a series of negotiations with family members, landlords, and community services lead to a moment where a young person was asked to leave their housing.

During the interviews, this thin line of choosing homelessness or having it forced upon them was not always clear in the narratives presented by young people. On several occasions, a young person would tell me that they had been kicked out of their home, and later, when I asked them to tell me more about what lead to them being kicked out, they explained that they had actually decided to leave. The fluidity between the concepts of being “kicked out” or “choosing to leave” seemed to reflect perceptions that can change with time or maturity. It also highlights the process of negotiation that many young people engage in over their housing status.

Mallet et al. (2010) explain that, at times, young people minimize their own behaviours such as violence, or drug use that may have led to being asked to leave home, and at other times the same young people may acknowledge that their behaviour left their parents with few options. I first noticed this pattern of changing narratives when I was talking with June (age 18), who initially said that she was kicked out of her home, and then later said that she chose to leave to

get away from her mother. As she further reflected on her experiences, she emphasized the importance of taking the time to reflect honestly on the reasons for becoming homeless.

“I guess there's a lot of decisions kids have to make when they're thrown out on the street. It's like...I think people need to come to the conclusion why they ended up there. A lot of people actually ended up there for really sad reasons, you know? And me, I was just a brat. And I think you'll find a lot of people like that...but I think people need to be realistic and actually look at the situation and help themselves” (June, age 18).

Other young people, like Kathryn (age 18), maintain that it was necessary to leave home, but still feel a degree of regret about severing ties with her family; regret about treating her parents poorly, and regret about losing her housing. Kristin (age 18) also expressed regret that she was not able to live with either of her parents, but cast blame equally on her own mental health challenges and attitudes, and what she perceived to be the shortcomings of her parents. I encountered a tremendous amount of ambivalence and mixed feelings about relationships with family. As I listened to young people share their stories, I had the sense that I was listening to accounts of unresolved situations and relationships that continued to exist in a state of flux. A few young people discussed how negatively they perceived their parents at the time of leaving home, and how they had developed a greater sense of appreciation as time passed.

Many young people also demonstrated a great deal of forethought and planning prior to leaving home. Examples included planning a safe time to leave home, arranging transportation into the city, observing how parents treated younger siblings to assure safety, planning and paying for international travel to escape mafia-related violence, tolerating violence until the age of 16 to avoid placement in child welfare, and a young man providing a letter to his parents that had been translated into Arabic to explain his sexual orientation and why he was leaving home. While some young people appear to have run away more spontaneously, these decisions were

often shaped by responses to adverse living conditions. The way that young people perceive their initial departure seems to exist in a state of flux, but it is common for young people to continue to reflect on the initial cause of their homelessness. For virtually every young person I interviewed, leaving home was a difficult decision. On the following page, Table 5.0 provides a summary of the findings from this chapter.

TABLE 5.0 Pathways into Youth Homelessness: Summary of Findings

Theme	Literature	Findings	Theory
Family Conflict	(Cochran et al., 2002) (Fournier et al., 2009) (Gaetz, 2004) (Gattis, 2009) (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) (Kruks, 2001) (Mallet & Rosenthal, 2009) (Mallet et al., 2010)	• Young people present shifts in their narratives about their responsibility for the decision to leave home • As stated in the literature, family conflict is one of the primary pathways into homelessness for young people, including conflict relating to divorce, drug use, responsibility in the family home, mental health, the death of a parent, or queer identities • Often, many of these aspects intersect in the lives of young people	Human Agency Negotiation
Family Violence	(Aubry et al., 2003) (Baron, 2003) (Bassuk, Perloff, & Dawson, 2001) (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) (Herman et al., 1997) (Mallet et al., 2010) (Mental Health Policy Research Group, 1998) (Novac et al., 2006) (Tanner & Wortley, 2002) (Whitbeck, Hoyt & Ackley, 1997)	• Some young people experience family violence from parents or siblings while others are the source of family violence • Some young people meticulously plan their exit from their family home, researching resources in advance • Young people may feel pressure to protect younger siblings, and this may be a factor in decision-making	Human Agency Navigation
Child Welfare	(Aubry et al., 2003) (Mallet et al., 2010) (Novac et al., 2006) (Whitbeck, 2009)	• Young people may wait to leave home until they turn sixteen to avoid being taken into child welfare • For young people who experience abuse in child welfare, homelessness may be perceived as better choice than remaining in care	Human Agency Negotiation
Other Pathways	(Aubry et al., 2003) (Karabanow, 2004) (Karabanow, Carson & Clement, 2010) (Mallet et al., 2010) (Novac et al., 2006)	• Some young people couch surf until they have exhausted their social network prior to sleeping in shelters or on the street	Human Agency Negotiation
On Becoming Homeless	(Carlen, 1996) (Karabanow, 2004) (Karabanow, Carson & Clement, 2010) (Mallet et al., 2010) (Novac et al., 2006)	• Young people are generally unaware of youth services when they become homeless, and learn about them from other youth • With time, young people may think differently about their circumstances when they first become homeless	Human Agency Navigation Negotiation

“And we’re just kids trying to...get out of here. Some of us won’t. Some of us have no intentions of it. But the rest of us are trying our fuckin’ hardest to get away from here, and away from the drama, and away from the stress, and the violence and the drugs, and the...diseases...and just everything ...like...I’m a drunk and an addict...it’s bad...it’s bad...the things you have to do...it’s just wrong, you know?” (Kristin, 19, female)

6.0 Adversity: Victimization, Offending and Interactions with the Police

Adversity is the most common aspect of life on the street. When I asked each young person to share their story with me, and to describe what they found the most challenging about homelessness, many of the challenges described were similar. Young people struggled daily with meeting their basic needs, and with navigating relationships with peers, service providers, partners and family members. These challenges were on top of the energy that young people had to devote to finding housing, completing school or becoming and staying employed. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, victimization and family conflict are frequent contributors to youth homelessness, and many young people struggled to deal with the emotional fallout of their home and family experiences. Many described drug use and eventual addiction as a direct attempt to numb the emotional pain they had experienced, or even as a way of helping them to engage in constructive behaviours when they felt powerless without the drugs.

As indicated in the earlier review of the literature, young people on the streets experience high levels of victimization, and many become involved in the criminal justice system, or have very negative experiences with police officers (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O’Grady, & Buccieri, 2010; Larouche, 2010). I had not anticipated the degree of adversity that many young people in the city were experiencing, nor had I anticipated the degree of strength and innovation that so many of the young people demonstrated. While strengths and the ability of young people to navigate around obstacles will be the subject of the next chapter,

this section paints a portrait of the challenges and constraints that young people experience when they are homeless.

Young people who are homeless struggle to meet their basic needs such as food, water, clothing and most obviously, shelter. Often the pursuit of these necessities becomes a central task of each day, and distracts from other tasks such as attending school. The lack of basic necessities is often most felt during the cold winter months when young people are more acutely aware of their need for warm clothing and food. During the interviews, young people told me that before they knew about existing services, they would often go hungry and that their clothing would wear out or was inadequate for the weather conditions.

For many, the experience of homelessness induced a form of ‘survival mode’ where young people became willing to temporarily engage in behaviours that they might not have done if they were not homeless. Sometimes, the pursuit of food or income for housing or drugs leads young people to consider involvement in illegal activities, and this context of deprivation and the struggle for survival must serve as a framework for the discussion that follows.

6.1 Victimization

Previous research on youth homelessness highlights that young people may experience high rates of victimization both prior to becoming homeless and once they are living on the streets or in shelters (Aubry, et al., 2003; Baron, 2003; Bassuk, Perloff, & Dawson, 2001; Herman, Susser, Struening, & Link, 1997; Mental Health Policy Research Group, 1998; Novac et al., 2006; Tanner & Wortley, 2002; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Ackley, 1997). Likewise, in my research, I anticipated that victimization would be a significant theme in the lives of young people. Because I am very curious about the subjective experiences of young people

experiencing homelessness, I chose not to ask any direct questions about victimization. Instead, I asked young people to share their story with me, and I asked about the challenges they experienced when they were homeless. I was curious about the extent to which young people would choose to include experiences of victimization in their narratives. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, victimization is a significant factor in the lives of almost all young people I interviewed, with experiences ranging from child abuse to theft of belongings to serious physical and sexual victimization.

In an interview, one service provider, Joyce, explained that many young people are not expecting the amount of victimization they experience once they get onto the street. She elaborated that often young people assume that they can escape violence if they leave a home where they are being abused. Joyce explained that often young people are “dragged into the drug scene, the dealing scene, the bullies, and all that stuff.”

Physical Violence, Robbery and Theft of Belongings

Life on the streets can be extremely violent, and young people are frequently assaulted and victims of robbery and theft. Vince (age 20), who has spent 3-4 years on and off the street reflected, “I see some people get robbed for no reason...for money and stuff like that, for iPods.” Young people reported having their laptops, iPods, cameras, phones, clothing, and other personal belongings stolen from them, and three reported having someone ‘borrow’ money from their credit card which was not paid back. Ella (age 16) had saved over \$1000 to use once she left home. She met a young man at a drop-in center, who befriended her, then stole her bank card and used it to commit several acts of fraud. As part of recouping the damages, the bank withheld Ella’s original \$1000, and would not return it.

Many young people maintain high levels of caution about whom they will trust and they are careful to manage their relationships to minimize “the drama.” In a focus group with young people, one young woman spoke about the dangers of trusting the wrong person.

“You've got to be careful who you trust. You trust the wrong person, you could get really fucked over and you're in jail. I have so many frenemies, it's not even funny. Everyone is such a big backstabber. You've got to be really careful who you trust when you're homeless, cause a lot of the other homeless people will try to get you hooked on drugs. Or stabbed! Like I did!”

Young people reported being especially vulnerable to violence and theft when they were using drugs or sleeping. Chad (age 17) experienced a life threatening stabbing when he spent time with the wrong crowd and became too drunk to take care of himself.

“I got stabbed a couple weeks ago because I blacked out when I was drinking, so I probably said something to someone, so they stabbed me, and like...you start thinking, what if? Like what if someone hadn't carried me back to the shelter, I would have died, you know? You start thinking about what can actually happen to you. For me... it made me realize life is worth living, you know? Like this isn't what I want with my life. I guess it's smartened me up a bit because I want out, but...easier said than done...I've been stabbed three times, shot four times ” (Chad, age 17).¹⁸

In Chad's case, much of his violent victimization is tied to earlier gang involvement where he was caught up in a cycle of retaliatory gang acts that resulted in the murder of two of his closest friends. Chad relocated to Ottawa to maintain a safe distance from his gang; however, without housing, he continues to be victimized. He now tries to be very careful of how he treats others when he gets upset, and he tries to think everything through to avoid acts of retaliation.

¹⁸ At this point, I followed up with Chad to ensure that he was doing okay. He explained that he was actively seeking treatment in a residential program for substance addiction.

“Impulse decisions fuck you over on the street, like...okay I don't like that guy, he robbed me, and you go beat him up...well then, all of a sudden all of his friends are coming to beat you up, and all cause you just got angry over 5 bucks or something.” (Chad, age 17).

Dustin (age 16) shares a similar sense of caution about his peers, and provides somewhat of a rationale for why some homeless young people will target others in the same situation.

“I've hung out with a lot of people who seem really chill, and then in the end, they're just like, 'Give me your shit.' That's happened to me a couple of times. ...It's really hard to explain, but street kids, they like to rob street kids cause it's easy. I'm not gonna tell the cops and I probably have something on me, you know? That's just the way it goes. You always have to watch who you're gonna hang out with, where you're gonna go with somebody...always have to keep your eye out” (Dustin, age 16).

Dustin believes that the vulnerability of young people who are homeless and their likelihood to be involved in drugs or criminal activity makes them easy targets, since they are unlikely to contact the police. He advocates for carefully watching his peers and being careful about where he will go with people. He explained that he is very unlikely to join peers in a dark alley if they offer him drugs, because he will be unprotected and worried that they may turn on him.

Marshall (age 17), has deliberately chosen not to deal drugs even though he uses them, because he feels particularly vulnerable to being a victim of robbery. He feels it is safer to use, and not sell. For Pete however, (age 18) his choice to abstain from drugs overall has gotten him into trouble with his peers. He shared that he had been beaten up several times by other young people on the street who suspected that he might be working with the police because he wouldn't use drugs with them.

During one of my volunteer shifts in the drop-in centre, one of the young men I had gotten to know quite well had his phone stolen off the table. He had left it on the table for a moment to go and look at something on a bulletin board, and when he returned, it was gone. I

was not far from the table when this happened, but I did not see the actual theft occur. The young man was very upset and said, “My whole life was on that phone!” He was upset about the loss of photos, contact information, calendar data, text messages and emails that he would not be able to access, and he appeared to be overwhelmed with the idea of trying to save enough money to buy another phone. He told me that he thought he knew who took it, but that he would not approach the person. This appeared to me to reflect a survival strategy of avoiding conflict or drama. He was not willing to risk a violent encounter with the other young man by confronting him. Two of the other young people I interviewed indicated that they had seen other homeless young people downtown with their stolen belongings. In one of these cases, a young woman started a fight to try and get her things back, although she did not describe the outcome of the altercation.

Young people may also actively confront victimization by making significant life choices such as relocating to a new city or confronting other youth. Paul (age 18), reported that after being beat up continually while living in a shelter on the East Coast, and having people try to stab him, he decided to move from the East Coast to live with his Grandmother in Ottawa. He tried to escape the victimization by rebuilding ties with his family members half way across the country. Unfortunately, his living situation with his grandparents deteriorated quickly and he chose to leave their house and became homeless in Ottawa.

Rather than running away from violence on the street, some young people confront it directly. Ezra (age 18) and some friends felt that one young woman downtown was acting too intense and drawing a lot of attention from police, which was angering a lot of drug dealers in the downtown core. Ezra explains that he and his friends ‘bounced’ her, which means that they banned her from coming downtown. He describes having a personal violent encounter with her,

where she attacked him. He decided not to fight back, since she was a girl and says, “I had to take it.” Despite experiencing the violence, he and his friends were able to convince the girl not to come back downtown.

Sexual Assault

Most of the information that I received about sexual assault came from young people talking about ‘friends’ they know who had been victimized, or from service providers. A few young people briefly mentioned experiences of sexual assault, but the stories they told were generally prior to experiencing homelessness. As previously mentioned, Kristin (age 18) indicated that she had been “raped multiple times by multiple people” including an incident involving multiple perpetrators close to Rideau street when she was only 14 years old. Young people like Jake (age 19) and Marshall (age 17) experienced sexual assault while in child welfare group homes, and Paul (age 19) mentioned that he had been sexually assaulted in his family home. Cassandra, a service provider, mentioned that she has worked with a young woman who will not step into an elevator because she had been sexually assaulted in an elevator and has adjusted her lifestyle to avoid confined spaces that trigger unwanted flashbacks.

Sexual victimization experienced by young people who are homeless was not very visible in my study. This is likely because I never asked any questions about it directly, but rather asked about the challenges young people experienced when they first became homeless. Jake (age 19) discussed his involvement in underage prostitution at the age of 16, which I will discuss in more depth in the section exploring the links between past abuse and involvement in criminal activity.

Donny, a service provider, explained that young people tend to keep their involvement in the sex trade hidden from each other and from service providers, as there is so much shame involved. Another service provider, Erica, shared about working with girls involved in the sex trade and expressed that it can be very dangerous for these girls to seek help or to move away from homelessness if they are being controlled by a pimp. She also indicated that young people who are sexually assaulted are unlikely to report their victimization to the police, because of how long the process is, what it entails, and the low likelihood of receiving a conviction. Other studies such as Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri (2010), have explored the reasons homeless youth underreport victimization to police, and their findings align well with Erica's explanation.

Drug-related Violence

Many of the most violent experiences young people reported having on the streets were related to buying and selling both criminalized and prescription drugs. For some young people who were new to selling drugs, the learning curve was steep. When Jay (age 17) was first being introduced to selling drugs, he had a violent encounter with his supplier. He was drunk downtown trying to sell marijuana to people walking down the sidewalk, and his supplier didn't like his forward approach.

"I kept going up to random people like, 'Need weed? Need weed? Need weed?' And he told me not to be such a bait-ass or he was going to hit me, and I kept doing it. I think I said it one more time, and he fuckin' full-out decked me. And like...I did a twirl, fell over, got right back up, and then I don't remember anything" (Jay, age 17).

Christine (age 21) was amazed at the impact drugs could have on people. She described how her drug use quickly caused her to drop from 210 pounds to 115 pounds. She says, "I had scabs on my face, like, I mean I was... I looked like a crack head." Although she was using and

selling drugs before she experienced homelessness, once Christine was on the streets, she reports that she had many scary experiences including having a gun pointed at her and her boyfriend, and being ‘grabbed by some guy.’ These experiences caused her to reflect on how drug use can change people. She mentioned the public awareness campaigns that show people before and after drug use, and said that she could identify with how she was changing.

Chad (age 17) explained that the money he earns from selling drugs can be addictive, but that it is also very dangerous. He also explained that it is difficult to maintain connection and loyalty with friends in some of the life and death situations that can arise when he is dealing.

“Some dealer down the street runs out but he knows I'm chopping. He'll roll through, put a gun to my head, and be like, ‘Yo, give me your shit. I'm gonna blow your brains out.’ ...When situations go down...life or death, like, you don't know who has your back. Cause I can go up to my homie downstairs and be like, ‘Yo, I've got your back...through and through’. But when there's a gun pointed at us, what are you really going to do?” (Chad, age 17).

Chad explained that his old friends who used to smoke marijuana and cigarettes with him at school won't talk to him now, because they feel like it is too dangerous, and they don't want to spend time downtown where they may be mugged or get caught up in the violence. Chad described a few other violent incidents involving needles. Once a man threatened him with a needle that he claimed was infected with HIV.

“I got in a fight with some guy the other day. He rolls through, he's like, ‘Yo, give me three bucks!’ ...This guy comes at me with a needle and says, ‘I have HIV. Like, you want HIV? I'm gonna stick you with this.’ For three bucks!” (Chad, age 17).

Chad also reported that he has been robbed at knife point for unused needles that he obtained from the free needle exchange program at the Ottawa Mission.

Fear

One common reaction to victimization on the street is experiencing high levels of fear and anxiety. Jake (age 19), reported that he would always carry pepper spray to protect himself because he was afraid for his life. Dustin (age 16), reported that he experienced a high level of suspicion when he spent time with his peers, and that he would ask himself if the people with him were actually his friends or if they were trying to gain his trust to rob him. Chad (age 17) describes how he is constantly worried, “It's just a lot of running around and looking over your shoulder all the time. And...if you have to sleep outside, you worry about where you're going to sleep, and if cops are gonna come and charge you...kick you out, if you're gonna get robbed while you're sleeping...staying warm...how you're gonna eat.” (Chad, age 17). Whereas Chad framed his fear as a sense of worry, Kristin (age 18) speaks directly to her own fear and her belief that other kids on the street are just as scared.

“It terrifies me...absolutely terrifies me, because I'm not a confident person, I'm not generally a violent person, and I can't defend myself...I can't. I'm not big, I'm 5'2 and 100 pounds...I'm not big...I'm scared. And I think most of the kids I meet, as confident as they are, as loud as they are, as friendly as they can be...I think inside, they're terrified, and...they won't admit to themselves. Hell no, you don't admit you're scared to someone else living on the streets...that's when you get the crap beaten out of you, and all your stuff taken. You have to be as tough as you can be... If I'm not acting tough...if I'm not watching my back 24/7, I guarantee one day some guy is going to come up to me, knock me up and take my shit. And I don't have enough stuff to have repetitive amounts of stuff being stolen from me.” (Kristin, age 18, female).

Although I heard a lot of expressions of fear related to violent victimization, not all the youth reported being troubled by violence. One young person, Marco (age 21), said that he didn't mind the fights that occurred downtown. He shared that other homeless people would often pick fights with him, but that it did not bother him. He elaborated, “I know how to throw my weight around or whatever, so...I don't know...I didn't mind it at all.” (Marco, age 21). Other young

people I interviewed were directly involved in robbing and intimidating other young people who were homeless, and felt that this strategy helped them to survive.

6.2 Links between Victimization and Offending

Literature on youth homelessness clearly indicates that many young people on the streets are involved in criminal activities (Barnaby et al., 2010; Baron, 2003; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997; Tanner & Wortley, 2002). In this section, I would like to explore the links between victimization and offending, and it would be a gross oversimplification to suggest that experiencing victimization on the streets causes young people to commit crimes. There are many additional factors to consider, and such a limited explanation diminishes the relevance of human agency in understanding how young people interpret and respond to victimization. Some young people will experience victimization on the streets and be deeply affected emotionally, while others will consider this as an initiation into street culture; many experience both reactions simultaneously.

Drug Use as Self-Medicating Behaviour

One of the most prominent links between victimization and engaging in criminalized activity is the use of drugs as a form of self-medication. Service providers and young people spoke to this directly, explaining that young people who are homeless will use drugs to escape from emotional pain and the stress of being on the streets. One service provider shared her observation that young people may do this as a deliberate escape and sometimes they may not be aware of why they use.

“I see a lot of self-medication happening. And sometimes really directly like, 'I don't want to think about this, and so I'm going to use.' And sometimes it's not so direct, and they don't necessarily realize the factors of why they're using or starting to use, but I do see a lot of self-medication happening” (Joyce, Service Provider).

The sense that youth self-medicate with illegal and prescription drugs was strongly supported by service providers in focus groups and interviews.

Two young people I interviewed described their first time taking illicit drugs as following an experience of victimization. Before becoming homeless, Chad (age 17) was a gang-involved young person in Toronto, and at the age of 12 he witnessed the death of two of his closest friends, after which one of his other friends killed himself.

“...I watched my buddy die when I was 12 years old, and that was the first time I ever did it. Well, my first drug I ever did was Oxycotton¹⁹, and I got hooked right off the bat. So I've just been doing Oxy's for like 5 years now...which sucks balls. Like...every day... I went from popping...like just swallowing them, to chewing them, to snorting, and now I shoot up. Next step is smoking them, and I don't want to smoke...like, I go to Narcotics Anonymous, but like...it's so hard on the street. Every day, you're just like...it's around you everywhere. Like I look on the ground, I'll see a needle...I want a hit. I see somebody else high, I want a hit. You sit down and think...you just don't want to be in your own head anymore” (Chad, age 17).

Chad links the choice to start using drugs with his experience witnessing the death of his friends.

Similarly, Kristin (age 18) used drugs at a party for the first time; she links this choice with having recent experiences of sexual victimization.

“Um...I...got raped...multiple times, by multiple different people [speaking softly and slowly], and uh... then I went to one of my parties, and uh...a friend of mine offered me oxy's...and I took them” (Kristin, age 19, female).

In her interview, Kristin did share more details on some of the sexual violence that she had experienced, but the connection between these experiences and her drug use was very clear in her narrative. In some ways, the timing of the incidents is inconsequential in terms of how soon the drug use began after the incidents of victimization. It is the explicit link that Kristin and

¹⁹ Oxycotton is a common street name for prescription opiates such as oxycodone.

Chad made between the victimization and drug use that demonstrates how the victimization influenced the decision to try criminalized drugs.

Many young people on the street reported coming into contact with police because of the possession or selling criminalized and prescription drugs. This will be further discussed in the section on youth interactions with police at the end of this chapter.

Bullying and Intimidation

Through my interviews and focus groups with service providers, I heard about two different ways that young people may be affected by bullying and intimidation from their peers. The first negative impact described by service providers is when they see a young person who is bullied who in turn becomes a bully. Erica described this as “trying to get some power over their lives by trying to get power over others.” Joyce explained that some people quickly realize that if they don’t do something rash, they may continue to be picked on and victimized on the street. Young people also spoke to the need to portray a strong front on the streets; Chad (age 17), Dustin (age 16), Kristin (age 18), and Marshall (age 17) all affirmed the importance of taking a stand and not appearing as weak. Cassandra, a service provider, described that she has even seen people who were beaten up but fought back, who then received praise from their peers for being ‘quite a fighter.’ She explained that in some cases this praise could be negatively translated into becoming a bully and using these ‘fighting skills’ to intimidate and bully other young people on the streets.

Another way of dealing with bullying that I observed and heard about from service providers and young people was the deliberate building of alliances with people on the street who young people perceived as strong. Often bullies would collect a group of followers who

felt that a friendship or proximity to the bully would be a source of protection. Emily, a service provider, explained that young people may continue to experience victimization from the bully, but may rationalize that this victimization was not as bad as what they might experience if they did not have that source of 'protection.'

Underage Prostitution

I heard about prostitution from a number of young women that I interviewed, and more directly from service providers. One service provider, Donny, explained that this is a topic that is not talked about much among the youth, and that most young people who engage in sex work try to keep it hidden. All but one of the young people who mentioned prostitution referred to 'friends they know' who engage in sex work, but did not share personal experiences. I did, however, speak with one young man who shared his personal experience from a period of homelessness when he was 16 years old. Jake (age 19) made a link between his history of sexual assault in child welfare and his eventual involvement in prostitution as a means of making money on the street.

"I feel like people are more at risk for prostitution when you get into people's background and history. The first time I was sexually assaulted, I didn't care anymore. Like it was just like, 'the worst has already been done to me, fuck it.' You know? That was my attitude back then. And knock-on-wood, I never got any diseases or anything like that; I was always playing it safe so to speak. But it wasn't my most ideal situation for cash. It was actually very demeaning...but it's a way to get money, and I'll never do that again, but you know, it's something that I learned from other people, like, 'Oh, this is what we're doing today.' And I'm like, 'Okay, you go have fun.' But at the time, that's what I was doing. I'd be copying the same thing. So a lot of monkey see monkey do, I guess, on the streets. Cause you know, there's people car hopping, carjacking people, and you see that so you get offered these doors in front of you, and you're just like, 'Okay, should I go and copy what they're doing, or do I do my own thing?' (Jake, age 19).

Jake's example highlights the complexity of the link between victimization and his choice to engage in illegal sex work and experience further exploitation as an underage prostitute. Based

on the narrative that he has presented, his history of sexual assault alone would not likely have led him to choose to participate in underage sex work. It is the combination of his past victimization, with the context of desperation and limited resources that were introduced through homelessness, and exposure to peers who were also engaged in underage prostitution.

6.2.1 Techniques of Neutralization and Offending Behaviour

In this section, I will continue to present some of the strongest connections between victimization and offending that were shared in the interviews; however, I would also like to explore how the young people rationalized their offending behaviour. As presented in the literature review, Sykes & Matza (1957) and Matza's (1964) concept of the techniques of neutralization that young people may entertain to allow them to drift from conformity has particular relevance in this research. As I reviewed my findings, several techniques of neutralization became readily apparent. The temporary aspect of homelessness may serve as a cultivator for these techniques of neutralization to be used, and young people develop a series of justifications for illegal behaviours. As young people begin to commit criminal offenses, they use many strategies to minimize their perception that they are harming others. Sykes & Matza (1957) suggest that some young people may engage in these techniques of neutralization directly and reflexively to justify behaviours while others may become so detached from mainstream society that the techniques of neutralization occur on an almost subconscious level. Since this section aims to present youth rationalizations for criminalized behaviour, it will include a number of extended quotes, allowing the reader to take in these rationalizations in the words of the young people.

The techniques of neutralization that appeared to be most common in the youth narratives were the denial of responsibility, condemnation of the condemners, and the denial of

the victim. The denial of responsibility seemed to be the overall backdrop for other rationalizations, and it was commonly linked to young people expressing that they did not have other options but to engage in criminal activity. When talking about illegal drug use and prostitution, Kristin (age 18), repeatedly asked, “What do you expect us to do?” This question represented a sense that youth homelessness is a form of social exclusion and that it introduces barriers or challenges that make offending behaviour seem necessary to survive. Many young people offered a similar perspective, expressing a sense of systemic injustice that limited their ability to make choices that would be interpreted as respectable by people in positions of authority. Ella (age 16) explained, “Well, when you don't have any money and you're starving, you steal food...and clothes too. But I only stole stuff when I needed it, not when I just wanted it. You know...I wasn't a klepto.” Ella describes her theft as a necessity but seems proud that she exercises restraint and only steals when she perceives it to be required. Pete (age 19) shared a similar rationale for stealing food. He found the decision difficult, but experienced a sense of pride in taking care of himself.

“It did get really desperate sometimes, where I was having to steal to eat because nothing was available. I felt really bad afterwards, but it's like that sort of good guilt that you get...where you know you did something wrong and you don't like it, but it was for the better...like if you didn't you would have probably been up all night reeling over cause your stomach hurts so bad cause you haven't eaten anything in a couple of days. So it's kind of like, 'Okay, good. I'm not going to do this again, it's the last time.' It's sort of that desperation mode that you go into. I think everybody who has gone homeless knows the feeling of being that desperate to do really anything to get something. Yeah, they were really hard decisions to make, and I didn't really like them, but it got me through to where I am” (Pete, age 19).

Ella and Pete rationalize their choices based on their perception that engaging in criminal behaviour was a necessary choice given the disadvantaged context of homelessness. Most of the young people presenting this form of logic also seemed to think about homelessness as a

temporary condition, and this helped mitigate their feelings of responsibility for the seriousness of criminal behaviour and also helped to neutralize their guilt, as shown in Pete expressing that when he stole food, he would tell himself that it was the last time. Pete was proud that he had done what he had perceived as necessary to survive, and believes that it has helped him to get to where he is now: housed, employed, and self-sufficient.

Some young people expressed resentment about the social exclusion they experienced, and engaged in the technique of neutralization that Sykes & Matza (1957) describe as the condemnation of condemners. In one of the youth focus groups, after discussing barriers to finding employment, Kristin's partner Paul (age 19) passionately explained why he rejects mainstream society.

"They judge us for going to drugs, and going to alcohol, yet how can they expect us to rely on anything else when we constantly get rejected for who we are when they don't even know us? Of course we're going to turn to the only shit that seems to give comfort to everybody else around us. Nobody else supports us. They reject our potential, they reject our capabilities, so we reject them. What do they expect? ... Fuck the system!" (Paul, age 19).

For some young people, the perception that they have been deliberately rejected by society can lead to a choice to reject social norms, and there seems to be a sentiment of reciprocity that underlies youth decision-making around offending behaviour. Furthermore, some young people expressed that their anger about experiencing specific acts of victimization caused them to consider harming others in similar ways. One softer example of this is Ryan's story about experiencing a theft. When Ryan (Age 22) was panhandling, he fell asleep and someone stole his cup with money in it. He was offended that someone would steal from a "homeless person". The next day, Ryan saw another "homeless person" who had fallen asleep while panhandling. Ryan briefly considered stealing his cup with money.

“One time, I was sleeping outside and I figure, 'If I'm here in my sleeping bag on Rideau Street, I may as well have a cup out and if anyone wants to throw change in, fine, but I'm not going to ask every person that walks by.' So I was lying there, and I had some change in my thing, and then I woke up and my cup was gone, and I had 10 bucks in there, and it was like, 'Fuck! Who steals from a homeless person?' And then a week later, I see a homeless person sleeping and his cup is there full of money, and obviously I didn't do it, but the thought went through my head, because it's like, 'Well fuck, someone did that to me, and it taught me a lesson. Someone should do that to him.' But it's like, I never would have thought that if it wasn't done to me. So it's like, you feel like you almost want to get even with the universe. It's like 'All this shitty stuff is happening to me, so I should be allowed to do it.' But then it's just a horrible cycle, it's like pay it forward, but horribly wrong” (Ryan, age 22).

In this narrative, Ryan is very transparent with how experiencing homelessness has caused him to wrestle with his values when decision-making. He chooses not to steal from the man who is sleeping on the streets, but acknowledges that having experienced a theft made him consider stealing from another person under the same circumstances, and one rationale that he considered was the notion of getting even with the universe; a feeling that being wronged should justify his behaviour.

Although Ryan did not steal in the previous instance, he did disclose that he does steal, but that he exercises some constraint in when he makes that choice. Ryan has a series of rationalizations that he uses to deny the injury caused by his actions, such as targeting corporations, or breaking into cars when he will not see the victim. However, these rationalizations seem fragile when confronted with the effects of victimization experienced by his girlfriend.

Ryan: I won't...I can't steal from people. Like, if I see the person, I can't steal from a person, but stealing from a store...like a corporation, I'm able to kind of rationalize why that's okay, 'Oh, they're running all these Mom & Pop shops out of business...it's all the corporate business men profiting from it.' You kind of make these excuses in your head.

Interviewer: Do you believe them?

Ryan: At the time, but you really don't put too much thought into it. I don't know...to an extent, but...I don't know. It's things like breaking into cars; you don't see the person, you don't see the victim. There's no connection there, so it's kind of easy to distance yourself from that...or you make it easier at least. But then...my girlfriend got her car broken into. She had her iPod and her GPS stolen, and it was devastating to her. But it's like, you just don't think about those types of things. Or maybe you think, 'Well someone did it to me, so...' (Ryan, age 22).

Ryan's comments about targeting corporations represent a denial of injury, reflecting a sense that corporations could afford to lose a few dollars and that the 'Mom and Pop' shops could benefit from the theft. This Robin Hood logic of stealing from the rich to help the poor effectively neutralizes the sense that his theft is causing harm, and reduces victimization to an abstract notion similar to that described by Sykes & Matza (1957).

Finally, one of the strongest examples of the link between victimization and offending, and the techniques of denial of injury and denial of the victim was presented by Dustin (age 16). Shortly after becoming homeless, Dustin was the victim of a group mugging on the street, and it dramatically altered his way of thinking about criminalized behaviour. Even though he was upset about his valuables being stolen, in reflecting on what happened, Dustin reasoned that despite the discomfort of being mugged, he had not experienced any long term negative effects from the incident. Based on this personal reaction to victimization, he decided that mugging people on the street might be a good way for him to make money too. He describes how this process unfolded in his mind.

"I could feel my head changing when I was out on the streets. When I lived with my mom, I never would have robbed anybody....never, never, never. That would never cross my mind. And it's just because when I was on the streets it happened to me, and then I thought, 'You know what? That's not so bad. They didn't stab me, you know? They took a couple bucks from me...whatever...I'll live. So, maybe...it seems like a good way to make money, so why don't I do it? Fuck.' You know?" (Dustin, age 16).

After I paraphrased what I heard from Dustin he further elaborated on his reaction to being robbed.

“I got robbed, and...like, they didn't even touch me. All they had to do was intimidate me well enough. If there's a bunch of guys with a knife, and I'm just there...there's not really anything that I can do. Like... some people, if you hold a knife to them, they'll cry. If you hold a knife to me and take my money, you didn't hurt me...you just took my money, so like...I care, but I don't really care. He didn't stab me, so why would I go home and cry about it. So that kind of...in my head, thinking that...that kind of justified it I guess. I'm not gonna stab the person, what the heck? Why would they feel that way about it? Why would they be scared? You know?” (Dustin, age 16).

Hearing Dustin express that his logic for robbing people included a technique of neutralization that denied the impact of victimization, I thought that it may be appropriate to explore this further. Earlier in the interview he explained that he only robs people who meet certain criteria, and that he maintains what could be understood as a code of innocence. He never robs people who look ‘respectable,’ or like they may have a wife and kids at home. Instead he tends to target people who are like him, assuming that other young people on the streets may be carrying drugs or up to no good. At this point in the interview, I was curious about Dustin’s logic that robbery was not harmful because he was not harmed when he was robbed, and that targeting other street youth would also minimize the harm. To learn more about this technique of neutralization, I asked a simple follow-up question, “Have you ever been in a situation where you thought, ‘Oh, I just had a big impact on somebody?’” Dustin replied with a tone that seemed to imply curiosity and reflection.

“Yeah...yeah, that's happened. That happened to me with a guy, not even...I thought it would happen with a girl. But this guy, he almost started crying. I was like, 'What the heck?' What can be going on in his head right now? What the heck? And I...like, I'm thinking maybe he thinks I'm gonna stab him or something, so I put it away [the knife]. I'm just like, 'Come on. I showed it to you, I put it away, just give me your shit please.' And he does it. He doesn't say a word. And then he's kind of like...still just standing there...like...just looking at everybody. And we're all like, 'Okay. What the hell? Get out

of here.' And then he starts booking it, and just runs away. It was so crazy. And I was like, 'Man, we scared the shit out of that guy. Holy Crap.' That was like...there's a couple people who I remember, and other people, I could see them at the bus stop and never even remember that I robbed them. But there are people that I definitely remember...for sure" (Dustin, age 16).

Dustin's techniques of neutralization to deny injury, and deny the victim seemed more strongly entrenched than they were for Ryan, and this opportunity to consider the possible impacts of victimization seemed to puzzle him rather than eliciting the type of reflective discomfort shown by Ryan. In both of these cases, and many of the others presented in this chapter, the experiences of victimization on the street are combined with the realities of disadvantage presented by homelessness to create conditions of possibility for engaging in criminalized behaviours. For many young people, the types of criminalized behaviours that they engage in are also specifically shaped by related experiences of victimization. However, this discussion has attempted to explore the perceptions and rationalizations entertained by young people in making decisions around these behaviours and many of the case studies have shown that young people wrestle with their values and engage in a series of personal negotiations that attempt to balance the idea of the people they want to become with the realities of homelessness. While the concept of neutralization has been applied to offending behaviour, it could also be applied to other decisions that young people make when they are homeless, such as decisions around prostitution, drug use and even the treatment of peers on the street. The struggles highlighted in this chapter demonstrate the importance of human agency, recognizing that individual actors, although situated within broader structures of disadvantage, still retain the capacity to interpret their circumstances and make choices about how to respond.

6.3 Interactions with the Police

Previous research on youth homelessness and interactions with the police demonstrates that young people on the street will have more interaction with police officers for a number of reasons: lack of access to private space, the use of social profiling, the stigmatization reinforced by business owners who do not want youth loitering, and youth involvement in criminal activity, most notably the sale and exchange of criminalized and prescription drugs (Avila et al., 2009; Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Gaetz, 2002; Hagan & McCarthy, 1997). Furthermore, young people have both positive and negative interactions with police officers (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010; Gaetz, 2002; Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2010).

In this study, I asked the general question, 'Can you tell me about any interactions that you have had with the police while you have been homeless?' While, a few young people indicated that they had not really had many interactions with the police, and some also mentioned positive interactions, the majority spoke very negatively about police interactions. Young people expressed a tremendous amount of anxiety about their interactions with police. They reported feeling intimidated, shaking, not trusting authority, being embarrassed in front of their peers by the way that police treated them, experiencing threats of physical harm from police officers, being hurt physically by the use of force, and having their experiences of victimization that they reported to police dismissed by the officers.

Interactions with Police that Young People Perceived Positively

In all of my interviews and focus groups with young people, only six young people mentioned positive interactions with police officers. Ella (age 16) explained that her contact with police began early in her life when she would run away from home and get picked up downtown and returned home. She said that the police started to know her and that she would

often be stopped when she was downtown for police to check on her. Shortly after she became homeless at 16, Ella was stopped by the police while she was walking with a group of people that she did not know well.

“I was out late once, and I look young for my age, so they thought I was like 14...And I was with some people that looked kind of sketchy I guess, and one of them, turns out he was like a...a pimp. Like he had a record in Montreal...had just finished his trial. He was 30 years old. He told me he was 20...cause he looked young. So...I guess I was lucky to get stopped that day, and they brought me to my Grandma's. It was so embarrassing. (Ella, age 16).

In this case, Ella felt like the police had protected her from being exploited by the 30 year old pimp. In the interview, she describes a number of times when people had taken advantage of her by providing her with false information about themselves.

When Patrice (age 23) was homeless in London, England, he got to know several police officers who worked the area where he was sleeping. He reported that they would occasionally wake him up with tea or coffee, and that they had very pleasant conversations together. He also described how the police did not often interfere with people who were openly selling or buying illicit drugs in the Piccadilly Circus, which he found quite surprising. His positive experiences with police in London were contrasted with two other incidents. The first was a description of frequent immigration police sweeps where people suspected of being illegal immigrants were arrested from the streets and from homeless shelters en masse and detained for several days before being released. He also described how the police cleared out the peaceful demonstrations that had been camped outside of the British Parliament for over 10 years. He had stayed on the site for 14 days before it was cleared out.

Jean-Olivier (age 20) had a positive interaction with one Montreal police officer when he was trying to run away from Ottawa to the Maritimes. Jean-Olivier had been flagged as being at high risk for suicide by a youth serving agency in Ottawa and the Ottawa police were actively looking for him. The police were able to track Jean-Olivier's phone, and they sent a communiqué to the Montreal police department when they learned that he had taken a bus route with a connection in Montreal. Before Jean-Olivier was able to board his bus to the Maritimes, a Montreal police officer stopped him at the bus station.

“I was in Montreal, and just before my bus comes, the police show up. And they're like, 'Hey Jean-Olivier.' I had green hair, and it was a little obvious. I don't blend in. And they're like, 'Can you come with us?' And I was like, 'Okay.' And I was very compliant...I didn't give them any trouble. And they're like, 'So what's going on?' And I'm like, 'Well, I'm not really sure what's going on. I'm guessing the Ottawa police called you.' And they're like, 'Yes, they did.' And I'm like, 'I'm not really sure why they're looking for me. I think...they think I'm high risk, they think I'm a suicide risk.' And he's like, 'They think you're a suicide risk?' And I'm like, 'yeah.' And he's like, 'Really?' And I'm like, 'Yeah, I don't really know why.' And he's like, 'Oh.' And eventually, they let me go” (Jean-Olivier, age 20).

Jean-Olivier reported that the officers were relaxed and fun, and that they spent time joking, while waiting to hear from the Ottawa police department about whether Jean-Olivier would have to be hospitalized. While Jean-Olivier had a fun interaction with the police, he was also actively managing what information he chose to share with the officers. He intentionally deflected any discussion of his mental health status. He explains,

“I didn't really want to talk about the fact that I was running away, and that the night before I was going to kill myself and then that day I didn't feel like it anymore. Like...I didn't want to talk about that, cause then they wouldn't have let me go. I didn't want to go to the hospital, I really didn't” (Jean-Olivier, age 20).

Three young men briefly provided examples of other positive interaction they had with the police. Max (age 20) expressed his positive regard for officers who patrol the areas around the adult shelters. He felt that the police presence likely reduces the number of stabbings and shootings and creates a safer environment. After years of negative interactions with police, Aaron (age 23) has finally been able to secure employment in the construction industry. Since he is well known to the police officers downtown, when he leaves his downtown worksite, he takes pride in talking to the officers about his current construction work. Finally, Vince (age 20), admits that he doesn't remember many of his interactions with the police because of his alcohol addiction; he is arrested frequently and has spent many nights in the 'drunk tank.' Vince shared about a time when a police officer was kind enough to drive him back to where he was sleeping outside after a night spent at the city jail.

While Pete (age 18) did not have any negative experiences with the police, he credits himself with being able to successfully manage his interactions with officers. His statement acknowledges that many young people do have trouble with officers, and that the way to avoid trouble is through polite communication and not offering any information.

"I was one of the smarter kids that kind of just kept their mouths shut...and then when I was asked something, I would just say, "Yes sir' or 'No sir', that sort of thing. But...snitching to the cops, I didn't do that because you know, you usually get beat up for it or worse...so it was better to just keep my mouth shut and not do anything, and cops didn't really bother me at all" (Pete, age 18).

Jake (age 19), also gives himself credit for obtaining help from the police. After he was kicked out of his parents' home on Christmas eve following a violent altercation, the police threw his belongings out the front door and left him on the front steps. However, after he walked to his girlfriend's house and called the Victim Crisis Unit at the police station, the same

car that had dealt with Jake earlier in the night was dispatched with instructions to drive him to the shelter.

Interactions with the Police that Young People Perceived Negatively

Eighteen out of 24 young people I interviewed (75%) mentioned having negative interactions with police. Hagan & McCarthy (1996) wrote that young people who have been abused by people in positions of authority may be especially sensitive to mistreatment by police officers. Jay has trouble communicating with police officers because he has a difficult time relating to people in positions of authority. He explained that he starts to shake and his feelings of intimidation are interpreted by police as a sign of dishonesty or guilt.

“I've always known my rights, I've always known what to do, what to say. It's just...I've been treated wrongly because when I deal with the police I start to shake...just cause I don't like dealing with authority. Like I don't mind store authority or security or anything like that, but as soon as I deal with actual shit that I can go to fuckin' jail for, I don't like it...I don't like it at all. So I start to shake, they don't believe me, and I tell them this, and they still don't believe me. They think I'm just bullshitting” (Jay, 17, Male).

Use of Force and Uttering Threats

Jay shared a story about a specific incident where he was threatened by a police officer. He indicated that he would never forget the name of the police officer. He still remembered it clearly, and provided the name of the officer.

“I had a gram on me, the cop tried to arrest me, and I gave him three fake names...three fake names. And he's like, ‘You're gonna...fuckin' send me a letter within’...I still remember the cop's name off by heart, ‘You're gonna send me a letter within a week, or I'm gonna find you, no wait...I don't even need to find you, I'm gonna see you around here and I'm gonna fuckin' beat the shit out of you.’ [Name of officer removed]. Remember that fuckin' name till I die. Tall black cop...[Name of officer removed]. Fuck man” (Jay, age 17).

When I conducted the feedback group with young people to share the findings from my research, young people were very vocal about mistreatment from police officers. One young woman reported that she had been ‘tasered’ when a police officer found her sleeping in a parking garage. She was upset about the incident and claims that she told the officer that she would file an official complaint. She reports that the officer questioned, “Who are they going to believe: A police officer or a dirty street kid?” She decided not to file an official complaint about the incident.

Young people who had experienced being searched in public, or being arrested in front of their peers frequently reported feeling embarrassed. This seemed to be connected to the use of force by police officers. When a young person felt unsafe because of a police intervention and began to fight back, only to be physically subdued by officers in front of their peers, their narratives describe a loss of power that was experienced as profoundly embarrassing. Young people reported being concerned with how others perceived them following the intervention. Chad is a relatively short, 17 year old with gang-related tattoos on his neck. He reported that his tattoos are an identifier and that he is stopped and searched by police constantly. His description of one police search describes his efforts to resist, the use of force by police officers, and his embarrassment in front of his peers.

“It's embarrassing when they search you like they do...they're really rough...like they smash you around and shit, and you're just like, 'Fuck man, like leave me alone.' When you get arrested...they don't pull you aside; they do it in the middle of the street... smack ...pull your pockets out, slam you against the wall...both hands on the wall, and then they yell at you. They're angry too, they're like, 'Keep your fucking hands on the wall! Don't move! Stop resisting!' And you're like, 'What the hell? I'm standing here.' Like...I'm sorry, you're shaking me around, I'm gonna be like, 'Yo, what the hell are you doing, you know? You're coming at me from behind. I'm kind of gonna sketch here.' I don't know, they're just like...aggressive and rude...the whole time. And like...they make a scene about it so everyone looks at you, and you're just like, ‘Man...everyone thinks I'm a piece of shit now’” (Chad, male).

In this story, Chad rationalizes his resistance to the police with the phrase, 'I'm kind of gonna sketch here,' indicating that he found the experience frightening. Later in the interview, Chad also expressed disappointment that the police may detain a young person for one night, without considering that this may cause the young person to miss curfew and lose their bed at the youth shelter.

Ezra (age 18), who has FASD, was laughing when he told me about the time he unknowingly tried to break into an undercover police car to steal a phone. As he shared his story, like Chad, he was upset by the degree of force used by the officer and how the physical force occurred in front of his peers.

“I got tackled to the ground like no tomorrow, like...this guy was crazy. He just like gets out of his car...well first of all he slams me with his door, and I get like knocked over, you know? So I was just like, 'What the hell!', and then like I was gonna get ready to punch him in the face. And he gets out and starts tackling me. He's like, 'I'm a cop.' And I was like, 'Bad idea to hit him', and so I just like gave up, and he just pinned me down. Everybody was looking at me, and I was just like, 'what are you all looking at?'” (Ezra, age 18).

Feeling Targeted by Police because of Homelessness

Service providers and young people identified that sometimes young people who are homeless may be targeted by police officers. This aligns with the findings of an inquiry by the Quebec Commission on Human Rights and the Rights of the Child into the discriminatory practice of social profiling (Avila, Campbell & Eid, 2009). In a focus group with Service Providers at a youth shelter, Bob described “harassment from police” as one of the challenges of homelessness, “Just because they live in a shelter, they're all under this negative, 'Do you do drugs? Do you sell drugs? I'll stop you every time I see you.' They've got a radar for them

almost...which is unfortunate.” Chad (age 17) expresses a similar sentiment, “With cops, they treat you like shit. If they know you're a street kid...automatically cops are all over you.”

Young people also expressed anger over how they perceived officers treating others who were homeless. Talking about older homeless men around the adult shelters, Chad (age 17) says, “They harass crack heads like no tomorrow...which sucks cause you're trying to make money and cops are harassing some poor bastard, and you're like, 'Man, give this guy a break, you know? He's smoking crack and eating out of a garbage. Like...why are you busting him?'” Paul (age 19) also felt like police treat young people who are homeless in a discriminatory manner.

“The cops are ruder to homeless people than needed... If we're standing outside in front of McDonald's having a smoke and talking, we're automatically selling drugs... automatically...that's what the cops think. And they'll charge us for loitering, they'll charge us for possession if we have even our own personal shit that we smoke ourselves. And they just...like...try to get us thrown in jail as fast as they can...that's what it's like...in my eyes. Because a lot of my friends have been getting put in jail because of what they do to help themselves survive” (Paul, age 19).

Chad (age 17) also spoke about the use of ‘ticketing’ in a discriminatory fashion.

“So let's say I'm kickin' in front of McDonald's and I see cops...automatically, if I don't leave, I'm going to be getting ticketed...just cause I don't look like someone who has money. So it's automatic, 'Oh what? You're a street kid and you live at young men's? Here's a \$65 ticket.' There's a lot of undercovers who give around tickets, like, 'Oh, you're within 3 meters of a bus shelter, you're supposed to be 9 metres. Here's a \$65 ticket.' Cause they ask you where do you live first, right? They take down all of your information, 'Oh, the shelter? Awesome. Let's fuck you over nicely.’” (Chad, age 17).

Chad and Paul were the most outspoken on these issues in the individual interviews; however, the use of ticketing and the perception of police targeting of homeless youth was a sentiment that

was widely shared in both youth focus groups and the feedback group with young people. In the focus group with young women, three young people reported that they had been “red-zoned” from Rideau street, meaning that they were not allowed to access the street, and that they believed a breach could result in their arrest. The police use of “red-zoning” to ban youth from public space is an interesting area for future research.

Chad (age 17) expressed concern that police officers may lack understanding about the issues surrounding youth homelessness and that the well-being of young people may be compromised by a police objective of keeping young people off the streets. He is also frustrated that he is often caught up in the clash between the mandate of public health initiatives that provide free needle exchange services, and the police who conduct drug enforcement.

“If you're a street kid, they make it seem like it's all your fault that you're on the street...I've seen kids get arrested for being runaways, but...there's obviously a reason they don't want to go back to where they came from. They just haul you back there. They don't really care for you personally; they just want you off the street, that's it. So charges, restrictions, anything they can do to keep you bound up...they're not very lenient with anything. So let's say I get caught with a needle in my pocket? Paraphernalia charge...even though you have an unopened needle in your pocket, you're getting arrested if they find it. You're like, 'Man! I get these from the shelter so I don't get AIDS! (Chad, age 17).

It is tempting at this point to return to the techniques of neutralization presented by Sykes & Matza (1957) to explore the technique of condemning the condemners where young people may shift attention away from their own law-breaking behaviour and instead focus on the faults of their condemners: in this case the police. In fact, Sykes and Matza (1957) explicitly use the example of police, saying that young people may perceive the police as corrupt, stupid or brutal as a way of minimizing their responsibility for law breaking. While the negative sentiments of young people towards the police may be understood in this light, it would be a mistake to use

this as the full framework for analyzing police interactions with young people who are homeless. Given the perceptions of young people about being unduly targeted, experiencing threats and use of force, it would appear that some of the resentment young people feel towards law enforcement officers is not a projection of their own guilt, but rather a profound disappointment with those in society who are meant to respond to victimization, ensure public safety and keep young people from harm.

Young people may report feeling targeted by police, but several of the young men I spoke with also discussed how they manage interactions with police by watching for uniformed officers and trying to detect undercover officers on the street. Jay (age 17) proudly stated that he could “spot a Narc from two miles away²⁰.” Marshall (age 17) watches for undercover officers on the street. He explained, “When you're homeless and you have all this time, you kind of investigate everything that's going on, and you know that if some guy holding a Timmy's cup is walking up and down the street every two minutes to go to a white car parked with a cop in it...he's an undercover.” And speaking about cars driven by undercover officers, Ezra (age 18) remarked, “Undercovers are actually really easy to spot. It's the tinted windows, the rims, the wheel tread, the car, or the lights...I mean in the dashboard and the rear window...or the antennas. That's how you usually tell if it's an undercover; they even drive rusty cars sometimes.” Young people resist police targeting by trying to be aware of their surroundings, watching for police officers, and keeping their distance whenever possible.

Interactions with the Police because of Mental Health

Three young people spoke directly about police involvement because of mental illness. Marshall (age 17), reported that he is frequently taken to the hospital by police officers because

²⁰ Narc, is a slang term referring to a Drug Enforcement Officer.

of mental health crises. Aaron (age 23), who suffers with Schizophrenia, also reported that he has been taken to the hospital by police. However, Aaron also has an extensive criminal history, and many of his interactions with the police have been exacerbated by his mental illness. He explains,

“If I was on the streets, I'd always be paranoid about someone either comin' to try and fight me, or if anything like the cops showing up for no reason trying to harass me, even though I wasn't doing something wrong. It's kind of like...'Okay, they're coming for me...Why? I don't know, but they're coming for me', you know what I mean? Being schizophrenic on top of that kind of didn't help. But like...a lot of times when the cops would show up, they'd be like, 'why do you look so stressed if you're not doing anything?' I'm like, 'I don't know. It's just you guys!'" (Aaron, age 23).

Aaron's girlfriend, June (age 18), elaborated that often the police would not understand Aaron's behaviour, especially when he was off his medication. She explained that they would often think that he was faking unusual behaviours, and that she would have to advocate on his behalf with the officers.

Jean-Olivier (age 20) has an extensive history of mental illness and hospitalization. He is frequently sent to the hospital against his will by social service providers, shelter staff, and by his community college. At school, Jean-Olivier had so many mental health crises involving campus security that the college eventually decided they were not equipped to deal with him, and that whenever there were challenges with Jean-Olivier's mental health, local police would escort him to the hospital. This became a weekly occurrence. Jean-Olivier shared a specific story where he was taken by police against his will. In the altercation that took place, he describes how he was pinned to the door by a large officer, while the other officer threatened that if he didn't comply, more force would be applied. Eventually he was strapped into a chair in front of his peers, and taken to the hospital.

“And this one time that I remember very very vividly...I'm talking to this police officer. And he's telling me, 'Your pupils are not the same size.' I didn't even know what that meant. And he's like, 'Are you on something? Have you taken an overdose?' And I'm like, 'I really haven't.' And obviously they didn't believe me because another time I had, and I had been lying to them. And he's like, 'You're coming with us to the hospital.' And I was like, 'No I'm not. I don't want to!' But he's like, 'If you don't agree to go with us, we're going to make you.' And I was like, 'Fuck you!' So [the police] jump up and they grab my arms, and they put them behind my back, and they handcuff me. And I start struggling, and I'm like, 'Let go of me! I'm not going! I don't need to go! I haven't taken anything.' And I'm freaking out, and I'm screaming. And they're like...carrying me out of the room. And I'm like, 'Fuck you, you pig!' And he...pins my leg against the doorway, and he's hurting me...and he's really hurting me. And the girl [says], 'If you keep struggling, and if you give us any shit, he's really big and he could hurt you easily.' That's what she said to me. And I was like....wow, I'm an underweight, unwell 19 year old kid, and you have this 6 ft tall...big police officer, and you're threatening me with that? And then they got this weird chair thing...like you see in prison, when they like strip the person down and then they...strap one foot, and then they strap the other foot, and then they strap your legs, and then they strap your arms, and then you just can't fuckin' move. And that was at my school...and they wheeled me away and they took me to the hospital. It took me a long time to get over that. Like...all these people that I knew...all my teachers were there, and they saw the whole thing” (Jean-Olivier, age 20).²¹

During the time of the incident, Jean-Olivier's psychiatrist was experimenting with multiple medications to try and stabilize his health. Jean-Olivier still vividly remembers the incident and the bruising he experienced. He attempted to file a complaint more than 6 months later, but was told that he could not since complaints are no longer accepted after 6 months. He tried to explain that as a result of ongoing mental health issues, his medication had been changing rapidly over that period in an attempt to stabilize him, and he had not been in the frame of mind to report the incident. His complaint was never accepted or processed. Jean-Olivier expressed anger over how the mental health system functions, and how he is frequently sent to the hospital

²¹ It should be noted that Jean-Olivier is a transgender male, and at the time of this intervention, Jean-Olivier still self-identified as female.

against his will, where he has to wait for hours until a doctor comes and has a short conversation and then sends him home.

“And that's it. There's no discussion, there's nothing. And it's always been like that my whole life...That's how it is every single time I go. It's a big waste of fucking time...it stresses me out and it puts me in a situation where I'm being demeaned because the police officers are making decisions, and I'm telling them 'No.' And then psychiatrists and all these people are like, 'Okay, so why are you sad?'" (Jean-Olivier, age 20).

Jean-Olivier expresses anger with his loss of power in mental health interventions and how intrusive they are on his life. Since he is hospitalized multiple times every week by service providers from different institutions, much of his week is spent in hospital waiting rooms, counting down the hours until he can have a two minute conversation with whichever mental health professional is on duty that day. In the incident he described, it appears that his anger is accentuated by the fact that he was not having a mental health crisis at the time of the intervention. The police and college had become so accustomed to sending him to the hospital that they did not conduct a thorough assessment of whether hospitalization was needed. Although, Jean-Olivier concedes that he had previously lied to the police about taking an overdose of medication. He was also upset that the police used so much physical force in apprehending him.

Police Interactions with Young People who Identify as Transgender

Three of the young people I spoke with who identify as transgender had experienced negative interactions with police officers that intersected with their gender identity. In all three cases, the young people felt like the police were not sensitive to their gender. I have already described Jean-Olivier's altercation with police over mental health hospitalization.

Paul (age 19), a young person who identifies as a transgender male, reported that the officers he interacted with refused to acknowledge him as male or to use his chosen male name, but instead made a point of using his female name repeatedly. This is the account of the incident provided by Paul's girlfriend, Kristin (age 18).

“After a while you get paranoid of the cops. My boyfriend is transgender...he's actually a woman, and...we were downtown. He had the intentions of buying weed....his money was in his wallet. He had not bought weed yet. He had no drug paraphernalia of any sort. And a cop stopped him, an undercover...found out his real name was [Linda]...and was making comments about me to him...and saying things like he's a freak...because of his choice, and stuff like that. Calling him 'she', when he prefers not to be called that. They're completely disrespectful...cause to them we're fuckin' scum, you know? And we're just kids trying to get out of here” (Kristin, age 18).

Finally, Thomas (age 19), who at the time identified as a transgender female, was sexually assaulted one day on the street.²² He describes how he was groped by a stranger on the street one night when dressed in women's clothing. When he called the police, they did not take his complaint seriously, and told him that the behaviour should be expected given how he was dressed. Thomas followed up on the incident by filing a complaint with the police and at city hall. The officers involved were reprimanded, and Thomas indicated that they had lost their positions with the Ottawa Police Service as a result.

“One time I was walking down the street... and a guy just touched my...how can I say? My bump. So I got mad about that. I was dressing as a girl, but that doesn't mean anything. I called the police. And then when they saw me, they just told me, 'Why should you ask about this? Look how you're dressing.' I got mad, really, and I told him 'I can dress however I want, but that doesn't mean you can touch me.' I took the names, I took the numbers of the car, I took the number of the officers, and then I went to the police office, and I went to City Hall. I talked about that. And these two guys, supposed

²² In the demographic portion of the interview, Thomas chose to define his gender as “Thomas.” At one point in his past, he did identify as a transgender female and was seeking sex reassignment surgery but was advised against it by his physician because of a health condition. In daily life, Thomas now reluctantly identifies as a gay male, but given the choice to self-identify, he preferred not to be attached to a male or female gender identity. Thomas now identifies as a queer male, and will be referred to as male in the description of events.

to be officers of the community, they were there, and they lost their jobs for that. I didn't do it on purpose, or to get them to lose their jobs. I did it because I need to be respected. I'm not disrespectful with anybody. And my Grandpa used to tell me, 'if you want everybody to respect you, you have to respect everybody.' I wasn't doing anything wrong, and they didn't respect me. And I have a voice” (Thomas, 19).

These later incidents show agency and resistance on the parts of the young people involved.

Some of them actively refuse to accept behaviour that they perceive to be unjust, while others may simply carry resentment that will likely colour future interactions with the police. Four of the young people discussed either actively filing complaints against police misconduct, or seeking information for the purposes of filing a complaint.

6.4 Conclusion: Youth Experiences of Adversity

Navigating homelessness is challenging, and young people who are homeless confront multiple levels of adversity. They are frequently victimized on the streets, and this victimization is rarely addressed by services or the legal system. Many young people choose to engage in criminalized behaviours and must carefully weigh these choices in the context of their poverty and determination to survive with limited resources. Young people who are homeless are further targeted by law enforcement officers, and only occasionally challenge abuses of power that they experience. Sadly, some young people die on the streets, and others are unable to transition off the streets, becoming homeless adults. Even so, the majority are able to transition out of homelessness. Jeff Karabanow (2004) writes, “Negative experiences prompt occasions for rethinking the viability of street life, and alternative options like the possibility of returning home, or entering a shelter are weighed.” This chapter has explored the context of adversity experienced by young people who are homeless; it has validated previous research on the high levels of victimization and offending that are part of life on the street.

This chapter has also emphasized the perceptions of young people as they interpret adversity, and it has shown the relevance of human agency in understanding how young people make different choices in similar situations based on their interpretations. It has also presented a more active view of how some young people manage and resist police interventions, and even file official complaints when their rights are violated. Finally, it has also highlighted notable interactions between police and young people who identify as transgender, as well as the police practice of red-zoning to ban young people who are homeless from accessing certain public spaces. The next chapter will begin to explore how young people are able to grow through these difficult experiences, unpacking the strengths and resources that young people find helpful in overcoming obstacles. Table 6.0 provides a summary of the findings for this chapter.

TABLE 6.0 Adversity: Summary of Findings

Theme	Literature	Findings	Theory
Victimization	(Aubry et al., 2003) (Ballintyne, 1999) (Baron, 2003) (Bassuk, Perloff, & Dawson, 2001) (D'Ercole & Streuning, 1990) (Fournier et al., 2009) (Gaetz, 2004) (Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2010) (Jasinski et al., 2010) (Herman et al., 1997) (Novac et al., 2006) (Roy et al., 2004) (Stermac & Paradis, 2001) (Tanner & Wortley, 2002) (Wachholz, 2005) (Whitbeck, Hoyt & Ackley, 1997)	• Victimization was a common experience, including: theft, assault, assault with a weapon, and sexual assault • Some young people choose homelessness to escape victimization and are surprised that they are further victimized on the street • Victimization was rarely reported to police • Violent victimization is more pronounced for those involved in selling drugs • Young people try to manage their risk of victimization by exercising caution about who they trust, or ally with those who appear tough.	Symbolic Interactionism Human Agency Negotiation
Links between Victimization and Offending	(Aubry et al., 2003) (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010) (Bright & O'Grady, 2002) (Eberle et al., 2001) (Gowan, 2002) (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) (Lloyd-Smith et al., 2001) (Matza, 1964) (Novac et al., 2006) (Sykes & Matza, 1957) (Tanner & Wortley, 2002)	• Young people interpret and respond to victimization differently • Experiencing victimization introduces the possibility of victimizing others in a manner • Techniques of neutralization help young people to drift into delinquency	Techniques of Neutralization Symbolic Interactionism Human Agency
Interactions with Police	(Avila, Campbell & Eid, 2009) (Barnaby, Penn & Erickson, 2010) (Bellot, Chesnay & Royer, 2007) (Brasard & Cousineau, 2000) (Chesnay, Bellot & Sylvestre, 2013) (Gaetz, 2002) (Gaetz, O'Grady & Buccieri, 2010) (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) (Novac et al., 2006) (O'Grady, Gaetz & Buccieri, 2011) (Wachholz, 2005)	• Some positive interactions with police reported • Some feel that they are able to manage interactions with police effectively • Young people are sensitive to the use of force and abuse of power from police • Police "red-zone" youth to ban from public spaces • Notable interactions with young people who identify as transgender • Conflicts exist between public health and policing agendas • Concern about use of police in mental health interventions • Young People use formal complaint mechanisms	Human Agency Negotiation

“It made me who I am. You can't deny that. And if I hadn't been homeless, things would have been different. Whether it would have been better or worse, I don't know. It would have just been completely different” (Jean-Olivier, age 20).

7.0 ‘What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger’: Positive adaptation in adversity

After conducting my pilot interviews with young people, one theme that emerged is that experiencing homelessness can bring about a large number of personal changes. I decided to integrate this into my interview guide with the simple question, “I’ve been hearing from other young people that experiencing homelessness can change you. Is this true for you?” Virtually every time I asked the question, I received a resounding and almost knowing “Yes,” as if there was some sense of shared experience that young people gathered through homelessness. The responses to this question surprised me because the young people described most of the changes as positive. Some young people did mention changes that they perceived as negative, such as becoming more “pissy” (Dustin, age 16), or further involvement in drugs and criminal behaviour, which was a relatively common experience as described in the previous chapter. However, and somewhat surprisingly, almost all of the young people I interviewed volunteered the perspective that homelessness had triggered some degree of personal growth.

Literature on youth homelessness frequently highlights the risk factors and high social costs of homelessness; however, like any time of personal crisis, homelessness has the potential to bring out the worst and the best in people. Young people living on the street may begin to develop new strengths that relate to managing their environment or overall life maturing, and these valuable resources help them navigate and negotiate their surroundings, and often become the building blocks to exiting the streets. These positive developments have begun to be

captured by researchers, but there is room for the development of a more strength-based research agenda [See Bender et al., 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Lanekau et al., 2005].

Understanding how young people develop strengths through their experiences of homelessness is central to understanding the process of resilience. This chapter will explore youth and service provider perceptions about what strengths young people develop on the streets and how they manage to grow despite facing adversity. Service providers and young people in this study seemed to believe that young people with more internal and external resources tend to navigate out of homelessness faster than those without as many apparent internal and external resources; but they also acknowledged that homelessness provides a steep learning curve, during which young people are constantly trying new things, facing new challenges, and learning from the outcomes. In the words of Max (age 20), and Aaron (age 23), “What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”

7.1 Reshaping Identity

One pattern that emerged in the discussion of personal change was the notion that experiencing homelessness and a disconnect from pre-existing social networks allowed some young people to experiment with their personal identity or to recreate themselves. Pete (age 18) described himself as very shy and withdrawn prior to becoming homeless. He explained that his introverted nature had caused him to be bullied in school. During his first night of homelessness, he made a calculated decision to change aspects of his personality that didn’t seem to be working for him.

“And then...[I’m] homeless, and I kind of just changed my ways of doing things overnight. So rather than being that sort of...secluded, cocooned person, I was more...you know...the one that's always out there, just doing stuff and having fun all the time, and trying to keep a positive outlook on everything...rather than being depressed all the time...cause making friends wasn't my forte, and interacting with people wasn't my thing, so it was kind of a new...sort of test ground for me. ...I thought for a little bit, and then decided, 'What the hell...why not try it?' And then eventually, I just started realizing, you know like...okay this actually does work, and I'm actually making some decent friends, and people actually like me for what I am. So I was just like, 'Alright, let's do this instead.' I just felt like I had actually let what was inside...you know...come out, and...you know...just be myself, and be energetic, and I actually enjoy life rather than sit in a corner and hate it...so a lot of stuff changed, and I actually like it, and I still feel that it's me...cause the person that I was I don't think...wasn't me, I think it was just like an outer shell that I had to break out of” (Pete, age 18).

Pete described how “everything changed” including the way that he dressed, and the music that he listened to. He says that he started wearing brighter clothes that fit him and that made him feel like he looked good, and he started listening to more upbeat and inspiring music. Pete believes that the positive changes he has experienced in his life and his ‘breaking out of the inner shell’ were accomplished as he adapted to becoming homeless.

Sexual Identity

A few other young people had a similar experience in relation to their sexual identity, where they had repressed who they felt they were when they were living in their family home and then once they were on the street, felt like they had the freedom to experiment or try to discover who it was that they were without the fear of judgement from peers and family who knew them. They had space to recreate their identity and present themselves to people as if that was who they always were. I interviewed five young people who were transitioning in their gender. Jean-Olivier (age 20), first came out as a lesbian, and later came out as a transgender male after learning more about sexuality through a sexual health education seminar. Thomas (age 19) experimented with life as a transgender female, moving from the Young Men’s to the

young Women's Shelter, but following some disappointing experiences, decided to return for now to identifying as a gay male, or gender queer. Syrus (age 21) described his gender as "fluid," recognizing that his self-identity seems to be male but could change in the future. For Syrus, leaving his strict middle-eastern family provided him with the opportunity to explore how to express his sexuality. He explained that at first he wore "flamboyant" clothing, but has since chosen to dress a little more conservatively as a sign of respect when he was accepted by his family and able to move back home.

Death and Self-Reflection

In his research on exiting homelessness, Jeff Karabanow (2010), affirms that many young people who are homeless witness the death of friends on the streets, and that this may become a pivotal moment in their trajectories. This was also true for several of the young people I interviewed, and it was relatively common for young people to mention a peer who had died on the street. Three young people explicitly mentioned in their interview that they had witnessed the death of a friend. For Chad (age 17), who grew up involved in gang violence before moving to Ottawa where he became homeless, the early loss of three of his closest friends to violence before he turned sixteen provides motivation to make the most of his life. "I think it's another thing the streets taught me, like...I have to live my life for my friends that died... cause they didn't get the chance...like, their turn at life got ended before it even begun." Similarly, Kristin (age 18) found that witnessing the death of a close friend from an overdose had become a powerful motivator to leave the streets, but explained that it is challenging to feel motivated to change and to remain surrounded by peers who use drugs and a lifestyle where drugs are constantly accessible.

“I had a friend die in my arms. She overdosed. She tore her skin to pieces. Like...that's why I'm trying to be sober, but you know...what else do you turn to when you have no other comforts? And what's the easiest accessible comfort when you're on the streets? Weed...alcohol...worse. You know?” (Kristin, age 18).

For young people who are homeless, traumatic experiences on the street provide opportunities for reflection, and may motivate some to consider exiting street life. However, many of the obstacles can remain that can be discouraging for a young person choosing to exit homelessness, and that may delay the process.

7.2 Visible Strengths

Based on Brownlee and Rawana's (2008) notion that strengths are 'developed competencies and characteristics', it is possible that adversity may provide a training environment for existing strengths to be practiced and further developed. A number of distinct visible strengths were identified in this research by young people and service providers, which I have grouped into the following categories: street smarts, life skills and attitudes.

7.2.1 Street Smarts

It was common for young people and service providers to refer to “street smarts” as one of the things that young people developed because of homelessness. This expression seems to be common in the homelessness sector since it is used frequently by people with lived experience, by service providers, and by academics [See Bender et al., 2007; Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Lanekau et al., 2005]. Since this term is not easily defined, in my analysis I reviewed the common attributes that were described as “street smarts” by people in this study and identified the following themes:

- “Smartening up”
- Networking and using technology
- Caution and observing others
- “Avoiding drama”
- Loyalty and protecting peers
- Being resourceful
- Surpressing values

“Smartening Up”

Jay (age 17) first experienced homelessness at the age of 14 after a series of family conflicts and out-of-home group home placements. He described himself as a naïve kid out on the streets at the beginning. He was scared and didn’t know where to go. However, the time that he has spent on the streets over the past several years has helped him to develop “street smarts” and to be motivated to take steps to sort out his life, such as working towards completing high school.

“But you do...it changes you, you become a lot smarter. You're not an idiot. If you left home an idiot, you're going to go back home a fuckin'...a smart smart mother fucker, like...you're gonna know like what you did...what you did to end up homeless was fucking stupid. And like you're fuckin'...you're young, you shouldn't be homeless at this age, like you should be doing the right stuff to fuckin'...get your life done. I used to be an off the wall little fuckin' maniac. Now...now I'm calm, I've got actual friends, I've got people that care about me, and I know that. I didn't know that when I was younger, and now I do. So I...it might not even be actually being homeless, it could just be aging...you're not a fuckin' stupid little child anymore, but...it could be...I'm pretty sure it is being homeless man, cause I know that I wouldn't be like this right now if I wasn't homeless at some point.” (Jay, age 17)

In this personal reflection, Jay considered whether the changes that he has experienced in his life are related to aging or homelessness, and chooses to believe that he has matured because of homelessness rather than a simple maturing that comes from age. He reflects on what he has learned, indicating his belief that he is not alone and that people care for him. This was further expanded in his discussion of getting to know people because of homelessness. Jake (age 19),

and Aaron (age 23), also shared the perspective that homelessness had helped them to “smarten up”, with Jake sharing that he learned to consider his choices more carefully, and Aaron explaining that he has calmed down and can now make plans to proactively create the type of future that he wants for his life.

Networking and Using Technology

Young people on the streets learn about street life and community resources from talking with other young people who are homeless. In the chapter where I described how young people first become homeless, one common experience was that young people would often spend their first night or first week sleeping outside until they met other young people who would let them know about different drop-in programs, or shelters. This word-of-mouth referral to different resources is important for young people to obtain information, since some who have just become homeless do not have access to the internet to search for information until they begin to access services. Also, because young people are cautious of trusting people, including service providers, they may be more willing to access the services available when they hear other young people speak about them positively.

Technology also plays an important role in street life and networking. Many of the young people that I met carry cellphones, and the drop-in centre where I conducted my research has computers equipped with internet access that are accessible for clients. While young people who are housed may use social networking technology for recreation or pleasure, young people who are homeless may use technology as part of a broader survival strategy. Young people described how they would use their cellphones or phones at the drop-in to call shelters about availability, to call the city for information, to text information about food to friends, to contact

people about the possibility of staying on a couch for the night, and for those involved in the drug trade, technology may also be used as a tool to communicate with clients.

Cellphones in particular may also provide a lasting point of connection to family and friends. Many of the young people that I met appeared to have a cell phone, and on a few occasions, I saw a young person showing off a new phone to other young people in the drop in. Both Ezra (age 18) and Jake (age 19) took time in our individual interviews to describe their high-end cell phones. Unfortunately, cell phones are also easy targets for theft. As previously mentioned, one day at the drop-in, a young man I knew had his cell phone stolen off the table and he was devastated. He explained that this cell phone was “his life,” and that he had photos of his family members who had since died, and that all of his contact information for everyone he had met in Ottawa and in other countries while travelling was on the phone. I also met a young man in my focus group who said that a phone call from family was an important source of encouragement when times were difficult on the streets.

One service provider, Timothy, explained how young people may also use Facebook to monitor the relationships between groups on the streets; to see who was dating who, and who was friends with whom. This became a way of reading the alliances of youth on the street, and managing drama.

“Technology plays a huge role in how life on the street is...so much can be going on when you don't even see...Networks are being made, fights are being started, alliances are being made. For some of them to be really aware of everything that's going on is a full-time job...some of them get so wrapped up in the drama of everything” (Timothy, Service Provider).

Syrus (age 19), also talked about how much emotional support that he received through his friends on Facebook, and conversely described his frustration when a woman who owed him money blocked him on Facebook so that he could no longer contact her. Young people who are homeless use the same social networking tools as young people who are housed, but they may also learn how to use these tools to enhance their ability to find resources vital to survival, and enhance personal safety through the monitoring of relationships on the streets. Although I have limited data about how young people who are homeless use technology, it appears to be an important aspect of street life that young people use to navigate a number of needs and social relationships, and it would be a valuable area for further study.

Caution and Observing Others

One of the qualities that young people develop quickly is caution. For Ella (age 16) and Syrus (age 21), they both learned to be careful of who they trusted through being scammed out of their money. Both Ella and Syrus left home with some money saved up, but quickly lost their savings after trusting the wrong people with their bank cards. In light of the danger of making the wrong choice about who to trust, young people learn to keenly observe everyone they meet, sometimes for weeks before approaching them. For some, this is a way of protecting themselves from theft and physical violence; while for others, observation is a skill to learn who might be able to sell them drugs or to detect who might be an undercover police officer. Ella decided to start selling drugs to make money. In our interview, she described how she would watch people at the youth drop-in centre to try and figure out who might be dealing drugs. She explained that if someone looked “really sketched out,” it may be because they were carrying a lot of drugs on them. She said that she would talk with them and try to build some trust, and that once she was in with them, they might connect her with their supplier so that she could also start to deal drugs,

and make some money. In Ella's case, she is using her skills of observation to become further entrenched in the street economy; however, observation can also lead to other outcomes. For Jean-Olivier (age 20), time spent observing people while homeless has taught him a lot about the world. "I have a lot of insight now too, because I spent a lot of time from when I was 16 to before I turned 20, just like...watching people, just watching and learning" (Jean-Olivier, age 20). Jean-Olivier feels that this has sharpened his intuition about who to spend time with, and how to help peers in difficulty.

"Avoiding Drama"

Street life is volatile and there are frequent conflicts between different groups of young people on the streets. Several of the young people I interviewed explained that it is important to be careful not to anger other youth on the streets, because if you anger someone and they come after you, they may have a whole group with them. At least five of the young people I interviewed referred to this as 'drama', and they explained the importance of avoiding drama on the streets. Before becoming homeless, Chad (age 17) was caught in a cycle of gang violence, but now that he is homeless in a different city and no longer aligned with a gang, he chooses to avoid drama and try to calm down when he is insulted. He explains that when he was younger, he was also very emotional and highly reactive. He says, "I find since I've been on the street, I'm not as violent." Chad also tries to "lay low" by choosing friends "who do their own thing and avoid all the drama." He explains, "Basically, just try and avoid confrontation at all costs, like...don't piss anybody off, just keep your mouth shut real good. Avoid...certain people who you know don't like you, and make sure you stay friends with the right people."

Loyalty and Protecting Peers

Young people frequently make informal alliances for protection that may loosely resemble a gang, but that may be more temporary than formal gangs, and not as dangerous to leave. Sometimes these are referred to by researchers, young people and service providers as “street families,” although this terminology was not commonly used in my study. Instead, young people used the common language “friends,” but the word carried many of the same connotations that might be attached to the term “street families.” In my focus groups with young people, the young women were quick to identify their friends as an important source of support when times were difficult, while the young men did not highlight this to the same degree during the focus group, but spoke about it at length during one-on-one interviews. Virtually all of the young people stressed that choosing friends carefully was an essential part of street life, and two young people spoke about how they got to know people through homelessness much better than they ever would have through making friends at school. Chad (age 17), described knowing people so well that they could easily communicate without speaking, or that a simple word like “Dip,” could be used to indicate that police officers were nearby and that the young people should get out of sight. The powerful bond that forms between young people on the streets is complex and can be both beneficial and detrimental, since the relationships may provide a source of emotional support and may simultaneously pull young people further into street culture and committing criminal offenses.

I also observed that many of those who were older or had more street experience expressed a desire to protect or instruct young people who were new to the streets. Aaron (age 23) described an incident where he protected a young girl on the street who was drunk.

“I saw a girl one time passed out...and guys were surrounding her...I was like, 'Yo. Get the fuck out of here.' I sat there the whole night...I stayed there till she woke up, and then she was like, 'thank you. I've never had someone do that.' I was like, 'Listen, I've been on the streets, and I know what could happen to you. I'm not one of these sick pigs, I'm actually the one that's here to help' And...when it came to that I actually felt good about myself...I knew I did something good, and from then on I started helping everyone I could” (Aaron, age 23).

Aaron said that he now takes every opportunity he can to talk with other homeless young people and pass along what he has learned, encouraging them to get off the streets as fast as they can.

Similarly, Jean-Olivier (age 20) befriended a young person at the drop-in centre who was new to the streets and in conflict with his family. When the young person received an invitation to a family dinner, Jean-Olivier bought him some new pants, and planned to go with him to provide support for what was likely to be a difficult conversation.

Romantic partners and family members shared a special kind of loyalty and protection while on the streets. My sample included two sets of siblings (4 interviews), and three sets of romantic partners (6 interviews), and a number of young people also referred to past relationships or their current partner during the interviews. Within these relationships, it appeared common for one person to play the role of protector and provider, while the other expressed feelings of being protected and provided for. The collaborative efforts of couples of this nature seemed to be more effective at finding shelter, food, drugs or resources, and young people expressed that they felt a genuine sense of safety and security together since they could trust their partner without needing to watch their back.

One couple was expecting a baby, and had transitioned into housing since the young woman's mother was keen to support her coming granddaughter, and decided to allow the couple to rent one of her properties. For the male partner, Aaron (age 23), expecting the baby provided

a high level of motivation to maintain employment, stable housing, and to clear up past charges from the criminal justice system. When June (age 18), found out that she was pregnant, she initially planned to have an abortion since raising a child while homeless or giving the baby away were not options that she wanted to pursue initially. On the day of her appointment, she was surprised by her reaction.

“I actually made an appointment for an abortion. But when it came down to it, I just...I was crying all day...it was so sad. Like, I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it. And I knew if I actually went through with it...I wouldn't be the same ever again. I wouldn't feel happy with myself. I'd rather carry the baby and give it to a family instead of kill it. I couldn't do that. Especially like...when you're pregnant, you can feel being pregnant, you can feel the baby inside you. Like, I don't know how a woman could go through with it. Like before being pregnant, I always thought whatever...people can make their own decisions. But now, it's just like, I have no idea how a woman could do that” (June, age 18).

For June, the decision-making process around her unplanned, teenage pregnancy while cycling through homelessness was difficult and constrained by many structural obstacles. Yet, after choosing not to terminate the pregnancy, she was able to work with her partner and her family to establish housing, an income, and make plans to raise the child. June stressed that the decisions she has had to make while homeless have been very difficult, but she is grateful for the support of her partner, and their experiences have drawn them closer together.

For other young people on the streets facing pregnancy, partnerships can cause conflict. After breaking up with his girlfriend, Chad (age 17) learned that she was pregnant. Although he was excited and motivated to leave the streets when he learned that he would be a father, his excitement turned to frustration and anger when he learned that the mother-to-be was continuing to drink alcohol and use drugs while pregnant. Adam (age 18) felt very guilty about the miscarriage of the baby that he was expecting with his fiancé when she blamed the loss on the stress of him being homeless and broke off the relationship. However, Adam also describes this

experience as part of his ‘wakeup call’ that he needed to transition off the street and find housing.

Being Resourceful

Young people find many ways to meet their needs once they become homeless. While some will turn to illegal activities like selling drugs to generate income, others will explore as many creative ways as possible to meet their basic needs. Service providers described a number of scenarios they have seen including: young people pooling their resources together to get something that they really want, young people may panhandle, they barter with businesses, some have restaurants or shops that are willing to give them food at the end of the day that they won’t sell to customers the following day, and one young woman frequently gets new shoes from a local shoe store. Many young people blend resourceful legal activities with resourceful illegal activities, and I observed service providers making statements to young people like, “I don’t want to know where you get your money...”

“It’s pretty amazing actually. We’ve got some youth who are for example, drug dealers. They’ve got an amazing business acumen that they don’t even realize that they have. They understand how to sell something to someone that age, and they’re very organized in what they’re doing, and they have a lot of skills there that they could apply in other settings in the mainstream society” (Joyce, Service Provider).

In one of the drug treatment groups at the drop-in centre, the facilitator asks the young people to consider how much money they spend on drugs each week, and then to consider what would be possible if they chose to spend the same amount of money on housing. This logic was echoed by several of the young people I interviewed, and Adam (age 18) successfully set aside a small portion from his drug dealing each week to save up first and last month’s rent, and then transitioned into housing.

Supressing Values

In the previous chapter, I discussed how young people may use techniques of neutralization to minimize the harms that they cause to others and supress personal values. These techniques of neutralization may allow young people to commit criminal offences, to use people for their own gain, or to violate societal expectations; all while entertaining some form of rationale for why the behaviour could be acceptable in the given circumstances. In the focus groups that I conducted with service providers, three service providers from two different groups articulated that young people do supress their values when they are on the streets, but this was portrayed as a strength, and as a form of flexibility.

“You see a lot of flexibility in adapting. If you're living on the streets or in a shelter, you may have to compromise a lot of the things that you value, or make some really hard choices about one value over another. You may have to give up your sense of safety if...you have to give up your self-confidence, or how much you value yourself through making a hard choice...maybe selling sex for something...and...I think that when they're making those choices, that's even a self-strength, that they're able to come back from that. We're talking about resilience...that they're able to put certain values...or compromise on a certain number of things for a certain amount of time to get by and survive, but that it's still there somewhere deep down inside of them, and once they're back on their feet, it can come back out. It's not always lost. They're able to adapt to the situation and do what they need to do” (Yvonne, Service Provider).

In this way, supressing personal values and making decisions that compromise values for survival is described as a strength, and two of the service providers described that they often see young people go through a process of supressing values, and rediscovering them or letting them resurface. This resurfacing may be tied to exiting street life, or it may be expressed as a lifestyle change while a young person remains homeless.

7.2.2 Life Skills and Attitudes

This section will explore the life skills and attitudes that young people and service providers described as resulting from homelessness or as helpful characteristics. Young people living on the streets become fully responsible for managing their own lives, without the covering and assistance of parents. At times, this can be challenging. One young person reported that once she became homeless, she lost the will to care for her hygiene, and did not bother with brushing her teeth. However, many of the young people that I met were very active in caring for their health, making doctor appointments, visiting drop-in health care services, and using the laundry services at the drop-in or in the shelters to clean their clothes.

Even some of the young people who were homeless and using drugs carefully attended to their health. Joyce is a service provider who does street outreach. She described meeting a young woman on the street who was an intravenous drug user and was sitting beside a garbage bag. Inside the garbage bag, she was hiding her backpack which was filled with everything that she needed to sterilize her needles and care for her injection sites, including Ziploc bags filled with antibiotic ointment which she could use to treat any wounds that were starting to get infected. Joyce expressed that she was impressed with the young woman's organizational skills, and her will to care for her health through harm reduction strategies.

Young people who are homeless become responsible for managing their health, their budgets, paying cell phone bills, doing laundry, searching for employment and housing, and many are struggling to succeed in school at the same time. Service providers and young people shared the view that young people on the streets are developing much more advanced skills in this area than young people who are living at home where parents may still take care of most of the responsibilities. "Kids at home are learning different things. Kids on their own, or on the

streets, or in shelters are learning a lot of things on their own, problem solving...that sort of thing. But kids at home are getting other sorts of skills and supports” (Lisette, Service Provider).

This perspective highlights that young people who are homeless are learning independently and are constantly engaged in problem-solving. As stated previously, homelessness provides a steep learning curve, and to survive, young people need to quickly develop a wide range of skills. While many of the young people I interviewed appeared to have developed independence and self-reliance, many felt torn about the level of responsibility they had to manage, and it came with a heavy cost. Paul (age 19) says, “So I learned to become independent. I never really had a childhood. I had to be grown up all the time.” And Kristin (age 18) grieved, “The fact that we as 18 year olds, 16 year olds, 15 year olds, 14 year olds, have to pick ourselves up and carry ourselves as 30 year olds...to be able to get anywhere in life does not help, because that's our whole childhood gone. You don't get to be a kid again. And when you do, if you do...you get judged obviously, because it's not right.” Aaron (age 23), felt quite differently about the skills he had developed while homeless.

“Homelessness is actually...not a gift, but it'll make you learn more about yourself than anything, because ...if you're homeless and you're trying to do it all for yourself, you're actually building character, you're building your motivation...I see it in myself...being on the streets, it actually built up skills I wouldn't have learned in a home, having my brother help me out with everything.” (Aaron, age 23)

Young people who are homeless experience the weight of responsibilities that are typically reserved for adults in Western society, and while they often learn to manage these roles, according to the young people I interviewed, it can be a bittersweet experience. Hagan & McCarthy (2005) validate the tension on the lives of young people transitioning to adulthood in the context of homelessness, pointing out that young people who are homeless generally have

challenges meeting the indicators that typically signify the end of adolescence, such as completing high school, enrolling in college or university, and entering full-time employment. At the same time, Hagan & McCarthy (2005) explain that young people who are homeless may become responsible for other roles typically reserved for adults “before they acquire the skills, credentials, experiences, psychological resources, connections, social support, and other assets that increase the likelihood of success (178). In my research, young people appeared to feel torn between feelings of pride that they were able to take responsibility for their own lives, and a sense of grief over the perceived need to grow up too quickly.

The fast-track to self-reliance that young people experience because of homelessness appears to spark some forms of personal growth as seen in this chapter, but it also increases vulnerability and exposure to risk. For this reason Karabanow (2004) cautions about glorifying the positive traits that young people may develop through homelessness at the expense of recognizing the harms. This research is an attempt to provide a balanced discussion that recognizes the adversity that young people experience connected to homelessness and also to explore the strengths and resilience that can emerge in parallel.

Attitudes

The final type of visible strengths that I would like to discuss, are the attitudes that appeared to help young people tackle the obstacles in their lives. These attitudes were the most surprising aspect of my research, as young people reflected articulately on the various mindsets that motivated them.

Gratitude

Several young people I interviewed explained that their experience of homelessness had caused them to feel more gratitude for the good things in their lives, and that experiencing gratitude was a personal strength that helped them to deal with their challenging circumstances. For Jake (age 19), gratitude was sparked as a reflection on what he has taken away from the challenges of homelessness. “I think that my experience has made me a lot stronger in areas that normally I wouldn’t be if I didn’t experience some of the stuff that I have. So, I’m very grateful, I guess, for some of the situations that I’ve been in...I’ve learned.” Pete (age 18), found that his nights sleeping outside made him feel grateful.

“We’d be out at Britannia beach and we’d sleep out on the rocks at the beach there. You kind of get those moments... like when you’re camping, and it’s quiet out and you see the stars in the sky...you’re just appreciative for waking up the next morning and actually having something in your stomach or just...cigarettes, or different people beside you. It’s another wide eye-opening experience to have to live with that and deal with that for six months” (Pete, age 18).

For Thomas, cultivating an attitude of thankfulness is a deliberate strategy for countering feelings of anger and frustration.

“When something wrong happens... and I get mad...I think positive...because I wake up and I can do everything: I can speak, I can see, I can feel, I can touch, I can move, I can walk, so those little things that happen in the day will be just little compared with the huge things that I have. I am grateful for everything that I have and I don’t think about what I don’t have” (Thomas, age 19).

During the focus groups, service providers eagerly validated that young people who are homeless will often express gratitude. This was seen in expressions of thankfulness for the resources provided in youth shelters and drop-in centers, and in thank you notes and personal expressions of thankfulness when young people received help or transitioned out of

homelessness. Daryl (service provider), also offered the perspective that experiencing homelessness seems to counter a culture of entitlement that can exist with young people in society. “Youth struggling, going through homelessness, going through systems, trying to make it on their own...I think it really breaks that down and gives them more respect for the things they do get, and they don’t take things for granted as much.”

Openness and Empathy for Others

In a similar way, several of the young people I interviewed indicated they felt like experiencing homelessness helped them to better understand other people on the street and to express more openness and empathy. This phenomenon was typically described as a change resulting specifically from having lived the experience of homelessness. June (age 18), explained, “I think it’s made me a little more open-minded. Like...I always think to myself...the thing I live by is be kind because everyone is fighting their own war.” Similarly, Vince (age 20) felt like living through homelessness softened his approach with people he did not know. He explained that prior to being homeless, he did not like talking to anyone apart from his closest friends, but that homelessness had changed that characteristic. “After that I became... more open talking to people...and I was giving them a chance. Cause I used to not like talking to anyone...not even a person on the street that would open the door for me, I wouldn’t say thank you. So now it’s funny that I’m a lot more polite and everything...more caring...‘cause I’ve lived it. Treat people the way you want to be treated” (Vince, age 21). Chad (age 17) discussed how his experience has caused him to wonder about how other people ended up on the street.

“But now, I see someone on the street, I’ll actually think about like...you know, ‘Why are you on the street? What did you go through? Like, why are you smoking crack? What are you trying to forget about?’ I feel like I can relate more to people than before. Cause before when you’re not living on the street...like when you have a place to live

and it's not that bad, you can turn a blind eye to everything else, but...when you're on the street, you can't turn a blind eye to anything...cause you're a part of it" (Chad, age 17).

Although judgement of peers continues to exist in street life, in focus groups, the service providers affirmed my own observation that young people on the streets and spending time at the drop-in centre develop a degree of respect and tolerance for people who are different than them. People from visibly different groups that would not likely associate in a high school easily mix at the drop-in, connected by their common experience of homelessness and marginalization, although it should be also be noted that this is a supervised space which can create a safer environment.

Minimizing Harm (Humour)

In focus groups with service providers, Cassandra mentioned that she is amazed at how young people are living with such difficult circumstances, are able to minimize their challenges and find humour. She provided the following example.

"One of them yesterday was putting on make-up before the evening, and kind of says, 'I'm brushing my hair, it's kind of hard to look good when you've been sleeping out on the street. Ha ha ha.' And to me, it's like, wow, some other people would probably crumble, but these people kind of just see it as that's what they're facing right now, and then let's move on. I find that incredible" (Cassandra, Service Provider).

While humour can be a source of strength for some, three young people I interviewed also acknowledged that they had lost their sense of humour when they became homeless, making less jokes, and spending more time in a serious frame of mind.

Dreaming About a Better Future

In my interviews, I asked every young person what they felt would be the next steps on their journey. While the majority of young people talked at length about finding housing and finishing school, I was also very interested to hear more about how the young people thought about the future, and what role these thoughts played in their lives. I discovered that thinking forward seemed to be an important coping mechanism for many young people in difficult circumstances, and to some extent, this seems to be linked with resilience. Jay (age 17), tries to think about where he is going, rather than dwelling on the past. “I try not to look back. I try to look towards the future and what I can do and not what I have done.” In this way, Jay chooses not to spend his mental energy dwelling on his past experiences of abuse, or his limited opportunities in school, or his involvement in drug dealing, but instead spends time considering the things that he has the power to accomplish such as getting into an alternative school to finish his high school education.

Thomas (age 18), held a more cautious view of the future, and made an important distinction between the future and dreams. “I have a theory. There's future and there's dreams. The future, you don't know about it, dreams you know because you want it and you try to do it every day. So, I prefer my dreams than my future.” Since Thomas is a foreign-born, visible minority, with no remaining family members, homeless in a new country without educational qualifications, and identifying as transgender, Thomas is very aware of the obstacles and potential discrimination that lay in the future. Instead, Thomas finds motivation by focusing on more holistic dreams. When I asked Thomas to tell me more about the dreams, the primary dream apart from a career path was to find companionship. “I just dream of a love for my life

that I could trust, and it could be for all my life. That's it." Thomas explained that he did not need to be important or to have a big house, but that he just wanted to be loved.

Other young people had a number of material objectives in mind. Chad (age 17) has some very specific ideas about what he would like to achieve later in life. "I just want a cottage...a cottage and a motorcycle, and I'm good to go...[laughs]...I guess...and a house where I'm not in a bad part of town...but you know, just...have my cottage and my motorcycle. I'll have my car, be a mechanic...I'm a happy man." In their study with 45 homeless and street-involved youth at a youth drop-in centre, Foster & Spencer (2011) conducted narrative interviews where they asked young people about their pasts, present and future. They found that while some young people discussed futures that were linked to their past and present (a "connected narrative"), many youth presented elaborate ideas or big dreams that would be difficult for anyone to achieve. At the same time, they found that young people were most likely to share a sense of the type of future they wanted to avoid, and that virtually all of the young people they interviewed wanted to transition out of homelessness at some point. Many youth in their study indicated that in the future, they wanted to be able to have the money to get what they need and what they want. While this article provides an excellent discussion of how young people think about their futures, the authors do not return to analyze the role that big dreams play in the lives of young people who are homeless, particularly since these seem to be so common. I would like to further explore "big dreams" here. When I asked Chad if he thought about his dreams very often, he presented a very connected narrative despite having dreams that Foster & Spencer (2011) may have categorized as unattainable.

“Everyday. It's what gets you through the day. So like, dreams is what gets you through that, cause like...when you're staring down the barrel of a gun all you're thinking is, 'Man, I'm gonna fucking die right now', and you get sad cause you're like, 'Man, I haven't accomplished shit'. So you think of your dreams and you're like, 'Man...if I get through this, that's what I want...I want out. I just want this, and I'm done.' You know?” (Chad, age 17).

For Chad, dreams help him to stay motivated and to center himself following traumatic aspects of street life. The dreams play a role in his day-to day survival. Chad's narrative suggests that for some young people the specific nature of their big dreams may not be as important as the role that the dreams play in their lives. In a focus group, one service provider shared a similar perspective.

“They keep on dreaming. There's always a dream, they always, I think a lot of them picture themselves in different places at some point. It may be crappy right now, but eventually they know or they dream that they will be better, in a better place. A lot of them talk a lot about like...I guess it's like a fantasy type thing. So the time right now is really difficult, but yet, they still, in their minds, fantasize about when it will be better” (Yvonne, Service Provider).

Still, I did interview many young people who presented narratives that seemed to connect their past, present and future. These young people appeared to be strategic thinkers, some who entered homelessness already considering strategies for exiting, and others who used the loneliness, isolation and unstructured time they encountered during homelessness to contemplate the life that they want to live in the future, and the future they wished to avoid. Ella (age 16) explained the importance of taking the time to think things through to avoid becoming a homeless adult.

“So basically, you have to think if you want to live this life forever and end up at [an adult shelter], or whatever...or if you want to do something about it and have a better life. Cause you don't...I don't think anyone would want to be stuck down here forever. Even if you talk to those people in those shelters, the adult shelters, you'll realize how like, most of them don't want to be there, they're just stuck there because some of them didn't get a

proper education, some of them, they can't get out of the city because of probation, or some of them just have bad drug addictions and they don't want to be there, but they're stuck here. So that's why you've got to make those decisions when you're younger, so you don't have to end up like that...just stuck” (Ella, age 17).

Ella’s belief about the aspects that contribute to long-term homelessness are evident in her decision-making in the present. She has chosen not to use drugs to avoid addiction, she is continuing her education in an alternative school despite multiple set-backs, and she is re-evaluating her career plans based on her current assessment of her abilities, choosing not to become a paramedic since that would require more skills in math and science than she feels she possesses. She also made a choice not to receive a free apartment from a drug dealer, since she is concerned that “getting booked” or charged for a drug offence would limit her future possibilities. This type of strategic thinking was echoed by Pete (age 19), who regularly makes a 6 month plan for what his next steps will be, and Vince (age 20) who used his time sitting in the “drunk tank” to develop a set of goals. Vince now evaluates his life choices by using his goals, and this will impact his decision making. He has now been sober for an extended period of time, and he has even refused to allow friends to house him, since he fears that he will become too comfortable and stop working on his goals for the future.

Many of the decisions that young people make about their futures also come with a cost, such as the unwanted symptoms of drug withdrawal, checking into residential drug treatment programs, enduring hospitalization as a result of disclosing mental health challenges, and losing the friends and status on the street that has been a source of comfort and protection. Chad (age 17) was very honest about some of the difficult decisions that he would have to make to achieve his desired future. “As sad as it sounds, I’m probably going to have to drop a lot of my friends. Like...I know that, cause if I’m clean, I can’t be around people who are using drugs, you know?”

Weighing the pros and cons of making life decisions and sifting through personal ambivalence is an important aspect of making decisions about exiting the streets. One service provider, Joyce, talked about the indicators that staff see when young people are ready to transition off the street.

“Sometimes they come out and tell you flat out, 'I'm just here until I find myself a place, and then I'm gone.' And a lot of times, that does happen. We don't see them for that long, you know...they pick themselves up and off they go. But for our regulars that we see more often, it's that change talk, you know? Like, 'I don't want to be like this forever. I want to go to school. I want to finish my education. These are my hopes and dreams for the future. This is what I want for a career for myself.' So looking forward...even despite a lot of the obstacles that they face, and even feeling really pressed, and sometimes they even feel suicidal but still have that...that thought, you know...that knowledge that things can change for them, that life is still going to have its ups and downs, but that they can still move forward and not be on the streets forever” (Joyce, Service Provider).

The ability to imagine a positive future, despite the immediate and pressing circumstances is a strength that young people use to past through difficulty, overcome daily challenges and transition out of homelessness. Some of the dreams that young people entertain may not be grandiose, but the capacity to dream through adversity is a strength and indicator of resilience.

Courage and Determination

The final visible strengths, which are perhaps the most obvious, are courage and determination. While I could discuss this at great length, this is most clearly seen through all of the data that has been presented to this point. Service providers were more likely to highlight how courageous the young people were, while both service providers and young people highlighted the importance of determination in facing each new day with hope. Courage is a framework for all of the decision-making that young people have to do on the streets. In my interview with Donny, a service provider, courage was the dominant theme in how he described the young people.

“A lot of times we get asked, 'What's a success story?' Well, I think a success story is someone who's got the [courage] to walk through our doors right in front, to come in the building and say, 'This is me, take me as I am.'” That's courage right there. You might not talk to anybody. It might take you two weeks to feel comfortable to talk to somebody, but you walked through the door. So that tells me something right off the get go. You have that” (Donny, Service Provider).

For all the service providers that I interviewed, the most common notion of resilience described was the idea that despite incredible adversity, the young homeless people they work with keep waking up day after day, working through their issues, and trying for a better life. That is also how they defined courage.

7.3 Hidden Strengths

While young people may develop clear strengths through homelessness, some of the strengths are less obvious and lie beneath the surface. One young person I interviewed, named Marshall (age 17), grew up in an abusive home where his father was violent and mocked him for his eating disorder. Marshall explained that his mother left when he was young, and that the experience triggered suicide attempts, other mental health challenges, and resulted in hospitalization and mental health treatment. Eventually he was placed in foster homes and group homes where he experienced sexual abuse and began to run away to escape the ongoing victimization. But one day Marshall had a significant experience where he was in the drop-in centre and a young Aboriginal woman came and started attacking him because she wanted to use the computer that he was on.

“Some Native chick came and punched me in the face because she wanted to see the computer...First of all I just stood there and let her punch me in the face a couple of times. And I got up and said, ‘I'm sick and tired of being a fucking twinkie.’ I got up and I started beating the crap out of her, and I'm like... ‘No, it's not happening!’” (Marshall, age 17).

During this fight, something significant was happening for Marshall, and as we talked further about this story, it appeared as though this was a pivotal moment for him. In Marshall's life, he had experienced high levels of victimization, and had tended to respond with running away from the abuse or retreating into himself and engaging in self-injury. In this instance, he took a stand for himself and said "No, it's not happening." So while he did end up in a physical altercation in the drop-in, he also described this as one of the first times that he had actively confronted someone who tried to abuse him.

"...You know what? Now, I feel better about myself. And I didn't eat for six days, and now... I started trying to eat again... I guess that doing what I did yesterday kind of...made me realize what I have now, that I have the power to stand up for what's going on. Before, I never stood up for anything. And I actually, like...I would say I actually enjoyed being homeless, cause I think it's changed me, changed what I've went through" (Marshall, age 17).

In this case, Marshall appears to be learning that he has the capacity to resist abuse, and this realization is improving his self-image and his personal sense of power. This would not be the most logical conclusion to draw for an onlooker who witnessed the fight in the drop-in; the value of the incident and the strength that Marshall is developing lies beneath the surface. This example aligns with Michael Ungar's (2004) book, *Nurturing Resilience in Troubled Youth*, which argues that certain behaviours which may be designated as "trouble" by external observers or social workers, could carry a more meaningful interpretation for the person living the experience.

Conclusion

Despite adversity and the negative adaptations that young people may experience while homeless, there are also many positive adaptations presented by young people and service providers that have been discussed in this chapter. This strength-based viewpoint is critical to

developing the constructivist model of resilience advocated by Ungar (2004; 2005; 2008) which I will further pursue in my discussion chapter. Although I have provided more discussion in this chapter of what I have called visible strengths than hidden strengths, the tone of this chapter is different than much of the writing on youth homelessness which emphasizes risk factors and the negative outcomes associated with homelessness. Instead, the orientation of this chapter has been to highlight the adaptations in identity, knowledge, skill development, and attitude that have emerged through the interview and focus group data in this research. These findings support the concept of post-traumatic growth, which posits that trauma has the potential not only to harm people, but also to trigger positive development and personal growth.

While I do wish to bring attention to this strength-based perspective, I also wish to acknowledge Jeff Karabanow's (2004) words of caution, "While there may exist some redeeming aspects to street life (such as independence, freedom, a sense of community and support), for the vast majority of children, this lifestyle offers a problematic and unhealthy existence" (p 68). Nevertheless, this chapter has shown that young people can experience personal growth and build strengths through the experience of homelessness; however, these lessons come with a high cost, and not every young person successfully navigates through homelessness. Despite the transformation that many young people experience on the streets, given the choice, most would prefer to grow up in the safety and security of a loving family with enough economic resources to meet the family's basic needs.

TABLE 7.0 Adaptation: Summary of Findings

Theme	Literature	Findings	Theory
Identity	(Cochran et al., 2002) (Fournier et al., 2009) (Gaetz, 2004) (Gattis, 2009) (Kruks, 2001) (Mallet et al., 2010)	• Young people experiment with identity roles, and may recreate themselves • Gender identity and sexual orientation may be especially fluid for some	Impression Management Symbolic Interactionism
Visible Strengths	(Bender et al., 2007) (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006) (Foster & Spencer, 2011) (Granovetter, 1985) (Hagan & McCarthy, 1997) (Hill, 2009) (Kidd & Davidson, 2007) (Lanekau et al., 2005) (Masten & Powell, 2003) (Pat-Horenczyk & Brom, 2007) (Roebuck et al., 2011) (Saleebey, 2013) (Ungar, 2004; 2004a; 2005; 2007; 2008)	• Young people develop street smarts, life skills and attitudes that help them navigate and negotiate through homelessness • Many young people perceive that they have experienced some form of personal growth during their period of homelessness • Grandiose dreams for the future may help some young people maintain hope for a better life	Resilience, Objective & Subjective Strength-based Discourse Symbolic Interactionism Navigation Negotiation
Hidden Strengths	(Roebuck et al., 2011) (Ungar, 2004; 2004a; 2005; 2007; 2008)	• Some behaviours that may appear negative to observers produce positive results for young people, or represent an underlying strength.	Resilience, Subjective Constructivist Strength-based Discourse Symbolic Interactionism Negotiation

8.0 Negotiation between Service Providers and Young People who are Homeless.

As young people who are homeless pass through community services, they manage and negotiate the expectations of numerous adult decision-makers. Armaline (2005) identifies that young people living in emergency shelters engage in continual negotiation of rules, power and social control with service providers. This chapter will focus primarily on the negotiations between young people and service providers in emergency youth shelters, and how young people and service providers perceive these negotiations. It will also touch on youth perceptions of adult shelters and other community services. Based on the interviews I conducted, I found that some social services like youth shelters are more youth-friendly and have developed their service framework specifically for young people, while other services like social assistance or adult shelters have more rigid regulations. Young people in this study expressed appreciation for the youth services they receive in the community, and their description of their experiences accessing services were generally aligned with the values that service providers tried to emulate in their work.

While this chapter focuses primarily on negotiations in youth emergency shelters, I spoke with young people about their experiences using a broad range of services in the Ottawa community, including:

- the Youth Services Bureau drop-in,
- the Young Men's Shelter,
- the Young Women's Shelter,
- A Different Street (ADS);

- adult shelters such as the Mission, Shepherds of Good Hope, and the Salvation Army;
- drug and alcohol counselling services such as Rideauwood;
- interactions with mental health professionals at the Royal Ottawa Hospital, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), and the Roberts/Smart Centre;
- experiences in schools with counsellors, social workers and principals;
- interactions in the Criminal Justice system at many provincial custody facilities, and youth custody programs in Ottawa, notably the William E Hay Centre, Livius Sherwood Detention and Custody Centre, as well as experiences in the courtroom; and finally,
- interactions with the child welfare system in foster families and group homes.

8.1 Accessing Adult Shelters

There is some overlap of clientele between adult and youth shelters, since adult shelters will accept young people who are age 18 or over, and youth shelters will accept young people up until the age of 21. Ten of the twenty-four young people I interviewed mentioned a previous stay in an adult shelter in Ottawa, and a few had spent several months to more than a year in adult shelters. With the exception of two young people who had stayed in adult shelters and did not mind the experience, every other young person who mentioned adult shelters was apprehensive. Young people conveyed fears about interacting with older people who were homeless, particularly those suffering from mental health disorders or those heavily addicted to substances, since they were perceived as unpredictable and dangerous.

In youth focus groups, four young people shared the following experiences about adult shelters. One young person said, "I'm only 18, and these are like 50, 80 year old guys...they're

aggressive, they're dangerous. I've had people put knives to my throat.” Similarly, another shared, “They smashed coffee cups and held it to my throat.” And another young person added, “You get robbed when you go to the Sheps too. They go through all your shit, even the staff.” One young woman reported that she almost stepped on a needle in the shower and was frightened that she could have been infected with a disease.

When discussing adult shelters, young people talked about fighting, drug dealing, police interactions, and the overall sentiment that adult shelters were unsafe and frightening places where they did not want to be. Three young people even indicated that they would rather sleep outside than in an adult shelter. This fear of adult shelters and the negative experiences that some young people have had appeared to lead to a greater appreciation of the youth services and youth shelters offered in the city. The young people expressed gratitude that there were youth shelters that were accessible to them. A few young people also cited adult shelters as a motivator to get off the streets, since they did not want to age into using adult services.

8.2 Negotiation between Service Providers and Young People in Youth Shelters

The young people I interviewed conveyed that the youth shelters made them feel safer than other alternatives like sleeping rough or spending time in adult shelters. In this section, I would like to explore the interactions between young people and service providers in youth shelters. The overall sentiment expressed by young people was that most service providers in the youth shelters were caring and understanding most of the time. Chad (age 17), found the service providers in the shelter helped him deal with his emotions when he found out that his ex-girlfriend was pregnant and that she continued drinking and using drugs. “I was like...this girl is killing my kid. And they were able to sit down and have a conversation about how I was feeling and like...things I could do instead of going out and getting high” (Chad, age 17). Without

parents to provide mentoring through difficult circumstances, adult service providers offer a listening ear away from the drama that might be going on with peers on the streets.

“With the staff, you can have a connection with someone who's not on the street, like someone who actually cares and...knows what you're going through, but isn't living it with you. So you can talk about it, and you know it's not bringing them down, because it's not adding to the drama that they have on the street, so like...a safe place to talk. Cause...I know guys who like...they won't cry on the street, but they'll cry at the shelter. So you're like...‘alright’, you know? People just got respect there. Just having people to talk to makes it so much easier, because that way you're not stuck in your own head all the time.” (Chad, age 17).

Residential programs for young people, as well as adults, involve a set of expectations for clients that are governed by agency policies and legislative requirements. They are generally funded on a per diem basis, and young people entering a youth shelter are stepping into a pre-existing structure where adults are paid to provide supervision and supports, in addition to ensuring the safety of all residents. In the delivery of services, it is inevitable that some conflict will arise, since people may have different perspectives on many of the daily decisions that need to be made. Some residential programs for young people may be characterized by rigid environments that prioritize the decisions of adults, while other environments seek to be client-centred and try to adopt a flexible case-by-case approach to ensure that all youth have opportunities to succeed that are tailored to their strengths and abilities (See Finlay, 2007; Kalke, Glanton, & Cristalli, 2007; Roebuck & Roebuck, 2013; Whittaker, 2000). In either case, young people are often in a position where they feel that they are required to self-advocate for their perceived needs to be met. In the interviews that I conducted, young people and service providers identified the three primary aspects of the shelter environment that are most commonly negotiated:

- 1) the requirement to return by curfew or risk losing the shelter bed;
- 2) the requirement to participate in chores at the shelter; and,
- 3) the requirement to leave the shelter during business hours.

These three areas of negotiation will be introduced, followed by a discussion of the perceptions of young people and service providers.

Curfew is one of the policies that has the most direct impact on the trajectories of young people who are homeless, and more study of this area would be valuable. Young people staying at a youth shelter are required to return to the shelter by a set curfew or they will lose their bed. This is a common practice in services for people who are homeless, and is related to both the desire to provide services as well as the vested interests of the agency. From a service delivery standpoint, since shelters exist to provide emergency housing, if someone does not return for any number of reasons, their bed may then be provided to someone else. This is considered preferable to having an empty bed when there are so many people who need shelter. From an agency standpoint, shelters are generally funded on a per diem basis and shelters that function at maximum capacity will receive more government funding for services. Statistics on occupancy are also a powerful advocacy tool for demonstrating the usefulness and need for the service which helps to ensure the continued operation of the shelter.

Chores are presented by service providers as a way for young people to give back to the shelter, and to contribute to the environment where they are staying. They are also framed as a form of training in life skills, since many of the young people in a shelter may be learning to live independently for the first time, and need to learn how to care for their property. Cheryl (service provider) indicated that young people who participate in the care of the facility develop

ownership and pride for the building, which she believed was demonstrated through the cleanliness and lack of vandalism at the shelter. If a young person chooses not to participate in chores at the shelter, that may also jeopardize their bed, since participation is a mandatory aspect of staying in the shelter. Again, the purpose of this policy is to assist clients to develop skills, and it aligns with the vested interests of the agency. Young people will learn more about cleaning and maintenance while also reducing the burden on staff to care for the facility on their own, or to pay money to hire additional cleaning staff.

Finally, *day access to the shelter* is another area where young people and service providers may engage in active negotiation. When the morning comes, young people are asked to leave the shelter for the day, and to return again in the early evening up until curfew. Cheryl (service provider), explains that in the past the shelter was available to young people 24/7, but they found that a significant number of young people would stay during the day and choose not to attend school or to look for housing or employment. Now the policy requires young people to leave the shelter, and spend the day “working on their goals” (Cheryl, Service Provider). Since the agency also provides a drop-in center, in addition to another youth drop-in centre serving the same clientele in the city, if young people prefer not to “pursue goals” they still have access to a safe place to spend time, where they can access many resources if they desire. The limited day access policy may provide more motivation for young people to attend school or pursue their goals, but it also allows the agency to reduce their staffing needs during the day and avoid the duplication of services, since operating the Young Men’s and Young Women’s shelters during the day would provide similar services to the drop-in centre which is funded through the same agency.

These three policies generated a lot discussion with young people and service providers, and people shared mixed opinions about the effectiveness of these approaches. In the focus group with young men, one young person indicated that he was proud that he had been able to respect curfew, and that it reflected one of the important decisions that young people have to make on the street. When I asked the question, “Is there anything else that you think I should know about the decisions you have to make when you're young and when you're homeless?”, he responded:

“Are you or are you not going to make curfew at shelters? That's the main thing. Nobody ever makes curfew, man. When I got here I stayed in the shelter for only 2 ½ months before I got transitional ... never once missed curfew; that's what saved me. Dang. Would you rather have a warm place to sleep or get drunk? Cause that shit can happen any day...If you miss curfew, you lose your bed. You're not allowed to go back there until there's another bed, and in the winter time it's so hard to get another bed.”

This young man's comments reflect his view that making curfew is his choice to make, and that he is choosing to prioritize shelter over other things that he could be doing with his time. He also highlights that when a young person loses their bed, it can be very difficult to get back into the shelter, especially in the winter. While she does not question this policy, Kristin (age 18) feels that the policies around curfew and chores have negatively affected one of her friends who is also homeless.

“If you mess up, you're back on the streets again. And they're strict. And you have the factor that, if you're living on the streets, you're not used to having curfew. You're not used to having to do chores, cause you have no chores to do. You're not about to wander around and be told, 'OK. You don't get food till you clean up the block.' Like...that doesn't happen. You're used to not having food, so, you know...like...you try...but then she gets told that if she screws up on something one too many times she has to spend 3 days out on the street. You're not helping her by saying, 'OK. Get out.' You know...that's not helping her, but that's what they do every time. And where do you go from there? Back to phase one” (Kristin, age 18).

These two opinions provide the contrast that I saw in the comments of young people, some of whom felt that the rules provided were reasonable in exchange for accommodation, while others felt the rules were rigid and could introduce harm to young people when the consequences of failing to follow the rules might result in absolute homelessness. The dangers of absolute homelessness are most pronounced for shelter residents who are 16 or 17 years old, and are not old enough to access adult shelters if they lose their bed at the youth shelter. Some of the young people in focus groups felt that it was unreasonable to be expected to consistently return before curfew, and that the policy interfered with their social lives and connections with their peers.

Youth shelter policies are clearly documented and they are articulated to young people at intake; however, in practice they are frequently negotiated, and to some extent, service providers may encourage negotiation. It is common to make exceptions under special circumstances to allow a young person to negotiate curfew, chores, or day access when needed. Yanick (Service Provider) explained that negotiation is an expected part of providing services, and that this informal expectation is also communicated to shelter residents.

“Extended curfews, staying in the morning because they're not feeling well, accessing here during the day for X,Y,Z reason...I think that's a message that all staff kind of give out to youth, you know, 'Negotiate it, and then maybe we can work with it on an individual [basis].' And depending what the negotiation is, right? Like, we'll have a youth who says, 'I really need to be on a computer and not disturbed to do housing research. Can I stay today?' Well, we'll meet as a team, we'll review that, and see what the rationales are...and then it's rare that we'd say, 'No, you can't do housing research today.' But we'll also give them other resources to access that. So...it's day to day” (Yanick, Service Provider).

8.3 Youth Perspectives on Negotiating in the Shelters

The young people I spoke with found that service providers are generally accommodating and respectful, and that it is often possible to negotiate flexibility in the delivery of services.

However, this also seems to be somewhat dependent on the relationship that a young person has with a service provider, and how respectfully they approach the issue. Chad (age 17), and Jake (age 19), both spoke about times when they were able to achieve some flexibility based on how they approached the issue.

“So if you're nice with the staff, they're nice with you, right? Like do your chores and it's good. But if you have a bad day, and you know the staff well and you talk with them, you can get a day off chores. Let's say you flip out on somebody in the shelter, right? Like you give them beef for something. If you go talk to the staff about it, you can save your ass from getting kicked out. Like you just have to build relationships with them” (Chad, age 17).

Jake (age 19) found that he needed to negotiate more sensitive matters with service providers that related to his personal sense of safety. When he first arrived at the youth shelter, he described himself as being in a “paranoid state from homelessness,” and he was convinced that he would be assaulted, or get into trouble in the shelter that would spill over into the streets during the day. During intake, Jake disclosed that he was carrying pepper spray for self-protection, and the service providers explained that they would have to take it while he was in the shelter. While this initially made him feel anxious, he was given a tour of the residence and description of the services that helped him to feel calmer and which he describes as “pretty cool.” Once he was settled into his room, the issue that bothered him most was the policy allowing service providers to conduct room checks at night if it was deemed necessary. Jake was very upset that someone may come to his room at night, and he always propped something against his door so that it would fall and alert him if someone entered his room. Jake’s fear was linked to his history of sexual abuse in CAS which frequently occurred at night while he was in bed, and the resulting trauma-response of chronic bed-wetting. After five days, he finally brought his concern to the attention of staff.

“About the fifth day of being there, I said, 'This is crazy, you guys aren't going to come into my room anymore.' They reassured me that only staff had the key...but it was other issues. It was issues like from the time being in the group home, I was always wetting my bed. So how do I explain that to a kid if I'm always doing my laundry, and like...even the staff, I didn't want certain staff knowing that, and I knew it would get back to the kids. So at the end of the day, I had to sit down with the staff and say, 'Look this is what's going on. I need help.' And I got help, you know? Then I started advocating for myself” (Jake, age 19).

Jake found the service providers to be open and receptive to his concerns, and they were able to collaboratively develop a plan that would work to put Jake at ease. Jake describes this success in negotiation as helping to build his confidence to engage in further self-advocacy and to “not take no for an answer.”

While the ability to negotiate with service providers was validated by many young people, Jean-Olivier (age 20) offered the perspective that it can be challenging for service providers to deal with all of the youth effectively, and that their decision-making may eventually be affected by receiving negativity from young people.

“You get a lot of angry kids that are just like, 'Fuck all of you, I don't want to do chores'...just a lot of attitude. But a lot of staff, they take it in, and...they're angry. And that's the kind of staff that if [they] come to me and ask me to do chores, and I'm not in a good mood, and I say 'No', [they're] going to give me attitude over it. Whereas other staff, they don't let it get to them. So I think staff need to work on that. I really do. It's a learning thing, you learn from every situation.” (Jean-Olivier, age 20).

Since Jean-Olivier has experienced relatively long-term homelessness and serious mental health complications, it is somewhat inevitable that there will be some days where his motivation is low, and this will affect his choices about participating in chores. Jean-Olivier's response demonstrates that when he is 'not in a good mood', some staff will respond negatively while others do not take personal offense to his attitude.

Christine (age 21), experienced a strong internal reaction to the stigma of homelessness when she was first on the street, and this appears to have been reinforced through her interactions with service providers. Once she became homeless, she was feeling out of place, and like she did not belong in public spaces. She links her feeling of stigma with the vulnerable position of needing to ask for things in youth shelter where she had a brief stay.

“Because when I was homeless, I mean, the way that people looked at me and talked to me was like...horrible. And I was like, are you serious? I'm just like you, I'm just here temporarily, and I mean, I guess you don't know that. But I mean...this is crazy, the way they talk to you. Like even the staff...you know, you feel like you're talking to a prison guard or something. Like you have to ask them things...it's a very incarcerating feeling” (Christine, age 21).

Christine felt that having to negotiate with service providers to meet her needs was disempowering. This feeling could be linked to her being at the upper age threshold for accessing youth services, and the greater degree of autonomy that she experienced as a young woman entering her twenties prior to experiencing homelessness. Being in the shelter environment, she felt like many of her freedoms were taken away and that her behaviour was being monitored. When Bryce (age 18 or older), received notice that he would be evicted from the Young Men's Transitional Housing Program, he made an underhanded effort to extend his stay by obtaining an “intent to rent” form for a property that he did not intend to rent. When we spoke, he was hopeful that if he showed service providers that he was likely to move into a new property in a month, that he would be able to extend his stay at the shelter for at least the month of January to avoid becoming homeless in the winter and give himself more time to make a plan. Bryce and Christine both felt that it was difficult to connect with staff and advocate for their needs, while Bryce chose to use dishonesty as a means to achieve his objective.

From the youth perspective, working within a case-by-case framework for negotiation can allow programming to be tailored to the needs of young people and also remain flexible enough to allow for changes as the needs of young people change with time. However, this approach also relies on constant interactions, and as highlighted by Chad (age 17), and Jean-Olivier (age 20), it can be highly influenced by the relationship between young people and service providers. Overall, young people felt that service providers in the shelters were approachable and adaptable in their delivery of services, with some young people raising concerns about how service providers responded to young people who resisted the shelter rules.

8.4 Service Provider Perspectives on Negotiating in the Shelters

The service providers who participated in focus groups and interviews spoke positively about the young people they work to support, and their capacity to engage in negotiation. Cheryl (Service Provider) explained that the youth shelters were developed in collaboration with young people, and the policies were shaped by asking young people, “If you had to go to a shelter, what would be the most important thing to you?” She conveyed that the overwhelming response was that young people wanted to be treated with respect, to be treated as individuals, and not to be burdened with “a million and one rules.” The policies for the youth shelters were also shaped by the core values of the youth-serving agency: “safety, choice, accountability, respect for difference, power with [rather than power over], and women positive” (Cheryl, Service Provider). Cheryl explained that apart from the three basic rules of the shelter: curfew, chores, and no day access; everything else is negotiated on an individual basis, and if young people are sick and need to spend the day in bed, or they get a job that requires them to work after curfew, the rules can also be negotiated. Although the Young Women’s shelter does have these rules,

Cheryl (Service provider) believes the choice-based approach to programming at the Young Women's Shelter puts young women at ease.

“When we're doing intake, you present it to them as 'this is a complete choice-based program, and there are some expectations that you have to follow certainly, but you don't have to stay if it's not working for you.' And then they're just like... 'Phew, okay.' Just having that feeling sets the tone for how we work with them, and how they are being received. That's a huge piece in the way we run. And knowing the rules of the shelter, they can choose how they interact with the staff, what they tell us, how they interact with the young women, and they can make the stay work for them or not, and it's completely up to them. It gives them some power.” (Cheryl, Service Provider).

The emphasis on individual choice could suggest an agenda of responsabilization on the part of the agency, where young people are held accountable for their “choice” to follow or not to follow “guidelines” regardless of their consent to the rules. This neo-liberal ideology may also be represented by Cheryl's construction of the reasoning for a choice-based program being built upon the belief that young people have the capacity to manage their own lives and own the outcomes of their choices. However, as the service providers describe their choice-based philosophy in more detail, using examples from daily practice, the motivation for this approach also appears to be rooted in showing respect for the human agency of young people. Kathy's (Service Provider) description of the service provider response to self-injury in the youth shelter shows the value placed on allowing young people to make their own choices.

“Some of the clients are engaged in self-harm. The self-harmers have the choice to come down and inform staff if they want bandages because they cut. It's their choice whether they want to share that or not. And it's very difficult for them to come to the office at times. We always say, 'We're not judging you. Thank you for coming to the office. What can I get for you?' We don't go into the life history of 'You shouldn't have done that.' We're just going to shut the door on that one. It's their choice to access bandages. It's our choice to call medical services if we need it. But they actually do come down to the office over time...not immediately, because in the admission, you'll see the cut marks or the burn marks from the cigarettes, and you've acknowledged that, and they know you've acknowledged it, but you choose not to make a big issue of it because you want them to stay at the shelter” (Kathy, Service Provider).

Similarly, Kathy illustrates a choice-based approach to acknowledging when young people enter the shelter under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

“And then those who use drugs and alcohol quite frequently, it must be very hard for them not to use as often as they do if they were in the community, because they can't bring it into the shelter. So we do have clients who come in for curfew, or a little past curfew, and we acknowledge that, but maybe their choice of how much they've used that day is functional as opposed to not-functional in their community zone. But how much would they use if they didn't come to the shelter and if that structure wasn't on them? They wouldn't have a limit. So they are acknowledging our choice...[with] their choice to follow our rules by lessening their use.” (Kathy, Service Provider).

Both of these examples demonstrate a commitment to respecting the choices of young people. In Kathy's comments about drug use, she acknowledges that young people may alter their use of illegal substances to respect the rules of the shelter, but she also prioritizes allowing youth to define how much use is considered less. She also suggests that the structure of the shelter imposes limits which shape the decision-making of young people, and that without those guidelines young people would not have a limit.

In keeping with the choice-based approach and strength-based philosophy of the youth shelters, young people are held accountable for their decisions with natural and logical consequences to the greatest extent possible rather than relying on disciplinary systems. Programs that are based on natural and logical consequences do not rely on imposing external consequences, but rather, service providers allow young people to make their own choices and experience the outcomes of their decision-making. The therapeutic goal of this approach is to assist young people in developing an internal locus of control (Boldt et al., 2007; Powell & Batsche, 1997; Roebuck, Roebuck, & Roebuck, 2011; Winter & Preston, 2006). Kathy and

Cheryl both commented on how service providers respond when young people make choices that lead to negative natural consequences.

“We’re not like, 'You [messed] up. You should have done this.' It's all about them learning to make decisions and also learning to be accountable. If you decide it's more important to spend the night with your partner and risk [losing], that's your choice and there isn't a lot of judgement or that guilt that so many kids get placed upon them by adults to make them feel bad and try to manipulate. And we don't do that. It is their life; they have done a good job of running their lives the best way they can. And we really believe that our job is to provide them with all the different tools so that they can make informed choices.” (Cheryl, Service Provider).

The service providers I interviewed understand their role as providing resources to help young people navigate their own lives, without imposing adult power on the decision-making processes of young people. This does not mean that service providers are always in a passive role. Joyce (Service Provider) explained that when she is having conversations with young people about using drugs, she recognizes the choice of young people, but she is also very direct about discussing the natural consequences of drug use, and invites young people to consider if they are willing to experience those consequences as a result of their choices. While this choice-based philosophy guides interventions, Cheryl (Service Provider) acknowledged that it can be difficult to watch young people making choices that lead to negative consequences.

Another service provider explained that in addition to ongoing negotiation with young people, there are also frequent negotiations within the staff team that arise to decide which of the values of the agency will be prioritized in responding to the most challenging cases. In particular, he explained that the agency has to make regular decisions between the values of respecting the personal choices of young people and providing a safe environment. He explained that it is challenging to intervene with a young person who may be putting the safety of others at risk because of personal choices, but that safety has to be prioritized. Since many of

these decisions are not black-and-white, the staff teams and senior management have frequent discussions of this nature, where people will share their opinions and negotiate the outcomes.

Service Providers and the Strength-based Approach

My focus groups with service providers opened with questions designed to have them reflect on the strengths of the young people that they support, and they were quick to provide examples of both visible and hidden strengths. I would like to quickly highlight a few of these that relate to negotiation between service providers and young people. Service providers were impressed with the willingness for young people to seek help, to navigate multiple community resources, to engage in self-advocacy, and to negotiate expectations with services. In addition to these visible strengths, service providers understood their role as trying to identify “positives” whenever possible, and Cheryl provided the following example of a situation where a young person was praised for disrespectful behaviour because of the less obvious strength that it revealed.

“Sometimes, for those kids that are extra perfect, when they break a rule or something we actually celebrate it [Laughs]. We used to have this young woman who was very controlled by her family, and she would never disrespect an adult. She gave somebody lip one day, and they actually said, 'Good for you!' So it's listening to the youth and finding the positives any time that you can see it” (Cheryl, Service Provider).

Young people in youth shelters are navigating a number of personal challenges, and this requires skill. The service providers I spoke with recognized that young people are using many strengths in their daily functioning, even if the strengths are not always neatly packaged. Furthermore, Joyce was happy to report that young people have also shown the capacity to effectively negotiate in ways that have contributed to transforming agency practices.

“We've also had examples where youth are able to advocate about changes in our policies and the way we work. [They] come forward and say this doesn't make sense and this is why; [they] give us a rationale. And I can think of recent examples where we've changed because the youth have come to us. It's definitely a back and forth, and it shows that strength that they have to come forward and make change happen” (Joyce, Service Provider).

The story Joyce has provided demonstrates how young people are able to interact with the pre-existing social structures to transform their environment, and it is also an excellent example of Giddens' (1976, 1983, 1984) theory of structuration. In this way, a strength-based resilience framework focuses on the capacities of actors to act upon their environment.

8.5 Young people navigating towards additional services

Because the youth shelters are located within a larger multi-service agency that includes a drop-in centre as well as multiple mental health, drug treatment programs, and resource programs, the young people reported experiencing a strong degree of accessibility to access needed services, and many of the young people I interviewed had chosen to access the additional services available within the agency while experiencing homelessness. Jake (age 19) accessed counselling through the agency while he was homeless and has been very impressed with the broad range of service available through the agency. He reports, “I think that the individual counselling that I've received from [the agency] has actually made me a stronger person. They offer food, you can do your laundry, they have a health clinic, the dentist, the services are never ending (Jake, age 19). Similarly, Pete (age 18) became connected with a treatment group for young people with concurrent disorders offered by the agency, which he experienced as very positive. When he told me about his involvement, I asked him what he gets from participating in the group. He felt that it was a positive space to be celebrated for working towards his goals, in

contrast with some of the negative feedback that he had been receiving from other sources in his life.

“I just feel a sense of accomplishment...cause most of the time I was told that I wasn't doing anything right in my life, and that I was starting to be a fuck up. And as soon as I get there, it's more like...you get this kind of warm feeling, it's like...'Alright. Wow, I'm actually being recognized for doing this... this feels good.' It's a positive space to share your stories, and you know...get feedback from everybody else...Those people are actually doing stuff with their lives and moving forward and they want to share with people how they did it, and how good they feel about it” (Pete, age 18).

While many young people shared similar stories of becoming connected with additional services within the agency, one story highlighted the importance of accessible services for young people who may not be motivated to seek out supports on their own. Prior to his stay in the Young Men's Shelter, Dustin (age 16), was involved in robbery, mugging people on the street and robbing pharmacies to get money to purchase drugs and basic necessities. This changed when a representative from the provincial agency responsible for social assistance visited the youth shelter.

“It's weird. When I was at the Young Men's shelter, I just woke up from one day, and then this girl from welfare comes in, and that day I was signed up. I never even thought, maybe I should apply for welfare...nothing like that. She just came, and she's like, 'Okay, you'll be getting your cheque next month, just make sure you go to school.' I was like 'Sweet'. Now...I get my welfare check, and I haven't done it...I haven't robbed anybody in like a month. I've just been living off my welfare, and...whatever money I get, I'm happy to get it, and then that's about it. Because before, I was literally a kid with absolutely no income who wanted to use drugs. So now, I have some legal way to pay for it, so I'm not...trying to get arrested and screw everything up for something that I can pay for legally” (Dustin, age 16).

Dustin indicated that he would not have considered seeking out social assistance on his own, but since the opportunity was presented to him at the youth shelter, he was glad to be enrolled.

While he admits that he is using the money to purchase illegal drugs, he is happy to finally have a legal source of income. Even so, his hiatus from committing robbery is fragile. Dustin admits,

“If something were to happen...like, that's what I know. That's how I know how to get money, so you never know. I don't want to, but...some people are used to working in law firms, some people are used to working at Dollarama; I'm just used to [robbery]. That's how I know how to get money” (Dustin, age 16).

Dustin's rationale for committing robbery demonstrates that his abstinence from crime is unlikely because of a cognitive shift and more likely because his perceived need has been reduced through the accessibility of services he has received through the Young Men's Shelter.

Conclusion

Every young person I interviewed expressed some degree of support or gratitude for the services provided through the Youth Services Bureau, regardless of less positive comments a few young people expressed about specific experiences or policies within the agency. While this is the representation constructed by those I interviewed, it is also important to acknowledge that there is a possibility of sample bias since every young person interviewed voluntarily accesses services from the agency. I did not interview young people in the city who either choose not to access the agency's services or are unable to access services because of the policy of barring young people for disciplinary reasons, although I did speak with people who had either been evicted from a youth shelter or barred temporarily from the drop-in, which would likely mitigate some of this effect. Even if sample bias has affected this study, it is clear that a large number of young people experiencing homelessness in the city value the services provided by the agency, and many young people expressed an interest in working in service provider roles in the future because of the help that they have received. This chapter has shown that young people are not passive recipients of services, but engage in continual interactions with service providers and the

negotiation of service delivery which requires a number of strengths. Table 8.0 provides a summary of the findings from this chapter.

TABLE 8.0 Negotiation with Service Providers: Summary of Findings

Theme	Literature	Findings	Theory
Adult Shelters	(Armaline, 2005)	• Young people in this study were generally not aware of youth shelters when they first become homeless • Fear of adult shelters and adults who are homeless may motivate some young people to get off the streets or stay away from drugs • Limited vacancies in youth shelters cause young people over 18 years old to choose between staying in an adult shelter or sleeping outside	Navigation
Negotiation between Service Providers and Young People	(Armaline, 2005) (Boldt et al., 2007) (Finlay, 2007) (Kalke, Glanton, & Cristalli, 2007) (Powell & Batsche, 1997) (Roebuck et al., 2011) (Roebuck & Roebuck, 2013) (Whittaker, 2000) (Winter & Preston, 2006)	• Service providers encourage young people to negotiate • Some young people appreciate the flexibility of being able negotiate, while others resent the obligation to advocate for their perceived needs	Human Agency Structuration Resilience, Subjective Constructivist Negotiation
Other Services		• Young people appreciate accessible services that are tailored to youth • Providing social assistance for young people who are homeless may reduce their economic desperation	Human Agency Navigation

9.0 Negotiation and a Constructivist, Strength-based Model of Resilience

Young people negotiate to meet their needs through interactions with service providers and their peers. The young people I spoke with explained that they will often alter how they present themselves to others if they believe it will help them to negotiate more effectively. The previous chapters have shown the decisions that young people make when they become homeless, the challenges they experience on the streets, the strengths they develop, and how they negotiate with service providers. This chapter will further explore these negotiations within the context of Goffman's (1959; 1961) theory of impression management, followed by a discussion of how service providers 'construct' their understanding of the victimization of young people who are homeless. In closing, the chapter will pull together the key themes from the dissertation into a broader theoretical framework.

9.1 Impression Management and Negotiation

The way that young people who were homeless described themselves in interviews and focus groups ranged from expressions of powerlessness to expressions of strength and capacity; it also became apparent that in certain circumstances young people would behave in a way that was different than how they felt about themselves. This dynamic will be analyzed using Goffman's (1959; 1961) theory of the presentation of self in everyday life, and the notion of impression management that was outlined earlier in the theoretical chapter. Drawing on a dramaturgical perspective, Goffman makes a distinction between how people present themselves backstage and front stage: the backstage represents what is hidden from others, and most accurately reflects what people believe about themselves, while the front stage represents a performance presented to a particular audience. Goffman recognizes that at times people want

others to perceive them differently than how they perceive themselves, and will put on an act to appear in a way that may be more desirable to their observers. Even so, there may be a difference between the impression that a person intends to give, and what they actually they give off. According to Goffman, these subtleties shape human interactions, and in this discussion, I will explore their impact on negotiation. The young people that I interviewed were conscious that they staged performances, and several of the interviews felt like frank discussions with actors backstage as they described the work that goes into staging their performances.

This section will highlight some of the performances that young people stage with their peers and with service providers, as well as the ‘backstage’ narrative that contrasts how the young people really think about themselves when they are performing. Situated within the broader theoretical framework in this dissertation, these reflexive descriptions of performances can be understood as a part of how young people negotiate for their wellbeing with those around them.

Backstage Reflections on Acting Tough

As identified earlier in the findings, young people reported that they often feel the need to “act tough” on the streets; a perspective that aligns with a front stage performance of identity staged for a specific audience. Acting tough was a common strategy to try and avoid being perceived as vulnerable, which young people felt could lead to being targeted for victimization, such as theft, physical assault, or sexual assault. Chad (age 17) explains his perception of the danger of showing emotions to other young people on the street, and describes how he tries to keep a very even demeanor.

“When you're with your friends...like, on the street, you portray any emotion...it's a weakness. Like...you cry? And you're a guy? You're a pussy. You don't fight? Me...I'm like this all the time, just mellow, you know? Cause like...you show happiness, sadness...all that does is get you hurt on the street” (Chad, age 17).

Chad confessed that performing this role on the street for so long had caused him some confusion, and now that he is considering transitioning off the street, he is trying to rediscover who he is, and who he can be, apart from the character he plays on the streets.

“So I have to learn how to separate myself from the street to who I really am. Cause on the street, you can't always be yourself. Like when you're with a crowd of people you don't know, you're a tough guy, like...nothing bothers me, nothing gets me shook. When you're with your friends, that's when you express it. But like, you have to learn to express emotions all the time apparently, or so I've been told. So I have to learn to accept like...everything, emotions and shit” (Chad, age 17).

In this narrative, Chad makes a strong distinction between who he is backstage and the character he plays on the street, and he describes the challenge of keeping these two identities separate. Kristin (age 18), maintained a stronger distinction between who she believes she is, and the identity that she tries to perform on the street, arguing that most people she knows on the street are terrified, but try to appear strong to others. She also questions her ability to perform a tough persona in a way that others will accept as credible.

“I'm not a confident person, I'm not generally a violent person, and I can't defend myself...I can't. I'm not big, I'm 5'2 and 100 pounds...I'm not big. And I think most of the kids I meet, as confident as they are, as loud as they are, as friendly as they can be...I think inside, they're terrified, and...they won't admit to themselves. And even if they admit it to themselves...hell no, you don't admit you're scared when you're living on the streets. You admit you're scared to someone else living who's on the streets...that's when you get the crap beaten out of you, and all your stuff taken. You have to be as tough as you can be...and I mean I'm 5'2 and 100 pounds. If I'm not acting tough...if I'm not watching my back 24/7, I guarantee one day some guy is going to come up to me, knock me up and take my shit” (Kristin, age 18).

Kristin believes that everyone she knows on the streets is putting on a performance to try and protect themselves. In the short comment provided above, she referred to her small size twice, and given her belief that she is not likely to scare anyone off, she relies instead on allying herself with others on the street who appear tough. “I associate with a few fairly well respected people, and...that keeps me safe. And [if] I piss someone off and I didn't have tough people around me, or weren't tough myself, I'd have three or four people coming after me to kick my ass, and I wouldn't be downtown...you know? So that's it...survival...survival of the fittest” (Kristin, age 18). Kristin believes that portraying a tough image or being associated with others who appear tough is a matter of survival, and performing this identity is part of how she negotiates with her surroundings for a sense of personal safety.

Similar to Chad, Kristin also expressed that playing a tough role has the power to change a person, although she reflected on a friend who she has seen change since becoming homeless.

“I know a guy who's down here, and he's this big beast of a guy, and he was the sweetest guy. When he ended up on the streets, he chose to start dealing drugs, and he took on that role...this, 'I don't give a fuck' attitude, and this, 'You get out of my face or I'll knock your teeth out' attitude. That personality...that person is now him; he's not who he was, he's not the nice guy that he was” (Kristin, age 18).

Kristin explained that her friend had alienated everyone around him and had run into trouble at school with his teachers and principal. She questioned where he will ever find a place to live or get a job. One other young man I spoke with, Dustin (age 16), also appeared to have adopted a tough personal identity, rather than conceiving of it as a role that he played, although it is possible that the interview with him could also be understood a performance rather than a backstage discussion. Contrasting many of the other narratives I heard, Dustin actually conceived of himself as tough, but felt that his physical appearance may not be adequate to

convince others. He described himself as having a “young face” and explained how that would take people by surprise when he robbed them on the street. To be taken credibly, Dustin explained that he robs people with a small group of guys who are bigger and more intimidating than him, and that he also uses a knife to intimidate others. As previously described, Dustin does not think of his behaviour as harmful, but rather as a temporary act of intimidation to convince people to hand over whatever valuables they may be carrying.

Appearing strong on the street is not just a matter of protection, it can also be a matter of personal dignity. Max (age 20) experienced embarrassment in a homelessness shelter when he discovered that some of the service providers and volunteers were previously students at his high school. He described this as the most challenging aspect of homelessness that he had experienced.

“They're working behind the counter, and then there's me...and then they're like, 'I know this guy. He's a fuck up. Look at him.' You know? They say it doesn't matter what people think about you, but it really does...because if everyone thinks of you as shit, then you're not really going to get anywhere” (Max, age 20).

Because of the previous relationship that Max had with the volunteers and service providers, Max felt judged and that he was being perceived as a failure. His connection with these people made it difficult for him to portray himself in a position of strength, and his concern for his future actually served as a motivator for Max to get off the street and move away from Ottawa, where he could have a fresh start in his life where people did not know him. When we spoke, he was days away from moving into a new apartment, and was eager to move away from downtown Ottawa where people may recognize him.

Backstage Reflections on Acting Vulnerable

In the narratives that have been presented, young people have discussed how they often feel vulnerable but try to appear strong. However, there are also times when young people bring their vulnerability to the front stage and present themselves as weaker than they feel as part of their negotiations to meet their needs. In the interviews I conducted, young people described these interactions as being predominantly staged for service providers, but they were also staged for parents, teachers, and police officers. Jake (age 19) was the most articulate about playing this role. When he turned 16 years old, he left the child welfare system, and after a falling out with his family, he went to his bank to withdraw \$10,000 in savings for education that was held in a joint account with his father. When he requested to withdraw the full amount, the bank clerk tried to decline the transaction and referred him to the bank manager.

“They're like, 'Wait a second, let's just talk to the bank manager.' And I started freaking out, and I was like, 'Well I need the money, because I just got out of CAS, and I need to get a house for myself, I have nowhere to go.' And it turned into the biggest sob story you have ever heard, but I had to do it...I had to lie to them, and I had to make the situation as far-fetched but as believable as possible, right? Cause I'm protecting myself, it's my money, 'fuck you, you know? Give me my money’” (Jake, age 19).

In reality, Jake was scared and angry and felt like he had limited options; however, he did not intend to use the money for housing, and he played up his vulnerable position as a form of bargaining power to manipulate others to let him withdraw his money. After providing a written statement to the bank manager, he was able to withdraw the full amount without having the bank contact his father. Jake then described with regret how he spent the full amount in the months that followed, and ended up with no money and staying in a barn near a friend in a rural community who he knew through the child welfare system.

Following that incident, Jake was housed again, but had another experience of homelessness following a violent incident in his family home. When Jake accessed support at the Youth Services Bureau he learned that his history of violent victimization in the child welfare system and his homeless status would grant him priority status on the social housing registry. He described in a playful manner how he tries to encourage young people to use any history of victimization to gain priority status as he did.

“I tell a lot of people who walk into YSB, like, 'What brought you?' I try to find something, any priority I can think of in my head: safety priority, medical priority...I just want to jog people's memories, 'Did anyone ever hit you? Did anyone do this or that? Were you ever wronged in any situation? So you left because of this, right?' I'm trying to find it for them...trying to get them thinking. But people are too honest. The reality is that it's on a big trust system here” (Jake, age 19).

Jake recognizes that these priority areas of vulnerability provide leverage in the negotiation for social housing. He encourages young people to find any area of vulnerability possible and present it to service providers to support their application to the social housing registry, even if they need to embellish their experiences. At the same time, his motivation is rooted in a deeper belief that young people should not be homeless. “I feel like being homeless should be illegal...no citizen should have the right to be out on the street in my opinion, because there's too much wrong that can be done to them” (Jake, age 19). Based on this belief, Jake is willing to use vulnerability and a history of victimization as a tool to negotiate to meet his needs. While the experiences may be real, Jake is aware of the power of presenting this image to service providers. Jake was very open about this aspect of his self-advocacy and also described how he would present a similar vulnerable image in negotiations with his social assistance worker. Service providers spoke more in depth about when they perceived that young people were

intentionally “playing a victim role” which will be further explored in the second portion of this chapter.

“Acted Upon” vs. “Acting On”

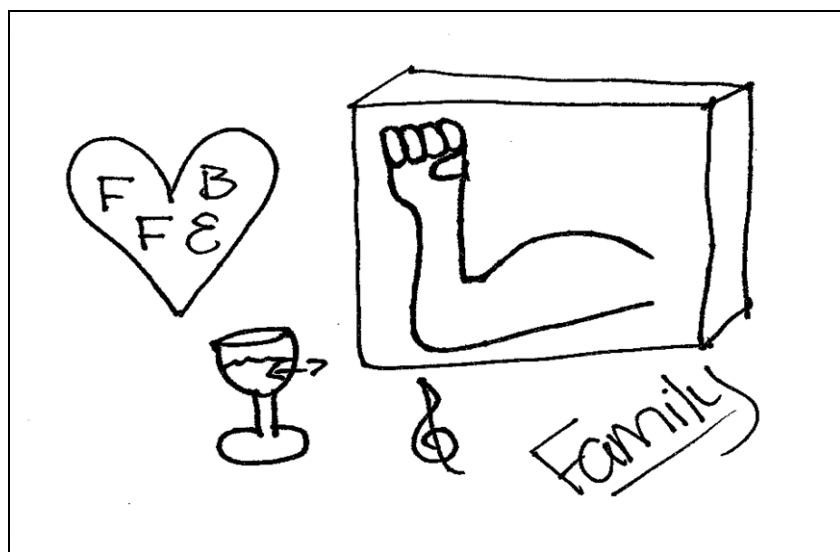
Returning to the central theme of human agency and Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration, when young people present themselves to others, they select between narratives that prioritize the power of either structure or agency; portraying themselves as either being “acted upon” by their circumstances, or as “acting on” their circumstances. An “acted upon” presentation of the self implies that human agency is limited and prioritizes the power of social structures in determining personal outcomes. An “acting on” presentation of the self prioritizes the capacity of human agency to affect social structures and shape personal outcomes. In the narratives presented above, there are often contrasts between what young people believe about themselves backstage and what they present to others on the front stage; these contrasts can be understood through the lens of being “acted upon” and “acting on.” With their peers, young people who feel unsafe and limited in their personal power (acted upon), will often convey an image of being powerful and strong (acting on) as a way of negotiating for their security. Conversely, when seeking help from service providers, sometimes young people may intentionally portray themselves as more vulnerable than they feel (acted upon) because they believe this will help them to get what they are looking for. The narratives show a reflexive use of these two identities, and the way that these roles may be played as part of the negotiation process.

At the same time, young people may also experience changes in their backstage beliefs about themselves and change between perceiving themselves as “acted upon” or “acting on.” This became apparent as I heard young people discuss their choices when they left home and

became homeless. At least two young people I interviewed said that their parents had kicked them out of their home, but later discussed their own choice to leave home. Others who had been homeless for a longer time explained that the time they had spent homeless had given them more time to reflect on the events leading to “being kicked out,” and explained that they now take a greater degree of responsibility for their own behaviours. This is consistent with Mallett et al., (2003) who found that many of the young people they interviewed reported that their understanding of how they had become homeless changed over time with distance from the other people involved, and gained a more mature perspective based on greater life experience.

The most dramatic shift in narratives I observed occurred in my interview with Kristin (age 18), who attended the focus group for young women, and then participated in a one-on-one interview the following day. As previously discussed in the methodology chapter, during the focus group I asked the young people to draw a picture of what they relied on in their lives to help them when times were difficult. Almost all of the drawings in the focus group with young women and young men depicted drugs and alcohol, so Kristin’s drawing stood apart (Figure 4.0).

Figure 4.0 Kristin’s drawing from the focus group with young women



Kristin's drawing included references to close friends, her "street family", music, and a glass of wine with an arrow pointing towards a picture of a strong arm inside a box, which was intended to represent "inner strength."

During the one-on-one interview, Kristin spoke about her life in a disempowered manner, describing her challenges and repeatedly asking questions like, "What do you do?" "What am I supposed to do?" "What do you do when you have nowhere to sleep?" She spoke at great length about how afraid she was on the streets and she presented a narrative that emphasized the obstacles in her life, portraying a limited view of human agency that could be understood as "acted upon." After thirty minutes of Kristin presenting this type of narrative, I asked her to tell me more about her drawing from the focus group that she had said represented inner strength. Her narrative made a distinct and immediate change that emphasized her human agency and personal capacity to overcome obstacles.

"I believe I'm capable of completing my high school education, finding somewhere to live, becoming successful. I...I think I'm capable of that. I think I'm capable of getting sober. If I can do 2 weeks, I can do 6 months, I can do a year, and so on and so forth. And I'm capable of getting past this...I'm capable of taking that first step, and the second one, and getting out of here. And...I...I think that I can get somewhere with my life if I put my mind to it, and put my talents to it" (Kristin, age 18).

At this point in the interview, Kristin continued to elaborate on her personal strengths and her determination to transition off the streets. She acknowledged again that since the death of her friend, she had managed to remain sober for two weeks, overcoming her addiction to alcohol and OxyContin for that period of time. Her demeanour changed and she began to speak with confidence. Having stayed clean for two weeks following the death of her friend was a significant personal victory since earlier in the interview, Kristin described how she would

typically use drugs to deal with emotional pain. She also indicated that she had been able to avoid self-injurious behaviour in the previous two weeks.

Kristin's narratives reflected both perspectives; being "acted upon" and "acting on." Combining this example with the others presented in this chapter leads to three observations:

- 1) Young people experience temporal shifts in their belief about their capacity to affect their social structures and circumstances.
- 2) These beliefs are influenced through interactions with other actors, both in ways that can reinforce feelings of powerlessness and that can reinforce feelings of strength and capacity.²³
- 3) Young people also consciously play the roles of being "acted upon" or "acting on" to negotiate with other actors to achieve a desired outcome.

The temporal nature of these perceptions is particularly important to understanding a constructivist model of resilience. Young people are continually reflecting on their lives, and at the same time being influenced by others. While adults also experience temporal shifts in their beliefs about their capacity to affect their circumstances, young people passing through adolescence are constantly navigating the expectations of adults and systems that fluctuate in treating them as children requiring adult intervention and as adult decision-makers with responsibility for managing their own lives. Youth perceptions and beliefs about personal capacity are in a constant state of flux, which may be further influenced by the rapid changes created by "drama" on the streets. One month a young person may describe himself as being connected with a "street family" that provides support and helps him through difficulty, but then

²³ This may relate to Goffman's (1961) notion that the 'self' resides in patterns of control

have a falling out the next month and come to perceive the same people as a threat. In this example, the supportive peers could be understood as a protective factor one month, and a risk factor the next. Other young people may experience constant tension in how they perceive and value their peers. This is why Ungar (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008) advocates a model of resilience that explores how marginalized young people navigate and negotiate with the multiple tensions in their lives. A young person on the street with a desire to feel acceptance and belonging from peers will have to navigate a large number of rapid changes in the social environment to achieve acceptance into a group, and will have to continually negotiate for a sense of belonging. These rapid changes will also affect how young people think about themselves, and the highs and lows of street life will influence, to some extent, when young people perceive of themselves as being “acted upon” or “acting on.” However, the individual capacity to respond in unexpected ways cannot be understated, and many of the young people I interviewed demonstrated a tremendous capacity to maintain a positive outlook and sense of personal capacity despite experiencing significant adversity.

9.2 Service Provider Constructions of Victimization

Another theme that I heard from service providers in individual interviews and focus groups was the idea that young people who perceive of themselves as victims will have less success in navigating through and exiting homelessness. All service providers I interviewed readily acknowledged that young people experience victimization prior to entering homelessness and that they experience high rates of victimization when they are homeless; however, I encountered an intriguing resistance to the notion that young people who are homeless are actually “victims.” Quinney (1978) as well as Holstein & Miller (1997) provide a social constructionist discussion of the “victim” label. The authors try to break away from the

simplistic assumption that a “victim” is a party in legal proceedings, and attempt to explore the interactions of claims-makers in establishing who should be considered a “victim.” Holstein & Miller (1997) argue that the legal recognition that a person is a “victim” implies that they have been harmed by some force beyond their control, and the legal process itself is a claims-making arena where claims-makers attempt to construct both victim and offender identities. Accepting that someone has been harmed by forces outside of their control fixes responsibility for the incident outside of the individual in question. A victim is not held responsible; rather they are seen as innocent, and unjustly injured. This process also implies that whatever or whoever caused the harm is the ‘victimizer.’ The combination of a victim and victimizer leads claims-makers to propose specific responses or remedies, such as some form of retribution for the wrong done.

Whereas the “victim” label is generally applied as the outcome of claims-making within the criminal justice system, many young people who are homeless avoid entering the criminal justice system as a means of addressing personal victimization. As a result, the “victim” label, when it is applied, is a vague and symbolic term that is open to multiple interpretations and is defined differently by claims-makers. This softer “victim” label may introduce some benefits outside of the legal sphere. Holstein & Miller (1997) argue that adopting the identity of a “victim” may allow an individual to be free of responsibility and even excuse them from aspects of their routine activities, but that there is also a danger that internalizing the “victim” label may become debilitating. The authors believe that the label implies a passivity and helplessness that may become dangerous if internalized, as it could produce a cycle of self-defeating behaviour. This disempowered way of understanding the “victim” label was shared by service providers who resisted its use in two important ways:

- 1) They resisted the use of the “victim” label to describe young people experiencing homelessness on the grounds that it diminished the recognition of the strengths and resilience of young people; and,
- 2) They felt that young people who “played the victim” diminished their own willingness and ability to accept responsibility for their lives.

Understanding how service providers think about the “victim” label provides an important context for understanding their interactions with young people who experience victimization while they are homeless. One component of Ungar’s (2004; 2004a; 2008) concept of navigation that is central to his model of resilience is that young people navigate towards available resources. This means that the resources that are available will influence the decision-making of young people. In their book on rehabilitative interventions, Ward & Maruna (2007) explain that the underlying beliefs and assumptions of service providers will shape the interventions that they offer. Exploring how service providers in this study construct their understanding of victimization and the “victim” label provides a glimpse of the claims-making arena where young people who are homeless engage in negotiation to meet their needs.

The way that service providers conceive of the word “victim”, what it implies, and how they actively resist its use with their clients provides an excellent case study for the social constructionist approach. The service providers I spoke with conceived of the “victim” label and “victimization” in a number of ways. These include seeing it as: a risk factor, something managed differently according to gender, a young person’s choice to disclose, and a role that young people may “play” to avoid responsibility for their behaviours.

Victimization as a Risk Factor

When young people disclose victimization to service providers at the drop-in centre or one of the youth shelters, staff will engage in a high-risk assessment, which involves a questionnaire that explores the client's mental health, the risk of harm to themselves, harm to other people, and the risk of being harmed by others. When service providers evaluate the outcome of this assessment, and classify a young person as being at high risk, they will typically engage in safety planning with the young person. Erica explains how choice plays a role in a client's safety plan.

“Safety is one of our main values, and we take supporting people in their safety very seriously. So if somebody comes to us, and they've been victimized, we would elaborate a safety plan with them, and they get to choose which elements they'd like to include in that safety plan. We're not here to push people into anything. We're here to offer them their options. You know, if it's an assault, do they want to be seen by a doctor? Do they want to pursue legal recourse? What kind of rights do they have? We're there to explain that to them, but ultimately what they do about it is up to themselves” (Erica, Service Provider).

With the exception of cases where the young person is assessed as an immediate threat to themselves or others, this approach positions the service provider as a resource for the client, and leaves the decision-making about how to implement a safety plan up to the young person. Erica explained that young people tend to be very hesitant to contact the police about victimization or to pursue any legal action. She suggests that this may be for a number of reasons, including the young person being involved in criminal activities, a fear of being judged by police officers, or the feeling that not much will come from a lengthy and demanding legal process.

Since many of the young people passing through homelessness have experienced some form of criminal victimization, service providers are frequently involved in supporting young people through their experiences. One service provider, Maggie, explained that an intake

assessment or conversation with a service provider may be the first time a young person talks about their past victimization. She explained that even conducting a risk assessment with the young people may provide a sense of relief.

“Some people are so happy that you took the time to care about them enough to write down what's really going on with them and how risky that is, and how concerning it is to us. It gives them the strength to then, if they're victimized again once they're on the street, to come back to us and talk to us about it.” (Maggie, Service Provider).

Maggie also acknowledged that when she is conducting housing assessments to move young people from the emergency shelter into transitional housing, young people may be cautious about what they choose to disclose to a service provider, since it could impact on their ability to get housing.

“In a way it's negotiating the information that they can share with me. I ask a lot of questions that can be quite intrusive. And I've learnt now that I start those conversations with, 'I'm going to ask you a lot of questions, and you feel free to share what you're comfortable with sharing,' cause some people might not want to disclose as much. So they give me what they can, and I work with that.” (Maggie, Service Provider).

Gender and Disclosure of Victimization

One of the service providers I spoke with had worked extensively with young women who were homeless for years prior to her current work with young men who are homeless. She shared that she felt that she had noticed a gender difference in the willingness for young people to disclose victimization to service providers.

“I find one of the differences is with the young women, they would speak to it a lot more, whereas with the young men, I find they don't want you to see them as a victim...they're not going to talk about it. For example, abuse in the home. A young woman would come in, and a lot of that would just come out at intake or through time. For housing with the registry, if you share that you have been a victim, you get prioritized for housing. I've seen young women get housing faster so often for those reasons. With young men, when

I share how it works, like 'this is how you get priority', they're like, 'Nope. Not a victim of abuse. Nope. Nope. That doesn't apply to me.' And I don't know...perhaps it's true, but I don't know how open they would be to admitting that, even if it was to give them priority. So that's a gender difference. I recall two young men bluntly refusing to go through the process, like getting the support letters...they just didn't want to do it. And it's a choice, right? The label...they don't want the label" (Maggie, Service Provider).

Maggie's account highlights the role that a "victim label" may play in the negotiation for emergency housing, where young people who disclose that they are homeless because of victimization may be prioritized for housing. Maggie also pointed out that even though priority status for subsidized housing may be the outcome of disclosing victimization, young men seemed to be less willing to discuss their history of victimization than young women. Given the narratives about the importance of appearing strong on the street as a form of self-protection, it is possible that young people may be hesitant to disclose experiences that make them appear or feel vulnerable. Literature does support the notion that men may be less likely to report victimization than women (Burcar & Akerstrom, 2009; Sundaram et al., 2004). I did however, speak with one young man who had been able to access housing because of his disclosure of victimization.

"I sat down with [a service provider] and did...almost like a resume, but chronological...everything that's ever happened, who has helped me, who has dealt with it, case numbers, reports and everything. Within about two weeks, I was offered a place from the social housing registry and that really changed my life around a lot" (Jake, age 19).

When Jake did disclose his victimization, a service provider helped him map out his history to prioritize his application for social housing. I find the intersection of victimization and gender for young people who are homeless a fascinating area for further study.

On Victimization and Choice

The previous chapter discussed the choice-based programming of the agency where I conducted my research, and how this plays out in the negotiations between young people and service providers. One of the challenges identified by service providers when they were discussing victimization is the need to respect the choices of young people, even when those choices are likely to lead to further victimization. Cheryl (service provider) described this as one of the most difficult parts of her job.

“I also see young women taking really high risks, and the likelihood is that they will be victimized again, and they will choose to be victimized again, or in high risk areas where that's a potential. That's one of the hardest things, at least for me to deal with personally, is when someone is giving their power to other people, or letting them take their power away, and trying to get young women to see that isn't always easy, especially when you're dealing with the impact of abuse and how one has learned to cope and strategize.”

Cheryl explained that service providers do try to intervene with young people to raise awareness about the potential impacts of their choices, but that it can be difficult to get young people “to see” the negative implications of their decisions. There is a difference between saying that young people put themselves in situations where they are likely to be victimized, and in saying that they choose to be victimized. None of the young people that I spoke with described a time where they made a choice to be victimized, although some of the narratives did acknowledge that victimization was a risk or a possibility of the choices they made. For example, Chad spoke about his decision to sell drugs, and acknowledged that he had experienced a high level of violent victimization because of his choice. However, he did not equate his choice to sell drugs with a choice to be victimized; rather, the victimization that he experienced was described as something that made him reconsider his choice to engage in drug selling. When we spoke, Chad was actively contemplating getting clean and entering a residential drug treatment program, but

until he was ready to commit to that, selling drugs was a vital part of the way that he secured an income on the streets, in spite of the violence that he experienced.

According to the perspectives offered by young people in this research, it would be more accurate to say that based on the social and economic constraints they experience because of homelessness, they may feel the need to make difficult decisions about their lives with the knowledge that victimization is a possibility because of their vulnerable position. No one shared an example where they made a choice knowing that victimization was a certain outcome; the implication that anyone intentionally chooses to be victimized is generally recognized in the field of Victimology as a form of victim blaming (Karmen, 2005). The difference of interpretation between service providers and young people could either become a power struggle in delivering interventions, trying to get young people to “see” the service provider perspective, or this example may simply be a reflection from a service provider trying to make sense of the choices that she sees young people making in her daily work. Young people who are homeless make choices based on a very different frame of reference than people who have safer options available to them. The service providers I spoke with do understand this perspective and strive to provide an environment where young people do not feel judged for their choices, despite how difficult it can be to see young people choosing pathways where they may continue to experience abuse and victimization.

On “Playing the Victim”

Service providers also provided the perspective that sometimes young people who are homeless may “play the victim” role. I first heard this perspective during a focus group at one of the youth shelters. When it was mentioned in individual interviews with service providers, I asked for more explanation about what “playing the victim” meant. Cheryl (service provider)

spoke about the concept at length, describing how some young people use the “victim” label to an extent where they no longer take responsibility for their lives.

“We certainly have young women that do play the victim role, and that's one of the hardest things to motivate from...giving your power away to everybody else, because that's what you're doing when you're playing the victim role, right? Playing the victim has some reward as well. Nothing is ever their fault. It's someone else's...it's never attached to them...so that's a bit more frustrating to deal with, when they don't want to take the power that they have as a person, and they deflect on other people.

Cheryl describes how service providers try to address the passive “victim” identity that young people may be performing.

“When we have kids that are playing the victim role, we do have a conversation about, 'When you do something it's yours to own. So when you something good happens, it's not because someone gave you something or did something, it's because you did it. And it's being aware of your own power, and that you have power. You're the only one who has total power over yourself’” (Cheryl, service provider).

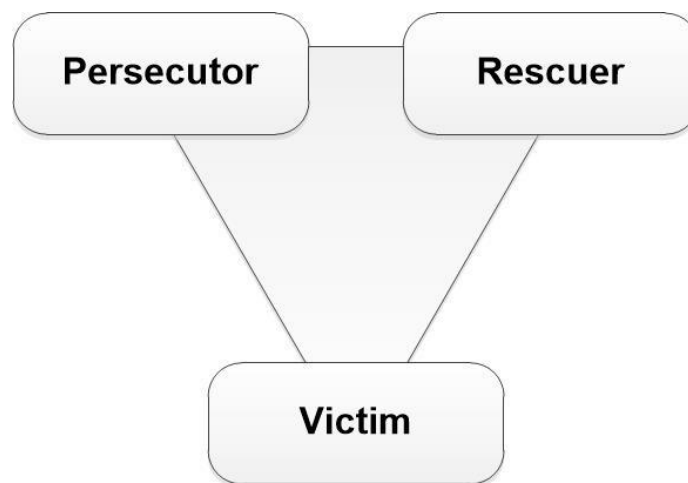
She further explained that the service providers were good at being direct with young people about the expectations of the shelters. For example, she explained that when people come back late for curfew and start presenting excuses, the staff team will listen and allow the young people to vent, but will then return to the importance of taking responsibility for choices. Erica (service provider) shared a similar conception of how young people may play a victim role, and spoke to the gradual process of helping young people redefine themselves.

“Part of our job is to meet the client where they perceive that they're at, but also to help them see that they can move forward...that you don't have to be stuck in this victim pattern. For some of them it will be really hard to get out of, it's not that they're just going to wake up one morning and say, 'You're right, I don't have to be a victim.' It does take some work, but it's a lot of what we do ...building youth self-esteem and belief in themselves, that can sometimes go a long way into them taking a bit more ownership over their lives and bit more charge over their decisions” (Erica, service provider).

Cheryl and Erica believe that service providers can help young people to accept responsibility for their lives despite any adversity they have experienced, and that young people move forward when they can accept responsibility for their choices. The service providers I spoke with readily acknowledged that young people who are homeless experience victimization, but they also challenged young people who allowed these experiences to define them or shape their interactions with others. “Challenging” may look like a simple conversation, or more often, it may play out in the negotiation of shelter rules.

It was Donny (service provider) who provided a theoretical rationale for the language of “playing the victim”; Donny introduced me to Karpman’s (1968) Drama triangle which informs his approach to working with marginalized young people [See Figure 5.0]. The drama triangle is derived from Transactional Analysis, and suggests that some human interactions can be characterized by actors playing three roles: the victim, the persecutor, and the rescuer (Karpman, 1968).

FIGURE 5.0 Karpman’s (1968) Drama Triangle



In keeping with a dramaturgical perspective similar to that proposed by Goffman (1957; 1961), the drama triangle theory suggests that some people will “play” or perform the role of a victim, persecutor or rescuer to achieve some form of personal gain, and that how they represent themselves may be a performance that differs from reality. From Donny’s perspective, when service providers understand situations as having a “victim” and a “persecutor,” there is a danger that the service providers could adopt a “rescuer” role to make themselves feel useful. This role risks adopting the assumption that the “victims” have a diminished capacity to care for themselves, and that they need an outsider rescuer. The person playing the role of the “rescuer” may then create a dependent relationship with the “victim, and become caught up in the drama that ensues. For service providers, a relationship of this nature may be characterized by a power differential, where the service provider assumes the power to fix the victim’s situation, and may try to impose solutions in a directive way that violates a client-centred approach, and does not allow the “victim” to use their own strengths and resources to solve problems.

“I believe when they come down here, they are a victim often, right? I try not to treat them like a victim. That's the important thing. I don't know if you're familiar with the drama triangle? I'll show you something really quick. This is the drama triangle...from research. So there's always someone playing victim, there's always someone playing rescuer, and there's always someone playing persecutor. If you are dealing within this, you're never getting anywhere. My biggest thing is to bring him out of that drama triangle, right? Cause they're always being rescued, so if I'm playing rescuer I'm not doing them a favour. If I'm playing persecutor, that's what they're used to hearing; I'm not doing them a favour. If I'm accepting them as a victim, I'm not doing them a favour. So I try to stay out of that triangle at all times.” (Donny, Service Provider).

As Donny further explained the drama triangle, his explanation seemed to indicate that when people try to play the rescuer role, they may inadvertently perpetuate the victim status of the person that they are trying to help, even though it can be difficult to listen to the stories of young people in distress and not play the role of rescuer. Donny’s understanding of intervention

prioritizes the human agency of young people, and assumes that they have the capacity and resources to solve their own problems. With this approach, the service provider avoids the rescuer role; and instead, functions as an additional resource for young people as they navigate the obstacles in their lives. They do not try to fix problems, but rather support young people in their own problem-solving. Donny's explanation of the Drama Triangle, helps to contextualize some of the other comments from service providers, and also provides a rationalization for why service providers may resist the use of the "victim" label being applied to their clients.

9.3 Towards a Strength-based, Constructivist View of Resilience

The idea of not "playing the victim" was also closely related to how service providers constructed their understanding of resilience. Young people who were described as resilient were those who, despite experiencing adversity, did not give up their hope for a better future, and kept facing the next day. For Monique, (service provider) young people who did not adopt a victim identity backstage, or play the victim role front stage were perceived positively.

"Maybe in our eyes, we see them as victims...and maybe people have made them feel that they're victims, but they don't let it define who they are. You know? They acknowledge what's happened...they know that it's happened to them, but they're going to move on. In there, they may get some help to deal with it, but they just don't let it stop them, which is really good. They don't look at themselves as a victim" (Monique, Service Provider).

Service providers frequently used the language, "moving on" or "moving forward" or "waking up each day" to explain how they felt about resilience, arguing that young people who are homeless are some of the most resilient young people in society because of their willingness to keep living and keep facing another day despite all of the adversity they experience. Donny (service provider) felt that the fact that they are still living and have not ended their lives shows the strength and courage that they possess. From a youth perspective, Syrus (age 21) felt that

resilience was related to letting go of past hurts and disappointments, and embracing new possibilities.

“I think it's part of resilience; to be able to change goals and adapt to life situations, and not to cling on to what someone has done to you, or cling on to what someone said to you, or how someone treated you, because by putting it in the past and growing from it, I'm able to interact with new people and not resent them for reminding me of someone” (Syrus, age 21).

This description provided by Syrus closely matches the common notion that resilience is a process of positive adaptation despite experiencing significant adversity (Masten & Powell, 2003). Young people who are homeless all experience adversity, and yet many of the risk factors they encounter may trigger a degree of personal growth and transformation. Based on the interviews I conducted, I learned that a risk factor like family breakdown has the potential to strengthen autonomy, independence and problem-solving; disconnection from peers can trigger experimentation and self-discovery; having few possessions can increase feelings of gratitude; and, accessing multiple community services can enhance organizational skills, initiative, and the capacity for negotiation and self-advocacy. The development of these strengths validates the notion that young people who are homeless may experience many forms of positive adaptation in light of the adversity they face; however, because of the way that resilience is generally defined, these same young people are not likely to be identified as examples of resilience because they may not be in school, they may be unemployed, selling or using drugs, and committing criminalized acts to meet their basic needs. A constructivist model of resilience (Ungar 2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008) addresses this disconnect by acknowledging the skills involved in how marginalized young people navigate and negotiate the tensions of life on the streets, and focusing on these aspects as indicators of resilience.

Ungar's model of constructivist resilience (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008) has been used throughout the dissertation to frame the way that young people navigate through homelessness. His perspective is linked to Giddens' (1976, 1979, 1983, 1984, 1996) interactionist theory of structuration which suggests that human agency and social structures exist in a continual feedback loop, where individual decisions are shaped by social structures, and social structures are reinforced or transformed as many individuals make decisions. In this way, Giddens bridges macro structures with micro decision-making. The literature review has argued that many researchers studying youth homelessness have focused on the macro structures that impact the lives of young people without much focus on individual decision-making, and how this decision-making is shaped by negotiation with other human agents and the subjective and symbolic interpretations of these interactions. In this research project, I have used tools from a symbolic interactionist perspective to further develop the dialogue around the decision-making of young people who are homeless and how young people present themselves in everyday life to aid in their negotiations with peers and service providers. This dissertation contributes to Ungar's (2004; 2004a; 2005; 2008) constructivist model of resilience, integrating concepts such as techniques of neutralization and impression management as conceptual tools to explore how young people negotiate with themselves and with others, through a specific case study of youth homelessness in Ottawa.

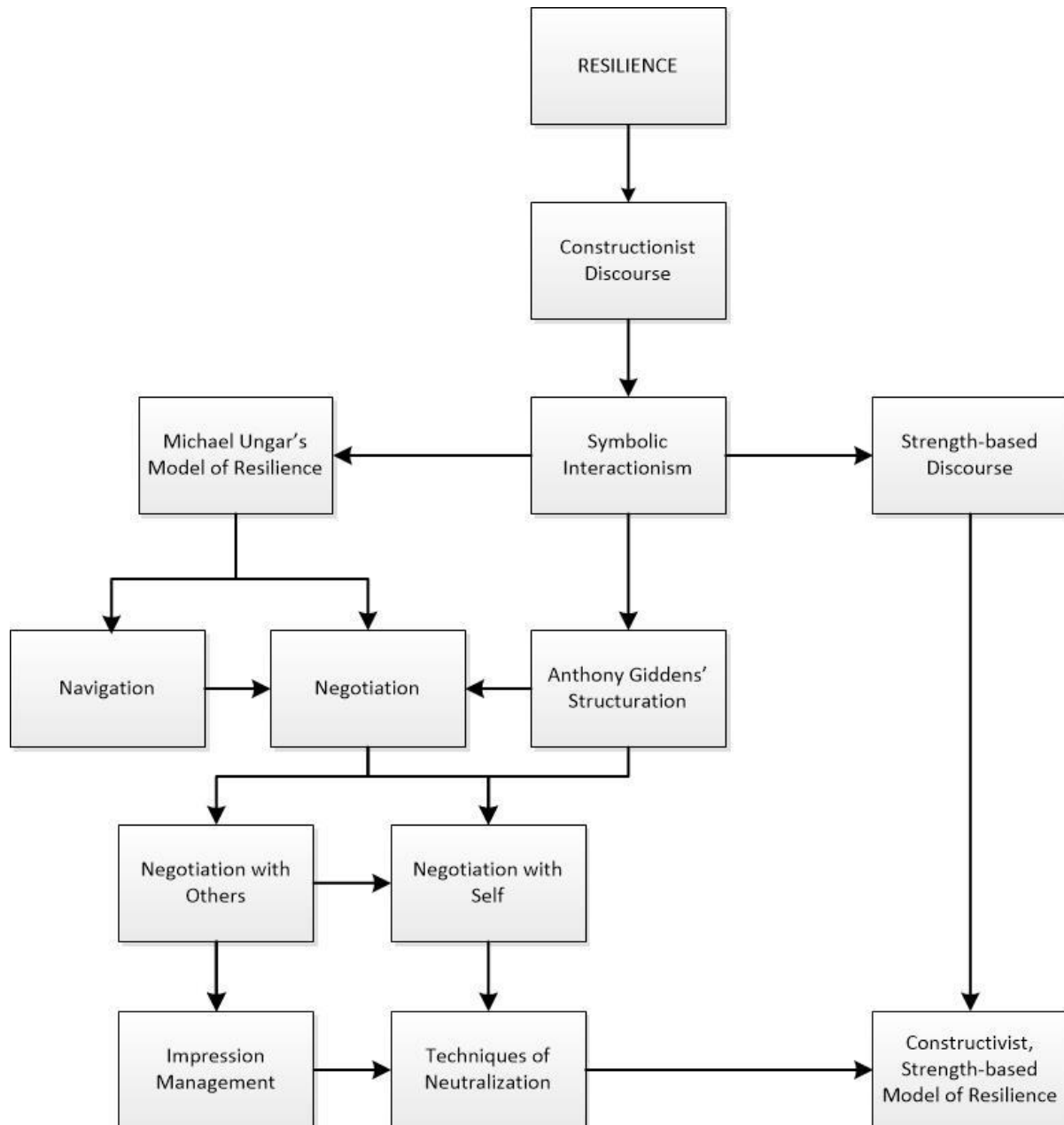
The literature review also acknowledged that the process of resilience is not an individual process alone, but it is a process that occurs in the context of the availability of external resources and social networks that support people in their process of personal growth (Bender et al., 2007; Lanekau et al., 2005; Masten & Powell, 2003; Ungar, 2005). Young people in this research identified community resources as an essential source of support, both for meeting their

physical needs and emotional needs. There was also a strong alignment between how service providers described their work with young people, and how the young people described their interactions with service providers; expressing that service providers were generally non-judgemental and created safe spaces. Young people indicated that the accessibility, relevance and flexibility of the services available in the community are linked to many of the positive outcomes they have experienced, even if there is room for improvement in some areas.

Finally, this research has framed the “positive adaptation” component of resilience around the concept of strengths, both visible and hidden. Critics of resilience discourse object to the practice of describing young people as “at-risk”, and the expectation that young people described as resilient are achieving a normative set of expectations related to housing, school, and employment (Foster & Spencer, 2011; France, 2007; Kelly 2000; Mallet et al., 2010; Martineau, 1999; te Riele, 2006). As an alternative, this research has explored what strengths young people possess, and what strengths they are developing because of homelessness. The development of strengths has been used as my primary indicator of “positive adaptation.” Strengths were described by young people directly, by service providers, and through my own analysis of the narratives presented. This strength-based approach is importantly linked to a constructivist perspective of resilience since many of the strengths required to survive homelessness may counter normative values and contradict traditional understandings of risk and protective factors. The young people I interviewed are strong, and overcome many obstacles daily, even if the way they navigate and negotiate looks different than how young people with more economic resources make choices about their lives. This research has found that a constructivist, strength-based model of resilience is well suited to understanding the process of resilience in the lives of young people who are marginalized and economically disadvantaged.

Figure 6.0 provides a visual representation of one way the various theoretical components used throughout this research can fit together into a constructivist, strength-based model of resilience.

Figure 6.0 Constructivist, Strength-based Model of Resilience



Conclusion

As young people pass through homelessness, they are constantly making choices; big “life and death decisions”, and smaller daily decisions about how to pass the time. They make calculated choices about who to spend their time with, how much emphasis to put on schooling versus finding housing, decisions about drug use and drug selling, decisions about when to seek help and how vulnerable to be with service providers. There are a lot of decisions to navigate, and they are constantly negotiating outcomes with people in their lives: family members at home, peers on the streets, romantic partners, and adult decision-makers like teachers, social workers, mental health professionals, police officers, judges, probation officers, and workers from many other service sectors. All of this occurs within the context of transitioning into adulthood, and adapting to the demands and stresses of homelessness. The collection of choices that young people make interacts with the decision-making power of many others in their lives, and the structurally disadvantaged position of homelessness. And yet, despite all these obstacles, many young people pass through homelessness and describe it as a learning opportunity that ultimately made them stronger.

TABLE 9.0 Towards a Constructivist, Strength-based Model of Resilience: Summary of Findings

Theme	Literature	Findings	Theory
Impression Management	(Goffman 1959; 1961)	• Young people play a number of roles to manage their interactions with peers and service providers; these interactions assist with negotiation • Young people may portray that they are “acted upon” or “acting on” to project a prioritization of the power of structure vs. agency	Impression Management Resilience, Subjective Constructivist Human Agency, Structuration
Service Provider Constructions of Victimization	(Burcar & Akerstrom, 2009) (Goffman, 1959; 1961) (Holstein & Miller, 1997) (Karpman, 1968) (Quinney, 1978) (Sundaram et al., 2004)	• Service providers acknowledge that young people may experience victimization, but challenge young people who “play the victim.” • There are possible gender differences in the willingness of young people to use a history of victimization to negotiate priority housing status.	Impression Management Resilience, Subjective Constructivist Human Agency, Structuration
Constructivist, Strength-based Model of Resilience	(Best, 1993; 1995; 2008) (Carpenter, 1996) (Giddens, 1976; 1984) (Goffman, 1959; 1961) (Mayer, 1999) (Miles, 2000) (Matza, 1964) (Sykes & Matza, 1957) (Ungar, 2004; 2005; 2008)	• Strength-based discourse provides an alternative to risk-based language. • Resilience is seen by service providers and young people as the ability to “keep moving forward” despite experiencing adversity • Risk factors have the potential to trigger growth responses, but this is highly dependent on individual perceptions and responses to adversity; this differentiation lends itself to a constructivist perspective • Resilience is intricately tied to choice and human agency	Impression Management Resilience, Subjective Constructivist Resilience, Objective Human Agency, Structuration Strength-based Discourse

10.0 Conclusion

Young people who experience homelessness are frequently constructed as passive recipients of circumstances beyond their control, or as young people engaged in high-risk behaviours. In my dissertation, I have looked beyond these constructions to explore the human agency of young people in the process of adapting to adversity. I have contributed to an understanding of how young people subjectively experience homelessness, and how interpretations of their circumstances influence their decisions. Within this framework, I have explored the relationships between young people and victimization, criminal offending, and community intervention. My analysis has been informed by theories of resilience and strength, as I explored the role that interactions, negotiation, and strengths play in influencing adolescent behaviour. I hope that my research will contribute to a greater understanding of how young people who are homeless think about their lives and help service providers to further understand how young people experiencing homelessness make decisions.

This work also responds to Hagan & McCarthy's (1997) call to return to "street criminology" and conduct research on the patterns of victimization and offending experienced by marginalized young people in the community who may not be represented in research conducted in a school-based environment. Since many of the young people I spoke with were either not attending school or only attending occasionally, I believe that I have succeeded in learning more about the lives of young people in Ottawa whose lives are significantly shaped by life and culture on "the streets." Furthermore, the integration of a framework prioritizing the human agency of young people has led to a more developed understanding of how young people

experiencing homelessness in Ottawa perceive and navigate through street life, often in creative ways.

Criminology as a discipline frequently focuses on questions of risk, exclusion, social control, and marginalization (Ronel & Elisha, 2010; Ronel & Yar-ara Toren, 2012). My choice to focus on strengths and resilience represents a calculated attempt to demonstrate resistance to the discourse of risk which frequently frames criminological research on youth. I hope that my work, in this dissertation and the publications to follow, will add to the growing exploration of resilience and strengths within criminological enquiry, particularly in research with young people facing adversity across multiple contexts. O'Mahony (2009) argues that the dominant risk-based logic used to inform crime prevention initiatives lacks a robust theoretical framework and fails to consider the human agency of young people, constructing their lives through a risk-based lens without consideration of how young people perceive their personal contexts and take action. I believe that the further integration of human agency and strength-based perspectives in youth studies across contexts such as youth experiencing family violence, youth involvement in conflict zones, or youth transitioning to adulthood in multiple contexts of adversity has the potential to increase our understanding of how young people experience and respond to marginalization.

The strengths-based approach provides a tangible alternative discourse to researchers who are critical of risk-based narratives. At the same time, the strengths-based approach used in this dissertation has not ignored the vulnerability and criminalized behaviours of young people, but has provided a balanced view by exploring both challenges and strengths. The young people who I interviewed are strong, and the findings of this research would be inaccurate if I portrayed

them in another light. Table 10.0 highlights this by providing a summary of the strengths that were discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

Table 10.0 Summary of Strengths Related to Youth Homelessness

Category	Strengths/Skills:
Street Smarts	• Networking and using technology • Caution and observing others • “Avoiding drama” • Loyalty and protecting peers • Being resourceful • Suppressing values
Life Skills	• Meeting basic needs and taking care of self • Making appointments (doctor, mental health, counselor, welfare) • Searching for housing and employment • Problem-solving • Independence and self-reliance
Attitudes	• Gratitude • Open to others and new experiences • Minimizing harm (humour) • Openness and empathy for others • Dreaming of a better future • Courage and Determination
Interactions with community resources	• Asking for help • Navigating multiple services • Negotiating expectations • Self-advocacy

Areas for Future Research

While analyzing the data that I gathered during this project, a number of questions emerged that would be interesting points of departure for future research. I term these points of departure, since I am still exploring youth homelessness, and I will undoubtedly discover other areas of interest and broader themes while investigating these questions. Nonetheless, I would like to explore the following areas in the future:

- *Awareness of youth shelters:* Most of the young people I interviewed were not aware of the existence of youth shelters when they first became homeless, and many were leaving dangerous environments behind.²⁴ To a large extent, youth shelters are not directly advertised in the community, and as with most adult shelters geared towards violence against women, the youth shelters are not marked with signs. While I have encountered different rationales for this, I would like to explore the effectiveness of this strategy. Specifically, I would like to talk with young people who have left dangerous environments behind about how their awareness or ignorance of youth shelters affected their decision-making process when they contemplated leaving.
- *Disciplinary policies:* One of the common methods for countering undesirable behaviours among services for young people who are homeless is barring them from access to programs and shelters. This is typically framed as a logical consequence to disrespecting the rules of the services being provided. I would be interested in talking with service providers and young people who are homeless about this practice, to explore the various impressions and beliefs that exist about the practice, as well as assessing the common outcomes. I am interested in exploring the symbolic nature of using exclusion as a disciplinary approach for young people who are marginalized and excluded in society, and how this is interpreted by young people. Some of the young people I interviewed had been barred from services in the past, and I would like the opportunity to further explore how this impacted their trajectory through homelessness.
- *“Red-zoning”:* Prior to interviewing young people who were homeless, I had not heard of the practice of “red-zoning” where police ban young people from access to public

²⁴ Young people tended to be aware of adult shelters for the homeless rather than youth resources, and as discussed in Chapter 8, they reported fear and anxiety about adults who were homeless.

spaces such as Rideau Street, or other locations where young people frequently gather or drug-dealing may occur. In the case of Rideau Street, this is one of the busiest locations in the city for public transit, and many of the young people who are in school rely on public transportation to attend school. This is also an interesting use of police discretion, and deserves further study as part of an overall investigation of the interactions between police officers and young people who are homeless.

I enjoyed my interactions with young people who were homeless, and I would also like to engage in longer-term participant observation as this would lead to a more in-depth understanding of the daily negotiations of young people with their peers and within community services, and it would provide further opportunities to observe strengths. I am also interested in the possibility of a larger-scale arts-based participatory action research project, where I might be able to work with a number of young people over a longer term to develop a series of artistic presentations about their daily lives that could be presented to the public; including theatre, film, music, creative writing, and art & photo galleries. A project of this nature would allow for participant observation, and both the process and final product of the arts projects would be a source of data for analysis. As a performing artist myself, I am intrigued by the power of arts-based methodologies to connect with people and communicate their message to a broader audience.

Limitations

At this point, I need to underscore the limitations of this work once again. This was a qualitative and exploratory research project that included a convenience sample of young people and service providers drawn largely from one youth-serving agency. As such, my findings are not representative of the experiences of all young people who are homeless in Ottawa, and there

may be a number of trends in youth homelessness that were not visible in my findings because of my limited access to young people who were not clients of the Youth Services Bureau. In particular, my findings do not provide much information related to young people experiencing homelessness who do not access youth services in any capacity, and I have relatively little information about young people who are couch-surfing.

In addition to these limitations to external validity, the subjective nature of this research limits its scope. My theoretical framework necessarily focused on youth perceptions and subjective interpretations as they navigate through homelessness, as well as the perceptions and subjective interpretations of service providers. Since I was interested in understanding how young people understand their experiences and make decisions based on their perceptions, I have limited data that may be considered objective, and I am relying on personal accounts from young people and service providers that may occasionally vary from what might be considered reality. During my interviews, young people and service providers would occasionally reframe their stories to present themselves or others in a different light than when they started sharing their narrative. This narrative reframing highlighted that perceptions about events may change with time, personal reflection, or be reframed to convey something to a particular audience. With this in mind, the focus of this research has been on the perception and interpretation of events in the lives of young people rather than on the events themselves.

As critiqued in the literature review and theoretical framework, resilience discourse has a tendency to polarize elements of people's lives into risk factors and protective factors (Foster & Spencer, 2010; Ungar 2004). Ungar's (2004) constructivist model of resilience aims to dismantle this polarized view of risk and protective factors by problematizing the social construction of these elements, and recognizing young people as having the capacity to construct

their own understandings of resilience that break away from the normative assumptions that may be used to frame traditional understandings of risk and protective factors. While I attempted to frame my own work on these constructivist principles, I have still presented my findings based on the dominant idea that resilience is a process of positive adaption in the context of significant adversity. This led to the creation of a chapter focusing on adversity followed by a chapter exploring positive adaptation. The danger in presenting the information in this linear manner is that it may serve to continue polarizing the experiences of young people who are homeless into what might be considered risk and protective factors. In reality, the perceptions young people shared about their experiences cannot be understood in such a black and white manner; rather, they tended to perceive their challenges and successes in a manner that may be better understood as shades of grey. Young people experience risk and protective factors in a state of flux and overlap.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This research highlights the capacity of marginalized young people to navigate and negotiate in contexts of significant adversity. The young people I spoke with were navigating through complicated systems including: services that provide housing, education, health care, and child welfare, as well as negotiating with a wide range of people including: shelter staff, teachers, social workers, police, parents and peers. As I progressed through the research, I became increasingly impressed with the capacities of the young people I encountered. From a policy perspective, recognizing the human agency and strengths of young people who are homeless may mean ensuring that young people with lived experiences of homelessness are included in all decisions that will affect young people on the streets, including: housing policies, shelter rules, planning local access to health care and social services, and consulted on law

enforcement practices in areas with high concentrations of homelessness. Furthermore, recognizing that young people experiencing homelessness are not a homogenous group, efforts should be made to engage in diverse and ongoing consultation to ensure that policy measures remain responsive to the needs and issues identified by young people. There may also be a need to specifically address law enforcement responses in Ottawa to young people experiencing homelessness who identify as transgender.

From a service delivery standpoint, young people should be consulted in the development and continued evaluation of services, and efforts could be made to provide environments that encourage and build on negotiation skills. Young people who are homeless are constantly negotiating with adults to meet their needs, and some young people are more equipped for this task than others, having developed more advanced self-advocacy skills. Since the stakes of these negotiations are often very high, including negotiations around housing, education, relationships, and criminal justice, I would recommend that service providers include negotiation skills as a key feature of all life skills programming.

Final Remarks

This dissertation has contributed to the academic discussion around resilience, responding to normative risk-based frameworks with a constructivist and strength-based alternative that adds value to understanding how young people who are homeless make decisions about their lives. It has also explored youth and service provider understandings of the adversity experienced by young people, and the strengths that help them navigate around obstacles. The overall portrait of young people who experience homelessness has carefully depicted the strengths and resources that help them to navigate and negotiate for their well-being. Strength-based research is an important building block for enhancing strength-based interventions that

work with young people to leverage their strengths to move forward with their lives, rather than focusing on the suppression of their deficits. This research has been presented back to young people and the service providers who have participated in the project, and I am hopeful that it will reinforce the strength-based perspective, both in how young people think about themselves, and in how service providers plan their interventions. I am also hopeful that the strength-based approach adopted in this paper will inspire other researchers to consider aligning their own work with a similar perspective.

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Appendix A Research and Ethics Board (REB) Approval Letter

File Number: 08-11-34

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 11/15/2011



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Ethics Approval Notice Social Science and Humanities REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Ross	Hastings	Social Sciences / Criminology	Supervisor
Benjamin	Roebuck	Social Sciences / Criminology	Student Researcher

File Number: 08-11-34

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the Decision-making Processes of young People Experiencing Homelessness

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)	Approval Type
11/15/2011	11/14/2012	Ia

(Ia: Approval, Ib: Approval for initial stage only)

Special Conditions / Comments:

N/A



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove subjects from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at:
http://www.rges.uottawa.ca/ethics/application_dwn.asp

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Signature:

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research

For , Chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities REB



August 30th, 2011

To the Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa,

The Youth Services Bureau is pleased to welcome Benjamin Roebuck to complete the research requirements for the proposed study:

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Specifically, Benjamin has been granted permission to conduct:

- Focus groups with youth who are homeless who have accessed our services
- Interviews with youth who are homeless who have accessed our services
- Focus groups with staff members of the Youth Services Bureau
- Interviews with staff members of the Youth Services Bureau

Director of Community Services

cc : Benjamin Roebuck, PhD (Cand.), Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa
Ross Hastings, PhD, Department of Criminology, University of Ottawa

Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa Bureau des services à la jeunesse d'Ottawa

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www.ysb-bsj.on.ca

Accredited by Children's Mental Health Ontario Accréditée par Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario



INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS on YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Project Title:

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

My name is Ben Roebuck and I am a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. I am doing research on the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homelessness to learn about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience and what they find helpful.

If you are interested in participating in this research, I am looking to interview and conduct focus groups with young people, ages 16 to 24, who have experienced a period of homelessness in the past year lasting up to three months, or three shorter periods of homelessness lasting more than three days each time. I will be conducting two focus groups: one with young men and one with young women.

I am interested in your opinion about issues related to youth homelessness, decision-making, and adapting to the challenges of life when homeless. The interviews will run about an hour in length, at a time and place that we agree upon. The interviews will be audio-recorded. Participating in this study will give you an opportunity to tell your story and explore your personal strengths and resources.

Your participation in this research will remain confidential and your anonymity will be protected. You will receive \$10 for participating in this research.

If you have any questions and/or are interested in participating in this study, please contact me on my cell phone at: [redacted] or by email at [redacted]. You can also contact my supervisor, Ross Hastings at [redacted], or by email at [redacted].

- Interviewing begins Tuesday, November 29th and runs until December 16th
- Focus Group with Young Men: Friday, December 2nd, 1:30-2:30 pm
- Focus Group with Young Women: Wednesday, December 7th, 3:30-4:30 pm

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS on YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Project Title:

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

My name is Ben Roebuck and I am a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. I am doing research on the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homelessness to learn about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience and what they find helpful.

If you are interested in participating in this research, I am looking to interview and conduct focus groups with service providers experienced in working with homeless young people.

I am interested in your opinion about issues related to youth homelessness, decision-making, and adapting to the challenges of life when homeless. Focus groups and interviews will run about an hour in length, at a time and place that we agree upon. The interviews will be audio-recorded. Participating in this study will give you an opportunity to share your experience and explore the personal strengths and resources of homeless young people.

Your participation in this research will remain confidential and your anonymity will be protected. You will receive \$10 for participating in this research.

If you have any questions and/or are interested in participating in this study, please contact me by email at , or on my cell phone at , or you can also contact my supervisor, Ross Hastings at , or by email at .

- **Focus Groups with Service Providers will be scheduled during a weekly staff meeting in December**
- **Follow up interviews with service providers can be scheduled following the focus groups**

INVITATION TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS on YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Project Title:

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

My name is Ben Roebuck and I am a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa. Over the past year, I have been doing research on the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homelessness to learn about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience and what they find helpful. I have been amazed at the stories of strength and resilience that I have heard.

In November and December, I conducted interviews and focus groups with about 35 young people between the ages of 16-24 at the YSB drop-in centre. Now, I am hoping to share some of my findings with interested young people to get their feedback, ideas, and answer any questions.

The feedback session will take place:

**Tuesday, July 17
From 1:00-2:00 pm
In the YSB Boardroom on the Second Floor

(Pizza will be served)**

Your participation in providing feedback will be very useful to me, and I hope to be able to answer any questions that you might have about the research process or about what I learned from my discussions with young people.

You are welcome to attend. If you do have any questions prior to the session, please feel free to contact me by email: .

I look forward to our discussion!!

Sincerely,

Benjamin Roebuck

Focus Group Protocol for Young People

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Preparation: Have craft supplies readily available on tables. As young people enter, invite them to make a name card with the craft supplies.

Stage One: Explanation of Project Objectives

Stage Two: Consent

Stage Three: Round Table Introductions

Stage Four: Focus Group Begins

- 1) **Opening Activity and Rapport Building:** Everyone has strengths, skills or things they are good at, that are helpful when things in life get difficult. Think of a number of things that you are good at, and take two minutes to draw a strength that you feel has been helpful to you when you were experiencing homelessness.

Please share your picture with the group, and explain how that strength is helpful to you.
[Ask permission to collect drawings, and possibly use them in the research].

- 2) **Filling in the Table:** In this research I am interested to learn what types of challenges you experience on a daily basis when you are homeless, and what you do to respond to these challenges. I'm interested to know about the types of decisions you have to make and about anything that you find helpful when you try to tackle these challenges. I'd like to explore what this looks like personally, in relationships, and in the community.

I've prepared a chart that we can walk through together. We'll go from left to right.

	Challenges	What I do	What helps
Personally			
Relationships			
Community			

- 3) **[Time permitting]:** Is there anything you think you have learned through your experience with homelessness that a young person who has been more sheltered may not have learned?
- 4) **Final Question:** Is there anything else you think that I should know about the decisions you have to make when you are young and homeless?

Stage Five: Thank you and encourage the strengths that I have heard

Interview Guide for Young People

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Stage One: Explanation of Project Objectives

Stage Two: Consent

Stage Three: Interview Begins

In this interview, I'm hoping to discuss your journey. I would like to get an understanding of your story, some of the challenges that you have faced when you were experiencing homelessness, and what you do to handle these challenges.

1. Everyone has a personal story of where their life has taken them so far. Can you share your story with me?
 - a. What challenges have you experienced as a homeless young person?
 - b. What are the most significant moments in your story?
 - c. What role have community services played in your story?
 - d. As a criminologist, I am curious to learn more about the interactions young people who are homeless have with the police. Is there anything you would like to share about that?
2. How do you handle the challenges that you have experienced because of homelessness?
 - a. Is there anything that you rely on to help you through difficult times?
 - i. Is there anything about yourself that helps you in difficult times?
 - ii. Are there any people in your life who help you?
 - iii. Have you been helped by any community services?
 - b. I've been hearing that spending time homeless can change you. Is that true for you?
3. What do you feel are the next steps in your journey?
4. Is there anything else that you would like me to know about your story?

Demographic questions: To finish the interview, I'd like to ask a few quick questions:

- Age: How old are you now?
- Race & Ethnicity: How do you describe your race and ethnic background?
- Gender & Sexual Orientation: How do you describe your gender and sexual orientation?
- Length of time homeless: How long have you experienced homelessness?

Stage Four: Thank you and encourage the strengths that I have heard

Focus Groups with Service Providers

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Stage One: Explanation of Project Objectives

Stage Two: Consent

Stage Three: Round Table Introductions

Stage Four: Focus Group Begins

- 1) **Opening Activity and Rapport Building:** Everyone has strengths, skills or things they are good at, that are helpful when things in life get difficult. I'd like everyone to think of a story when you witnessed a young person demonstrating a specific strength when they were homeless. Can you please share your example with the group?
- 2) **Filling in the Table:** In this research I am interested to learn what types of challenges young people who are homeless experience on a daily basis, and what they do to respond to these challenges. I'm interested to know about the types of decisions they make and about anything that you have noticed is helpful to young people tackling challenges. I'd like to explore what this looks like personally, in relationships, and in the community.

I've prepared a chart that we can walk through together. We'll go from left to right.

	Challenges	What young people do	What helps
Personally			
Relationships			
Community			

- 3) **[Time permitting]:** Is there anything you think young people who are homeless have learned through their experiences that a young person who has been more sheltered may not have learned?
- 4) **[If not covered in discussion so far]:** Research shows that a number young people become homeless for reasons related to victimization, and that once they are homeless, they become even more vulnerable. How have you observed young people dealing with victimization? What are some positive actions that young people take to recover?
- 5) **Final Question:** Is there anything else you think that I should know about how youth who are homelessness make decisions?

Stage Five: Thank you and encourage the staff team on their awareness of strengths

Interview Guide for Service Providers

Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Stage One: Explanation of Project Objectives

Stage Two: Consent

Stage Three: Interview Begins

In this interview, I'm hoping to follow up quite informally on the conversation that was begun in our focus group earlier.

1. Is there anything that was shared in the focus group earlier that sparked your interest or left you with some burning thoughts?

*Explore the themes introduced by the participant

2. Every young person has a personal story of where their life has taken them. Based on your experience working with youth, can you share a couple of stories with me of homeless young people who have faced extraordinary challenges and overcome them?
 - a. What do you think helped [her/him] to do well?
 - b. What strengths were you able to observe?
3. Young people on the streets can experience a lot of negativity and stigma from the general public who might not understand their situation. From your position working closely with young people, what strengths or qualities are you able to observe that may not be obvious to someone else?
4. Is there anything else that you think I should know about youth homelessness and decision making?

Stage Four: Thank you and encourage the awareness of strengths that I have heard



Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

[ORIGINAL ON UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA LETTERHEAD]

CONSENT FORM – FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Title of the Study: Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Ben Roebuck

Cell Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Ross Hastings, [REDACTED]

Department of Criminology

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Ben Roebuck.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to learn about the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homeless; particularly about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience, and what they find helpful.

Participation: My participation will consist of discussion in a focus group, approximately one hour in length, during which I will be asked to participate in group discussion and asked to draw a picture of a personal strength. Focus groups will be scheduled at a place and time that is accessible for participants and the researcher. I will also be asked to speak my opinion about issues related to homelessness, decision-making and how I navigate the challenges that I experience. The focus group will be audio-recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information and this may cause me to feel upset. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by allowing me to only answer the questions I feel comfortable answering, giving me the ability to stop my participation in the focus group at any time, and by providing me with a list of phone numbers and counseling services.

Benefits: My participation in this study will give me an opportunity to tell my story and have my opinions heard. I will also be reflecting on my personal strengths and capacities.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity by the researcher, but I also understand that given the group setting of the discussion, other participants will know that I have participated and will know what I have contributed to the discussion. I understand that the

contents will be used only for the completion of the researcher's PhD dissertation and publication in standard academic outlets such as books and journals, available to researchers, students, policy makers and the general public. If, during the course of the focus group, I mention an intention to harm myself or others, or disclose ongoing harm to a minor, the researcher will be required by law to tell appropriate authorities. Anonymity will be protected by using pseudonyms and removing all identifying material from the interview transcripts.

Conservation of data: The data collected, such as the tape recordings of the interviews, and the hard and electronic copies of the interviews will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and electronically on a password protected and locked computer, for up to 15 years after the study. A copy of the data will be kept at the university. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the interviews.

Compensation: I will receive \$10 for my participation in this research. I will receive this compensation at the beginning of the focus group and if I choose to stop participating in the focus group at any time, I keep the money.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, the data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be used in the research, unless I specify that none of it will be used, in which case, the researcher will exclude my comments from the focus group data.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ben Roebuck of the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Science, which is under the supervision of Professor Ross Hastings.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5387
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

CONSENT FORM – INTERVIEWS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Title of the Study: Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Ben Roebuck

Cell Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Ross Hastings, [REDACTED]

Department of Criminology

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Ben Roebuck.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to learn about the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homeless; particularly about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience, and what they find helpful.

Participation: My participation will consist of an interview, approximately one hour in length, during which I will be asked questions. The interviews will be scheduled at a place and time that is agreeable to myself and the researcher. I will also be asked to speak my opinion about issues related to homelessness, decision-making and how I navigate the challenges that I experience. The interview will be audio-recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information and this may cause me to feel upset. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by allowing me to only answer the questions I feel comfortable answering, giving me the ability to stop the interview at any time, and by providing me with a list of phone numbers and counseling services.

Benefits: My participation in this study will give me an opportunity to tell my story and have my opinions heard. I will also be reflecting on my personal strengths and capacities.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the completion of the researcher's PhD dissertation and publication in standard academic outlets such as books and journals, available to researchers, students, policy makers and the general public. My confidentiality will be protected because only the researcher will know that I am participating in the interview. If, during the course of the interview, I mention an intention to harm myself or others, or disclose ongoing harm to a minor, the researcher will be

required by law to tell appropriate authorities. Anonymity will be protected by using pseudonyms and removing all identifying material from the interview transcripts.

Conservation of data: The data collected, such as the tape recordings of the interviews, and the hard and electronic copies of the interviews will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and electronically on a password protected and locked computer, for up to 15 years after the study. A copy of the data will be kept at the university. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the interviews.

Compensation: I will receive \$10 for my participation in this research. I will receive this compensation at the beginning of the interview and if I choose to stop the interview at any time, I keep the money.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, the data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be used in the research, unless I specify that none of it will be used, in which case, the researcher will destroy the interview.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Ben Roebuck of the Department of Criminology, Faculty of Social Science, which is under the supervision of Professor Ross Hastings.

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Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

CONSENT FORM – FOCUS GROUPS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Title of the Study: Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Ben Roebuck

Cell Phone:

Email:

Supervisor: Ross Hastings,

Department of Criminology

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Ben Roebuck.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to learn about the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homeless; particularly about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience, and what they find helpful.

Participation: My participation will consist of discussion in a focus group, approximately one hour in length, during which I will be asked questions and asked to engage in group discussion. The focus groups will be scheduled at a place and time that is agreeable to program coordinator and the researcher. I will also be asked to speak my opinion about issues related to homelessness, decision-making and how youth navigate the challenges that they experience. The interview will be audio-recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information and this may cause me to feel upset. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by allowing me to only answer the questions I feel comfortable answering, giving me the ability to stop my participation in the focus group at any time, and by providing me with a list of phone numbers and counseling services.

Benefits: My participation in this study will give me an opportunity to share my experience and to reflect on the strengths and capacities of homeless young people.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity by the researcher, but I also understand that given the group setting of the discussion, other participants will know that I have participated and will know what I have contributed to the discussion. I understand that the researcher will use the information provided in the focus group for the completion of the researcher's PhD dissertation and publication in standard academic outlets such as books and journals, available to researchers, students, policy makers and the general public. If, during the

course of the focus group, I mention an intention to harm myself or others, or disclose ongoing harm to a minor, the researcher will be required by law to tell appropriate authorities. Anonymity in the data will be protected by using pseudonyms and removing all identifying material from the focus group transcripts.

Conservation of data: The data collected, such as the tape recordings of the interviews, and the hard and electronic copies of the interviews will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home and electronically on a password protected and locked computer, for up to 15 years after the study. A copy of the data will be kept at the university. Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the interviews.

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Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature:

Date:

CONSENT FORM – INTERVIEWS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Title of the Study: Exclusion and Resilience: Exploring the decision-making processes of young people experiencing homelessness.

Ben Roebuck

Cell Phone:

Email:

Supervisor: Ross Hastings,

Department of Criminology

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Ben Roebuck.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to learn about the lives of young people in Ottawa who have experienced homeless; particularly about the decisions they have to make, how they adapt to the challenges they experience, and what they find helpful.

Participation: My participation will consist of an interview, approximately one hour in length, during which I will be asked questions. The interviews will be scheduled at a place and time that is agreeable to myself and the researcher. I will also be asked to speak my opinion about issues related to homelessness, decision-making and how youth navigate the challenges that they experience. The interview will be audio-recorded.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer personal information and this may cause me to feel upset. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize these risks by allowing me to only answer the questions I feel comfortable answering, giving me the ability to stop the interview at any time, and by providing me with a list of phone numbers and counseling services.

Benefits: My participation in this study will give me an opportunity to share my experience and to reflect on my personal strengths and capacities of homeless young people.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for the completion of the researcher's PhD dissertation and publication in standard academic outlets such as books and journals, available to researchers, students, policy makers and the general public. My confidentiality will be protected because only the researcher will know that I am participating in the interview. If, during the course of the interview, I mention an intention to harm myself or others, or disclose ongoing harm to a minor, the researcher will be required by law to tell appropriate authorities. Anonymity will be protected by using pseudonyms and removing all identifying material from the interview transcripts.

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