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Review of *Youth Work: An Institutional Ethnography of Youth Homelessness*. Naomi Nichols. Reviewed by Melinda McCormick.

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and persistent mental illness, domestic violence, substance abuse/addictive behavior, adolescent inpatient psychiatry and public housing. The intersection between forms of oppression is addressed throughout. Recurring themes include the insidious effects of dominant world view messaging, the damage caused by a culture of individualism over solidarity, the importance of rescuing the historical memory of change, and the shift from the object to subject subject to the object role as an integral part of both personal healing and societal change.

This book provides a clear and compelling vision of liberation health practice in social work. While not being prescriptive, it provides tools and a framework for analysis and action. The case presentations are highly effective at demonstrating the use of the triangle in a process of problem formulation that both includes and goes beyond traditional practice. These analyses and the plethora of interventions they inform will likely challenge all but the most cynical of practitioners, expanding readers' sense of what is possible. Several examples of challenges and conflicts experienced in practicing liberation health social work are provided and should prove valuable to the reader as well. While the decision to feature clinical situations that reflect success in applying the liberation health model in social work accomplished a great deal, it would have been good to include a chapter briefly discussing situations when clients did not find the work helpful.

Nancy Feldman, Touro College Graduate School of Social Work

Naomi Nichols, *Youth Work: An Institutional Ethnography of Youth Homelessness*. University of Toronto Press, (2014). 158 pp., $24.95, paperback.

Naomi Nichols undertook an ambitious ethnographic project with the aim of understanding efforts in Canada to serve homeless youth. For a year and a half, she placed herself at a youth homeless shelter, observing operations and interviewing homeless youth and some of the professionals and paraprofessionals that work with them. Nichols used her experience to illustrate how the Children's Aid Society (CAS) and other social service agencies function and how their discourse

frames the problems related to youth homelessness. Nichols discovered that rather than helping young people, accountability structures end up creating barriers.

In chapter 1, Nichols outlines her purpose and her approach for the reader, defining institutional ethnography and the textual analysis that she uses throughout the rest of the book, and shares an unexpected finding-- that the young people at the shelter did not consider themselves homeless. Although the literature in the field defines homelessness as "use of emergency shelter services," the young people with whom Nichols interacted saw the shelter as a temporary stopping place while they waited for other things in their lives to work themselves out. The language of homelessness was not meaningful for these young people and failed to describe their experience.

This disparity between institutional language and experience sets the stage for young peoples' attempts to navigate social aid systems. One issue is that the needs of homeless youth are not in line with the procedures set up by the social welfare system. For example, youth identify their first need as a safe place to sleep, yet there are several agencies and procedures to be navigated to meet that need: In order for the youth to be recognized by the system, the youth need to understand what to do, know where to ask for the assistance they need, and know to ask for what they need in the particular language of the agency. When a young person needs somewhere to sleep immediately, these processes, which may take days or even weeks to resolve, do not serve their needs.

In chapters 2 through 4, Nichols reports her interviews with young people who describe themselves as "falling through the cracks" in their attempts to receive services. Nichols uses their stories to show how seemingly simple and straightforward tasks become part of a "complex and disorienting institutional field." Tellingly, Nichols admits it took her a year to understand how to access the various services the youth needed. She states that the young people need effective advocates to educate them on how to successfully navigate the system. As it currently stands, the interactions between the homeless youth and the service agencies generally result in youth not getting their needs met and feeling like their attempts have been fruitless and frustrating.

Nichols illustrates how agency documentation and accountability requirements create barriers for both the homeless young people and the social service workers who are involved in their care. In Nichols' words, her work is an attempt to "draw attention to the processes whereby people's actual experiences are subsumed in discourse, objectified as abstract data, or transformed into the terms through which they become institutionally recognizable or actionable" (p. 25). This movement from experience to actionable data is what she argues produces the "gaps" through which young people find themselves falling. Governance and funding sources create accountability structures that drive agencies to serve bureaucratic needs instead of the needs of young homeless people.

As an example of institutional ethnography, this text would be great in the classroom. It is brief and is written for an academic audience. It shows clearly how the needs of clients and the needs of bureaucracy can have very little to do with one another. Finally, the author brings praxis into her final chapter, an important step in feminist scholarship. She examines ways to start to change the system, by making connections between those in need and those in positions of power to influence how need is provided.

For social workers in the field, this book will be an affirmation of what they have been struggling with for the past decade—an agency focus on accountability, paperwork, and bureaucratic requirements that take up much of the workers' time, leaving insufficient time to foster relationships with the people they want to help.

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Gary Cameron, Marshall Fine, Sarah Maiter, Karen Frensch, and Nancy Freymond (Eds.), *Creating Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare: Congruence with the Everyday Lives of Children and Parents.* University of Toronto Press, (2013), 352 pages, $56 cloth, $27.96 paperback.

This is an unusual book, to its great credit. *Creating Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare* provides an opportunity